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INDIA TODAY

by

R. PALME DUTT

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R. M. DATTATREYA
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To

the memory of my father

UPENDRA KRISHNA DUTT

Born, Calcutta, India, October 17, 1857
Died, Leatherhead, England, May 12, 1938

Who taught me the beginnings
of political understanding—to love the
Indian people and all peoples
struggling for freedom

Other Books by R. Palme Dutt

The Two Internationals, 1919
Labour International Handbook, 1921
Modern India, 1925 (first published in India)
Socialism and the Living Wage, 1927
Life & Teachings of Lenin, 1933
Fascism and Social Revolution, 1934
" " " (first Indian edition), 1946
World Politics, 1936
Britain in the World Front, 1942
" " " (first Indian edition), 1943

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The appearance of this new edition of "India To-day" calls for a word of explanation.

"India To-day" was originally published in England in 1940. It was banned in India. The entire stock in England was destroyed in the blitz. Owing to war conditions the manuscript never reached America for an American edition. Paper shortage prevented reprinting. Hence it rapidly became a rarity and in practice unobtainable.

In 1947 a completely new and revised edition, bringing the treatment up to the autumn of 1946, including the constitutional proposals of the British Cabinet Mission and their reception, as well as the economic and political developments during the second world war and the first post-war period, was published in India and rapidly sold out. Owing to the copyright, however, being still in the hands of the original publishers, the new 1947 edition could not be published in England and was not available outside India. Since even this new edition within India was sold out within a few weeks of printing, the book has remained, as before, unobtainable.

To-day, (1949) many further changes have taken place in India, following the Mountbatten settlement and the establishment of the Indian Union and Pakistan. These changes have brought new conditions and problems. Any adequate treatment of these new conditions and problems would require a new book. Nevertheless, the basic issue of imperialism and Indian liberation has not yet reached final solution; and the study of this issue presented in this book may still be of use in helping to give the background to current problems.

The present edition has been revised to cover developments in India up to 1948. The main body of the text remains as printed in the 1947 edition with a few revisions and additions, and the general descriptive and historical treatment and statistical material must accordingly be read with

the understanding that it covers conditions in India prior to the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan.

It is to be hoped that the speedy advance of the Indian democratic movement and of the profound Indian revolution which is preparing will in the near future bring such far-reaching changes as will render this book of merely historical interest. But that time is not yet come.

October, 1948 R. PALME DUTT

Chapter I

INDIA IN THE MODERN WORLD

INDIA TODAY has entered into an era of great and far-reaching changes. The character and future development of these changes is still the subject of acute controversy. The outcome will only be settled in the course the social and political struggles which are already in progress, and which are closely bound up with the new developments all over Asia. The future of India is today one of the big questions of world politics.

The four hundred millions of India comprise close on one-fifth of the human race. For two centuries they have been subject to foreign rule. To-day direct foreign rule in India has come to an end, even though imperialist domination in India has not yet ended. But that also is approaching its end.

On a world scale the subjection of India has been the largest and most important basis of empire domination in the modern world. For centuries the wealth and resources of this vast territory, and the life and labour of its people, have been the object of Western capitalist penetration, aggression and expansion, and finally of absolute domination and intensive exploitation. The ending of this system will not only open up a new future for one-fifth of the human race. It will also mean a decisive change in the balance of world relations, a further weakening in the world system of imperialism, and a strengthening of the advance of freedom of the peoples throughout the world. The liberation of India, alongside free China, will open the way for the liberation of all the peoples of Asia and of all the colonial peoples.

All the problems and conflicts of the modern world find their focus in India. Here amid the ruins of an old historic

civilisation, which has been submerged and has stagnated under the crushing weight of modern conquerors, the lowest levels of primitive economy, poverty and servitude exist alongside the most advanced forms of finance-capitalist exploitation. Chronic agrarian crisis, famine, debt-slavery, the shackles of caste and of the outcaste, industrial exploitation without limit, contrasts of wealth and poverty more appalling than in any country in the world, social and religious conflict, class conflict, emergent national issues within India—all these problems reflecting in many respects the backwardness and retarded development of a subject country, and intensified by foreign domination, force themselves to the front to-day alongside the central problem of liberation from imperialist domination, and complicate the conditions of the struggle for liberation.

India to-day is entering into an era of profound economic, social and political revolution. The first step in that revolution will be liberation from foreign rule and the winning of complete independence. But that liberation, which is drawing close, will only release the gigantic internal problems, social strains and conflicts which have accumulated through centuries of foreign domination and arrested development, and which to-day clamour for solution. The Indian people to-day stand before a vast task of national and social renovation.

1. INDIA ON THE EVE OF FREEDOM

The new world situation following the victory of the United Nations over the fascist Powers brought the question of Indian freedom to the forefront of world politics.

The first world war of 1914-18 and the revolutionary wave which swept over the world in its train inaugurated an era of great changes in India, as in all colonial countries. Powerful mass struggles shook India in 1919-22, and again with even greater intensity (after the world economic crisis which affected India profoundly) in 1930-34. British rule sought to counter the rising national movement with alternating reforms and repression. Promises of future self-government were accompanied by constitutional concessions which left the real relations of power unchanged. These constitutional concessions, which resulted in the formation of Provincial Ministries of the National Congress in 1937 in eight of the eleven provinces, did not stem the rising unrest, but rather gave it new

impetus. The onset of war in 1939 found India already in the ferment of a sharpening struggle for independence against the Federal Constitution which the British Government was preparing to impose. The dragging of India into the war without any pretence of consultation or popular endorsement, and the establishment of an emergency war dictatorship only emphasised the gulf between the rulers and the ruled.

The second world war brought new urgency to the question of Indian liberation. The alliance of the United Nations officially proclaimed the aim of "the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live." In contrast to the first world war, the alliance of the United Nations constituted a coalition led by four Powers which included not only the two imperialist Powers—Britain and the the United States—but two non-imperialist Powers—National China and the Socialist Soviet Union. All over the world powerful national liberation movements were fighting for national freedom against fascism. It was not surprising that in this world situation the Indian people should demand with all the greater intensity the same national freedom which was being fought for by so many peoples and for which Indian soldiers were being called on to lay down their lives.

The special circumstances of the war in Asia increased this urgency. British imperialist domination in Asia which had so long with suicidal folly encouraged and assisted Japanese aggression and expansion, was shaken to its foundations by the headlong advance of that aggression after Pearl Harbour. The bankruptcy and inner rottenness of the old colonial system was exposed in the sight of all, as the vast territories of South East Asia collapsed before the invader almost without resistance, save for the unsuccessful defence by imported troops, with the foreign rulers totally incapable of mobilising the populations over whom they ruled.

This exposure produced its profound effect on popular sentiment in India. The myth of British invincible power was broken. Japanese armies reached and overran the borders of India. The Axis Powers made a skilful use of the former Congress President, Subhas Bose, who had placed himself in their hands, and of the "Indian National Army" to mask their aims of aggression and conquest behind a hypocritical pretence of concern for India. Against a free India such a propaganda could have had no effect. In relation to an India held subject, it had a certain measure of inevitable effect.

Thus, the second world war produced a situation in which not only the principles of democracy, but the vital interests equally of the defence of India and of the whole battlefront of the United Nations required speedy Indian liberation. India's national leaders had from the outset recognised India's common interests with the democratic peoples against the world alliance of fascism. They had recognised that common interest and actively campaigned against the reactionary policies of support for fascism at a time when the rulers of Britain were still aiding and abetting fascist aggression. They recognised that in the war of the United Nations against the Axis the interests of India were bound up with the defeat of fascism and victory of that camp which included National China, the Socialist Soviet Union and the democratic liberation movements in Europe. But they demanded, and rightly demanded, that India must be free, under the control of an Indian National Government with full and effective powers in order to mobilise the full strength of the Indian people as a voluntary partner in the alliance of the United Nations. This demand corresponded to the interests of the United Nations. It was supported not only by democratic opinion in all countries of the United Nations but also by representations from official quarters of the Allies of Britain, notably by President Roosevelt and Marshal Chiang Kai-shek.

Nevertheless, the close of the second world war did not bring Indian freedom. Toryism was in the saddle in Britain and obstinately resisted every proposal for Indian independence or even for any temporary wartime compromise which would put effective power in the hands of India's popular leaders. Churchill's motto that he "had not become the Prime Minister of Britain in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire" remained the guiding line of British policy even in the most critical days of danger and difficulty. The Cripps negotiations of 1942 broke down. The national movement, frustrated and torn by the dilemmas of the situation in which it found itself, became bogged in the impasse following the August Resolution. India's national leaders were thrown into prison and the sporadic unofficial movement and disorders which followed the arrests of the leaders were easily suppressed.

The end of the war found India still a subject nation and the political situation one of deadlock.

But the victory of the United Nations over fascism brought a new situation. All over the world the military

defeat and utter collapse of the fascist Powers represented the heaviest blow against reaction since the days of 1917. The popular movements surged forward in all countries. Imperialism was heavily weakened. German, Italian and Japanese imperialisms had vanished from the map of the world. There remained only two major imperialist Powers — Britain and the United States—together with the subordinate colonial empires of France, Belgium, Holland, and Portugal. In Europe, new democratic governments replaced the old conservative regimes which had surrendered to, or allied themselves with fascism. In Britain, Toryism experienced an overwhelming electoral debacle and was replaced by the first majority Labour Government. All over Asia the colonial liberation movements pressed forward; and the Indonesian Republic held out against the military assault of Anglo-Dutch imperialism and its Japanese troops. Within India, the universal demand for independence and the movement for national revolt rose to new heights in the winter of 1945-46 and found expression in mass demonstrations of Hindu-Moslem unity and in the extension of the national revolt to the armed services.

This crisis of British rule in India at the end of the second world war opened a new situation. The old forms of British rule could no longer be maintained. The ground was shaking under the elemental impact of mass revolt. The insurgent wave of popular awakening and unrest revealed that the conditions were ripening for the advance of the Indian revolution. Imperialism, if it were not to be thrust out neck and crop by a victorious popular revolution, was compelled to seek a new basis of alliance with the privileged elements in India, no longer only with the princes and big landlord "loyalists", but with the leaders of the national bourgeoisie, who held in their hands the leadership of the national movement, in the hope to stem the flood.

Hence this new situation at the end of the second world war compelled a speedy and decisive turn in British policy under the leadership of the new Labour Government. On February 19, 1946, the Labour Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, announced the decision to send a special Cabinet Mission to India. On March 15, on the occasion of the departure of the Mission, Mr. Attlee declared:

> "It is no good applying the formula of the past to the present position. The temperature of 1946 is not the temperature of 1920, 1930, or even 1942....

"Nothing increases the pace and movement of public opinion more than a great war Everyone who had anything to do with this question in the early days between the wars knows what effect the war of 1914-18 had on Indian aspirations and ideas. The tide that runs comparatively slowly in peace, becomes vastly accelerated in wartime, and especially directly afterwards, because that tide is to some extent banked up during war. I am quite certain that at the present time the tide of nationalism is running very fast in India and indeed all over Asia....

"India herself must choose as to what will be her future situation and her position in the world. Unity may come through the United Nations or through the Commonwealth, but no great nation can stand alone by herself without sharing what is happening in the world.

"I hope that India may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth. I am certain that she will find great advantage in doing so; but if she does, she must do so of her own free will, for the British Commonwealth and Empire is not bound together by chains of external compulsion. It is a free association of free peoples.

"If on the other hand she elects for independence—and in our view she had a right to do so—it will be for us to help make the transition as smooth and as easy as possible."

Protracted negotiations followed the dispatch of the Cabinet Mission. The Plan evolved by the Cabinet Mission broke down. The tension grew. Finally these negotiations resulted in the Mountbatten Plan of 1947 for partitioning India and conferring Dominion Status upon the parts of a divided India. In accordance with this Mountbatten Plan, on August 15, 1947, the two Dominions of India and Pakistan were inaugurated.

Direct British rule in India thus came to an end on August 15, 1947—one hundred and ninety years after the Battle of Plassey, the conventional starting-point of British rule in India. Indian Ministers held office on the basis of Indian elected assemblies, alongside the Princes in the still continuing Indian States, which were successively brought into association with one or other Dominion, although disputes and conflicts still continued in relation to Kashmir and Hyderabad. By 1948 Indians held the positions of Governor-

General on behalf of the British Crown in both parts of divided India.

In 1948 India was still part of the British Empire. Negotiations were continuing to evolve a formula which would express this association in terms deemed compatible with Indian claims to "independence". British Commanders-in-Chief, together with some hundreds of British officers, still held the controlling positions in the Indian armed forces; but the perspective was held out that these would eventually be replaced by Indians.

This Mountbatten settlement of 1947 represented the most far-reaching change in the system of government of India since the inception of British rule. It signalised the breakdown of the old forms of direct British rule in India. On this basis the view was widely expressed, both inside and outside India, that it represented the final end of imperialism in India and the final victory of the battle for Indian independence.

Nevertheless, a measure of political realities would show that imperialist exploitation and domination in India did not end with the Mountbatten settlement. The final historical verdict is more likely to reach the conclusion that the Mountbatten settlement represented the last of the long series of attempts at constitutional adaptation and compromise by British imperialism rather than the beginning of Indian freedom.

The essence of modern imperialism lies in the hold of the great imperialist monopolies on a colonial country, the economic exploitation of the wealth of the country and the labour of its people in the interests of the imperialist monopolies and their hangers-on within the country, and in the strategic domination of the country as a base of the imperialist camp. The political forms are subordinate to these decisive purposes of imperialism. By all these tests India in 1948 is still a colonial country within the orbit of imperialism, despite the changes of political forms. The new political forms have meant that the tasks of maintaining domination over the masses have been entrusted to Indian hands within the general imperialist framework. The new Indian Governments, based on Indian monopoly interests closely associated and interlocked with the major British and American monopolies, have taken over the imperialist machinery of administration, protect the vested interests of imperialism, invite and encourage further penetration of British and American capital, and exercise heavy

suppression against the Indian masses. For the masses of the Indian people the burden of imperialist exploitation and oppression is not lightened.

The coming period may thus still show for a certain term a further lease of life of imperialism and continuance of effective imperialist domination even within new forms. The fight for Indian freedom has still to be won.

But to-day there can be no longer any doubt in any quarter that the whole current of historical development is driving towards Indian freedom, and that this full freedom will be won in the near future.

This is the context of any examination of India to-day, of the last days of imperialist rule and the outcome of that long record of domination, and of the rising advance of the Indian people.

2. IMPERIALISM AND INDIA

India has for centuries been the main base of modern imperialist expansion and domination.

The area of India is 1,808,679 square miles, or fifteen times the area of the British Isles, and twenty times the area of Great Britain. The population of India was 389 millions in the last 1941 census, and is estimated to be now approaching 400 millions, or nearly one-fifth of the human race.

The 400 millions of India constitute three-quarters of the total population of the British Empire, four-fifths of the overseas population of the British Empire and nearly nine-tenths of the subject colonial population of the British Empire.

If we compare the extent of the eight leading colonial empires on the eve of the present war, the Indian population subject to British rule represented in 1938 more than half the total colonial population of the world, and more than one and a half times the combined colonial population of the French, Japanese, Dutch, American, Belgian, Italian and Portuguese empires—that is, of the remaining colonial empires.

India is not only far and away the largest of the direct colonial possession of imperialism. It was also the oldest, the longest dominated and exploited over many generations and, therefore, the most complete demonstration of the workings and outcome of the colonial system.

The European colonising Powers all directed their first efforts towards India and the wealth of India; they stumbled

across America and the West Indies in the course of searching for the new sea route to India; it was only in the later period that they extended their expansion to Africa, Australia, China and the rest of Asia.

If we look at the map, it is easy to see how India has been the central region of imperialist domination.

Around the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean, with India as the commanding centre, stretches the Persian Gulf, the new Middle Eastern empire and Arabia on the west; then the Red Sea and Egypt, and all Africa to the south-west; to the east, Burma, the Malay States and the East Indies; to the south-east, Australia; and through the gates of Singapore, as well as more recently through the new Burma-Yunnan Road, the route to China.

With the impenetrable mountain barriers to the north (open only to invasion on the north-west) and with command of the sea, India constitutes the central fortress and base for the domination of this whole region, as well as itself comprising the richest source of wealth and exploitation.

European capitalist penetration into India began with the Portuguese establishment of their factory at Calicut in 1500 and their conquest of Goa in 1506, more than four centuries ago. The British East India Company was founded in 1600, the Dutch East India Company in 1602 and the French Campagnie des Indes in 1664. British direct territorial rule in India, beyond the trading settlements which were already the initial outposts of conquest, dates from the middle of the eighteenth century. The traditional starting-point from the Battle of Plassey in 1757 gives close on two centuries of British rule in India.

The conquest of India by Western civilisation has constituted one of the main pillars of capitalist development in Europe, of British world supremacy, and of the whole structure of modern imperialism. For two centuries the history of Europe has been built up, to a greater extent than is always recognised, on the basis of the domination of India. Behind the successive struggles of Britain with Spain and Portugal, with Holland, with France, with Russia and with Germany, may be traced the issue of the route to India and the domination of India. Behind the inner course of politics in England, and directly under-propping the whole social and political structure laboriously and precariously built up in England, may be traced the role of this same domination.

India has long been recognised as the pivot of the British Empire. As the last outstanding Viceroy of still expanding imperialism in India, Lord Curzon wrote in 1894 (before his viceroyalty):

> "Just as De Tocqueville remarked that the conquest and government of India are really the achievements which have given to England her place in the opinion of the world, so it is the prestige and the wealth arising from her Asiatic position that are the foundation stones of the British Empire. There, in the heart of the old Asian continent, she sits upon the throne that has always ruled the East. Her sceptre is outstretched over land and sea. 'Godlike,' she 'grasps the triple fork, and kinglike, wears the crown'."
>
> *(Hon. G. N. Curzon, "Problems of the Far East," 1894, p. 419.)*

Four years later, in 1898, this intoxicated panegyrist of imperialism was sounding a new note:

> "India is the pivot of our Empire....If the Empire loses any other part of its Dominion we can survive, but if we lose India the sun of our Empire will have set."

In this oft-quoted rhetorical flight, the forebodings of the approaching end were already beginning to make themselves felt.

The economic and financial significance of India to Britain and to the whole development and structure of British capitalism has been very great through the historical record. It is now weakening but is still considerable. The old monopoly of the Indian market reaching to over four-fifths in the 19th century and two-thirds even on the eve of the war of 1914-18 has now vanished never to return. Since 1929 India is no longer the largest single market for British goods and had fallen to the third place by 1938. But the lion's share of Indian trade is still in British hands. The volume of British capital holdings in India was estimated at £1,000 million in 1933 (estimate of the Indian Chamber of Commerce) or one-fourth of the total of British overseas capital investments. This total is now reduced, though no authoritative estimate of the effects of changes during and since the second world war has yet been made. It is notable that while British overseas investments in other countries were freely sold under the stress of war, those in India were tenaciously retained. The present

total is, on paper, more than offset by the Indian sterling balances accumulated during the war through the drawing of goods from India without payment. But the future fate of those sterling balances has still to be settled. The value of the annual tribute drawn from India to Britain, in one form or another, has been estimated at £150 million (calculation based on the year 1921-22 in Shah and Khambata, "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India," p. 234), or more than the total of the entire Indian Budget at the same date, and equivalent to over £3 a year per head of the population in Britain, or nearly £1,700 a year for every supertax-payer in Britain at the time of the estimate.

No less important is the strategic significance of India to British imperialism, both as the basis from which the further expansion of the Empire has been in great part undertaken, the exchequer and source of troops for innumerable overseas wars and expeditions, and also as the centre-point to which strategic calculations (control of the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Middle Eastern Empire, and Singapore) have been continuously directed. This strategic significance was further demonstrated in the second world war.

3. BANKRUPTCY OF IMPERIALISM IN INDIA

What has been the outcome of imperialist rule in India?

Whatever the divergent social and political viewpoints of observers, on one point all, whether of the right or the left, are agreed. After two centuries of imperialist rule, India presents a spectacle of squalid poverty and misery of the mass of the people without equal in the world.

This is not a question of natural poverty of the country or deficiency of resources. The vast territories occupied by the Indian people enjoy a great natural wealth and resources, not only in respect of the fertility of the soil and potentialities of agricultural production, which, as further examination will show, could, if brought into full use, provide abundant supplies for a much greater population than the existing, but also in respect of the raw materials for highly developed industrial production, especially coal, iron, oil and water-power, alongside the intelligence and technical aptitude and dexterity (not wholly lost from the time when India enjoyed technical primacy among nations, before imperialist rule) of the population.

Yet these resources and possibilities are mainly undeveloped. If capitalism in general is characterised by waste and relative failure to utilise the full potentialities of production, then this failure reaches an absolute degree in India, which makes it basically different in type from any imperialist country.

A recent American observer, Professor Buchanan, after a monumental survey of economic and industrial development in India upto 1934 reached the melancholy conclusion:

> "Here was a country with all the crude elements upon which manufacturing depends, yet during more than a century, it has imported factory-made goods in large quantities and has developed only a few of the simplest industries for which machinery and organisation had been highly perfected in other countries. With abundant supplies of raw cotton, raw jute, easily mined coal, easily mined and exceptionally high-grade iron ore, with a redundant population often starving because of lack of profitable employment, with a hoard of gold and silver second perhaps to that of no other country in the world,....with an excellent market within her own borders and near at hand in which others were selling great quantities of manufactures; with all these advantages India, after a century, was supporting only about two per cent of her population by factory industry."
>
> *(D. H. Buchanan, "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India," 1934, p. 450.)*

The standard British authority on Indian economics, Dr. Vera Anstey, Lecturer in Commerce at London University, finds in India a picture of arrested economic development which is felt to be

> "the more strange because up to the eighteenth century the economic condition of India was relatively advanced, and Indian methods of production and of industrial and commercial organisation could stand comparison with those in vogue in any other part of the world....
>
> "It is not, of course, asserted that no economic progress has been made under British rule. The results of the British connection have been to provide India with cheap imported manufactures, to increase the demands for many types of Indian produce, and to introduce public works and administrative methods which have enabled India to

produce (especially by means of extended irrigation) and to transport (by rail and steamship) vastly increased quantities of crops and other goods. During the second half of the nineteenth century in particular, India's total production and trade advanced by leaps and bounds.

"But these changes brought about a peculiar interdependence between India and the West, whereby India tended to produce and export in the main raw materials and foodstuffs, and to import textiles, iron and steel goods, machinery and miscellaneous manufactures of the most varied description. Moreover, the concurrent increase in population counterbalanced the increase in production so that no considerable increase in production per head could be traced. These facts certainly lend colour to the view that economic development had been arrested, in India....

"Up to the end of the nineteenth century the effects of British rule on the prosperity of the people were undoubtedly disappointing."

(V. Anstey, "The Economic Development of India," 3rd Edition, 1936, Introduction, p. 5.)

What of the more recent period in which it is sometimes alleged that this situation has changed and that industrialisation is now well on its way? The same authority examines the figures revealed by the census of 1931 and reaches a negative conclusion:

"It is difficult to reconcile these figures with a picture of rapidly progressing industrialisation....Not only is industrial development insignificant in comparison with agricultural, but India still depends excessively upon foreigners for the provision of many goods and services that are essential for any materially advanced country... A well-balanced economic life has not yet been attained and the standard of life of the masses remains miserably low." *(Ibid, p. 8.)*

What is the explanation of this paradox of extreme, indescribable poverty amidst potential plenty (far exceeding the same paradox in ordinary capitalist countries), of arrested, stunted economic development after two centuries of rule by the most technically advanced and highly developed industrial Power?

In order to understand this paradox it is necessary to come closer to the real working of imperialism in relation to the social-economic situation of the Indian people.

For it is this failure to develop the productive resources of India that finally sounds the death-knell of imperialism in India to-day, just as it was the relative economic superiority of the British bourgeois invaders to the system of rule of the feudal princes (despite the wholesale destruction and spoliation involved in that invasion) which caused the victory of their rule two centuries ago.

The social-political expression of this bankruptcy of the old order in India and rise of the new is the gathering revolt of the Indian people against imperialist rule which has more and more dominated the Indian scene in the twentieth century.

There is no doubt that the conditions have matured for a transformation which will end the stagnation of imperialist decay in India and replace it by a modern advancing India of the people.

4. THE AWAKENING OF INDIA

It is against this declining and bankrupt system of imperialist rule that the Indian people have risen in ever-extending and universal revolt.

The Indian national movement[1] has developed through many stages over the past century and in its modern forms since the third quarter of the nineteenth century. It has developed in many forms, legal and illegal, constitutional and revolutionary. It has comprised many currents—conservative and radical, and in the modern era, socialist and communist. Half a century ago, the demands of the legal movement were still only for moderate reforms within the imperialist structure. The organised movement was confined to a handful of the educated middle class. But from the twentieth century the scope and aims of the movement have continuously extended. After the first world war, the national movement took on a full mass

[1]The terms "Indian Nation" and "Indian National Movement" are here and in subsequent pages used to describe the unity of the struggle of the people of India against British imperialism and for shaping their own political future. No judgement is implied by this term on the question of the future political forms a free India may adopt, or the signs of emergence of the multi-national character of a future free India with the significance which this may carry for political institutions. This special question will be separately considered later.

character, the demands advanced to full self-government which was finally defined from 1929 onwards as complete independence and separation from the British Empire.

India is awakening. Indians, for thousands of years the prey of successive waves of conquerors, are awakening to independent existence as a free people with their own role to play in the world. This awakening has leapt forward in our lifetime. In the last 25 years a new India has emerged. To-day India's advance to freedom, whatever the obstacles still to be overcome, is universally recognised as approaching victory in the near future. But the freeing of India removes the main base of modern imperialist domination of subject peoples.

Over the whole past period British policy has sought, with every weapon in its armoury—whether by violent repression or by constitutional concession, by skilfully playing on the divisions or by approaches to the upper leadership of the movement—to counter, check, divide, corrupt or oppose the national movement and stem its advance. British imperialist policy, the most skilful, flexible and experienced expression of imperialist policy, has endeavoured by every means and resource, combining coercion with reforms, to adapt itself to the new situation and to maintain the reality of its power and exploitation while making far-reaching concessions in form. The liberal imperialist and reformist theories of the possibility of gradual and peaceful advance and progress of a colonial people to self-government and freedom within imperialism have here been brought to the test of practice. History will determine the final outcome of this conflict which will be decisive, not only for the future of the Indian people, but for the future of the British Empire.

The record of the past quarter of a century has shown that all the efforts of imperialism at adaptation to the new conditions, all the alternating waves of coercion and concession which have characterised this period, have not succeeded in damming the advancing tide of the national movement, nor have they brought any solution to the problem of India.

The rising contradictions, rooted in the social and economic, no less than the political conditions of India under imperialist rule, again and again defeat the attempts at harmony. The two levels, of the most advanced and elaborate finance-capitalist exploitation and domination above, and of the lowest level of social misery and backwardness below, are closely intertwined in a network of cause and effect. In between these two levels—between the two opposing extremes of the impe-

rialist exploiters at the apex of the pyramid and the destitute producing masses at the base—exist a host of transitional forms, intermediary parasitism, subordinate mechanisms of exploitation, old decomposing forces and new advancing forces. Through it all, extending every year, develop the rising national consciousness of the Indian people and the rising economic demands of the hungry Indian masses. This is a situation packed at every turn with social dynamite.

The basic problem of India is not only national but social. The challenge of the Indian people to imperialism is in its simplest sense a claim of one-fifth of humanity to freedom from foreign domination. But this demand for freedom inevitably strikes deeper than a claim for political independence in which it finds its political expression. It is at root a challenge to a deeply entrenched system of exploitation which has its seat in the City of London, but which is closely bound with a subordinate system of privilege and exploitation within India. The one cannot be touched without the other.

In this sense the Indian question is in the last analysis a social question. The basic problem of India is a problem of four hundred million human beings who are living under conditions of extreme poverty and semi-starvation for the overwhelming majority, and are at the same time living under a foreign rule which holds complete control over their lives and maintains by force the social system leading to these terrible conditions. These hundreds of millions are struggling for life, for the means of life, for elementary freedom. The problem of their struggle and of how they can realise their aims is the problem of India.

The immediate aim of the struggle of the Indian people is national liberation, the conquest of national independence and the democratic right of self-government. But this aim represents the first stage of a deeper social struggle, of a moving social revolution within India. The national and social issues are closely intertwined, and the understanding of this interconnection is the key to the understanding of the Indian situation.

Social conservatism is still deeply rooted in India and profoundly affects the problems and character of the national movement. The effects of such social conservatism and reactionary tendencies weaken and disorganise the advance of the national movement. Just as imperialism has produced its mythology to cover up its real predatory record with the conventional picture of its "civilising mission" so we need to be on

guard against corresponding presuppositions and conventional mythologies in the opposite direction.

For, in opposition to the conventional imperialist mythology some backward-looking sections in India have endeavoured to build up a counter-mythology. In reaction against the evils of imperialist domination, they have endeavoured to paint a picture of a golden age of India in the past before British rule. They seek to slur over the evils of the rotting social system which went down before the British onset. They seek, not only to explain historically, but to idealise and glorify just those reactionary survivals of India's past which hamper progress, weigh down the consciousness of the people and prevent unity. On the basis of these reactionary survivals they seek to build up national consciousness. In this way they have sought to turn the fight against imperialism into a fight against "Western civilisation" in general. They turn their gaze backwards, not forwards.

This is not to strengthen the national front, but to weaken it. Nothing is to be gained by failing to face those evils of Indian society, which are not only derivative from imperialist rule, but also inherited from India's historical past. On the contrary, the national front grows strong precisely in proportion as it can show itself more capable than imperialism to fight those evils which imperialism, from the very nature of its role and social basis, is compelled to tolerate and even to foster.

So long as imperialism was able to stand out as the representative of a more advanced social and economic order, for so long, whatever its attendant cruelties and waste, it was bound to dominate. To-day, the more clearly the forces of the national front become identified with the advancing social forces of the Indian people, and can stand out as the representatives of a superior social and economic order to imperialism, the more certain becomes their future victory.

The Indian people, through the profound inner social conflicts and problems which are being brought to the front in the gathering crisis, stand before some of the most basic revolutionary tasks of any section of humanity. The deeper problems of the backwardness of India, of the task to clear away the dirt and filth of ages of subjection, arrested development and conservative social custom, will not reach their solution in the moment of national liberation, but will only reach their full amplitude and the first approach to the conditions for their solution. By the resolution of these conflicts and problems, as the working masses of India advance to con-

sciousness and to control of their own destiny, by the bringing forward of India from its present economic and cultural backwardness to the level of the most advanced nations, the people of India are marked out to play a foremost role in the future advance to world socialism and the final overcoming of the distinctions between East and West, between advanced and backward nations.

Every stage of civilisation and culture within class-society, from the most primitive to the most advanced, exists in India. The widest range of social, economic, political and cultural problems thus find their sharpest expression in Indian conditions. The problems of the relations and co-existence of differing races and religions; the battle against old superstitions and decaying social forms and traditions; the fight for education; the fight for liberation of women; the question of the reorganisation of agriculture and of the development of industry, and of the relationship of town and country; the issues of class conflict in the most manifold and acute forms; the problems of the relationship of nationalism and socialism; all these varied issues of the modern world press forward with special sharpness and urgency in India.

The solution of these manifold problems cannot be realised in isolation, but is necessarily bound up with the central immediate issue of national liberation, releasing the material and human forces for the creation of a new India. The solution of the problems of India means the solution of the most typical and sharpest problems, in their most complicated form, that confront in common the peoples of the world.

The people of India have already played a great part in world history, not as conquerors but in the sphere of culture, thought, art and industry. The national and social liberation of the Indian people will bring great new wealth to humanity.

Part I

INDIA AS IT IS AND AS IT MIGHT BE

Chapter II. THE WEALTH AND THE POVERTY OF INDIA

1. The Wealth of India
2. The Poverty of India
3. Over-population Fallacies

Chapter III. A CONTRAST OF TWO WORLDS

1. Two Decades of Socialism and Imperialism
2. The Experience of the Central Asian Republics

Chapter II

THE WEALTH AND THE POVERTY OF INDIA

"The most arresting fact about India is that her soil is rich and her people poor."—M. L. DARLING, "THE PUNJAB PEASANT IN PROSPERITY AND DEBT." 1925 p. 73.

TWO FACTS stand out in the present situation of India.

One is the wealth of India—the natural wealth, the abundant resources, the potential prosperity within reach of the entire existing population, and of more than the present population.

The other is the poverty of India — the poverty of the overwhelming majority of the people, a poverty beyond the imagination of any accustomed to the conditions of the Western world.

Between these two lies the problem of the existing social and political order in India.

1. THE WEALTH OF INDIA

India is a country of poor people. But it is not a poor country.

Not only are the natural resources of India exceptionally favourable for the highest degree of prosperity for the population through combined agricultural and industrial development, but it is also the case that prior to British rule Indian economic development stood well to the forefront in the world scale.

It is well known that in former ages the wealth of India was considered to be fabulous in the view of inhabitants of

other countries. Such accounts need to be treated with suitable scepticism, since observers of those times looked more to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the rich and the powerful than to the distribution of wealth. Characteristic of this type of observer was Clive when he entered Murshidabad, the old capital of Bengal, in 1757, and wrote:

> "This city is as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London, with this difference that there were individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater property than in the last city."
>
> *(Quoted in the Indian Industrial Commission Report, p. 249.)*

While allowing for variation and exaggeration in such reports as are available, and for the absence of any possibility of scientific evidence, it is noticeable that travellers in India in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century frequently reported a general prosperity, also in the villages, which contrasts strikingly with conditions to-day.[1] Thus Tavernier, in his account of his journeys in seventeenth-century India, remarks that

> "even in the smallest villages rice, flour, butter, milk, beans and other vegetables, sugar and other sweetmeats, dry and liquid, can be procured in abundance."
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> *(Tavernier, "Travels in India," Oxford University Press edition, 1925, Vol. I, p. 238.)*

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[1] W. H. Moreland, in his "India at the Death of Akbar" (1920) and "From Akbar to Aurangzeb" (1923), endeavours to accumulate all the negative evidence to show that poverty of the mass of the population was prevalent also in the seventeenth century. Even so, when it comes to summing up his results in his chapter on the "Wealth of India" in "India at the Death of Akbar," he is compelled to reach the conclusion:

> "It is improbable that for India taken as a whole the gross income per head of the rural population has changed by any large proportion; it may possibly be somewhat smaller, more probably it is somewhat larger than it was, but in either case the difference would not be so great as to indicate a definite alteration in the economic position" (p. 286).
>
> "As regards primary production, agriculture yielded about the same average income as now, forests about the same, fisheries perhaps somewhat more, and minerals almost certainly less. As regards manufactures, agricultural industries show on balance no material change; the average income from miscellaneous handicrafts, wool-weaving and transport production other than shipbuilding has substantially

Manouchi, the Venetian who became Chief Physician to Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century, describes ecstatically in his Memoirs the wealth of India province by province; as typical may be taken his description of Bengal, in view of its subsequent devastation under Clive and his successors and its present desperate poverty:

> "Bengal is of all the kingdoms of the Mogul best known in France. The prodigious riches transported thence into Europe are proofs of its great fertility. We may venture to say that it is not inferior in anything to Egypt, and that it even exceeds that kingdom in its products of silks, cottons, sugar and indigo. All things are in great plenty here, fruits, pulse, grain, muslins, cloths of gold and silk."
>
> *(F. F. Catrou, "The General History of the Mogul Empire: extracted from the Memoirs of M. Manouchi, a Venetian and Chief Physician to Aurangzeb for about 40 years," published by John Bowyer, London, 1709.)*

Similarly the French traveller, Bernier, in the middle of the seventeenth century, round about 1660, twice visited Bengal and wrote what he saw before the break-up of the Mogul Empire:

> "The knowledge I have acquired of Bengal in two visits inclines me to believe that it is richer than Egypt. It exports in abundance cottons and silks, rice, sugar and butter. It produces amply for its own consumption of wheat, vegetables, grains, fowls, ducks and geese. It has immense herds of pigs and flocks of sheep and goats. Fish of every kind it has in profusion. From Rajmahal to the sea is an endless number of canals, cut in bygone ages from the Ganges by immense labour for navigation and irrigation."
>
> *(Bernier, quoted by Sir William Willcocks, "Lectures on the Ancient System of Irrigation in Bengal," University of Calcutta, 1930, pp. 18-19.)*

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increased, but silk-weaving shows a decline. .These losses are much more than counterbalanced by gains under mineral and transport production and miscellaneous handicrafts; but these gains in turn, substantial though they are, become very small when we set them beside the preponderating item of agricultural income" (p. 287).

Over the general question of the standard of living of the masses in India prior to British rule controversy necessarily reigns, though the balance of evidence and of popular tradition undoubtedly points to a wider area of well-being.

Beyond controversy, however, and universally recognised is the high industrial development of India, relative to contemporary world standards, before British rule. The Indian Industrial Commission of 1916-18 opened its report with the statement:

> "At a time when the West of Europe, the birthplace of the modern industrial system, was inhabited by uncivilised tribes, India was famous for the wealth of her rulers and for the high artistic skill of her craftsmen. And even at a much later period, when merchant adventurers from the West made their first appearance in India, the industrial development of this country was at any rate not inferior to that of the more advanced European nations."
>
> *(Indian Industrial Commission Report, p. 6.)*

Sir Thomas Holland, the Chairman of the Commission and the leading authority on Indian mineral resources, reported in 1908:

> "The high quality of the native-made iron, the early anticipation of the processes now employed in Europe for the manufacture of high-class steels, and the artistic products in copper and brass gave India at one time a prominent position in the metallurgical world."
>
> *("The Mineral Resources of India," report by T. H. Holland, 1908.)*

It will be observed that iron and steel production had already reached a high degree of development; to this extent

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"A detailed examination of three other sources of income—ship-building, foreign commerce and textile (cotton and jute) manufactures—appears to justify the conclusion that they cannot have yielded so much more than now as to raise the average income of the country materially above its present level" (p. 293).

"India was almost certainly not richer (in Akbar's days) than she is now, and probably she was a little poorer" (p. 294).

When the most painstaking argument on the other side can thus only claim stagnation after three centuries (contrast the change in European countries in the same three centuries) it is evident what a relative retrogression in the world's scale has taken place.

the material conditions for the advance to modern industry were present.

The causes that led to the destruction of this leading position under British rule, and the relegation of India to a backward economic situation, will be examined in later chapters.

No less universally admitted is the fact that the natural resources exist for the highest modern economic development in India.

In respect of agriculture the judgment of Sir George Watt, Reporter on Economic Products to the Government of India, may be quoted:

> "It seems safe to affirm that with the extension of irrigation, more thorough and complete facilities of transport, improvements in methods and materials of agriculture, and the expansion of the area of cultivation...the productiveness of India might easily be increased by at least 50%. Indeed, few countries in the world can be said to possess so brilliant an agricultural prospect, if judged of purely by intrinsic value and extent of undeveloped resources."
>
> *(Sir George Watt, "Memorandum on the Resources of British India," Calcutta, 1894, p. 5.)*

Even more striking are the potential resources for industrial development. India possesses abundant supplies of coal, iron, oil, manganese, gold, lead, silver and copper. (In respect of oil, the political separation of Burma under the new Constitution has cut off the main existing supply, and the aim of British imperialism to safeguard its hold on Burma oil has undoubtedly been one of the factors underlying this separation; but such evidence as is available indicates that there are abundant untapped sources of oil in India, which have hardly begun to be prospected.)

The American Technical Mission[1] which came to India in 1942 "to investigate the industrial resources of that country (India) and to recommend ways and means by which the Government of the United States could assist in augmenting India's war production," reported:

> "The coal resources in Bengal and Bihar have been estimated at 60 billion tons, of which 20 billion are consi-

[1]It may interest the reader to note that the deliberations and report of this Commission have been branded by the British Government as strictly and highly confidential and have neither been published nor implemented.

south from that city, there are 20,000 million tons of high-grade ore at an average distance of 125 miles from the Bengal coal-fields. (Report of the Indian Tariff Board regarding the grant of protection to the steel industry, 1924.)

It will be noted that "limited funds for establishment and prospecting equipment" are allowed to prevent the Geological Survey Department from carrying its investigations sufficiently far to make possible the exploitation of these vast potential resources for Indian wealth, which are thus merely recorded on paper as an astronomer might map the stars. (The total expenditure on all the "Scientific Departments" in India in 1933-34 was one-third of 1 per cent of the total Government expenditure, and less than one-seventieth part of the military expenditure.) It will be further noted that the Report is content to indicate vaguely that the coal and iron resources are "sufficient in all probability to warrant large extensions of the existing iron and steel works."

Even more significant are the potentialities of water-power for the electrification of India and the neglect of these potentialities. The following table shows the water-power resources of leading countries of the world and the proportion of their use *(World Almanac, 1932)*, compared with India:

WATER POWER RESOURCES

Country	*In million horse-power*		*Percentage developed*
	Potential	*Developed*	
United States	35.0	11.7	33
Canada	18.2	4.5	25
France	5.4	2.1	37
Japan	4.5	1.7	37
Italy	3.8	1.8	47
Switzerland	2.5	1.8	72
Germany	2.0	1.1	55
India	27.0	0.8	3

India stands second only to the United States in water-power resources, yet uses only 3 per cent, compared to 72 per cent in Switzerland, 55 per cent in Germany, 47 per cent in Italy, 37 per cent in France and Japan, and 33 per cent in the United States.

On every side of Indian economy the same picture is revealed of limitless potential wealth and actual neglect and failure of development under the existing regime. The menace

of this situation is felt by the imperialists themselves, even though they have no solution to offer. In the warning words of Sir Alfred Watson, the Editor of the leading English journal in India, the Calcutta *Statesman*, and the Calcutta correspondent of *The Times*, at a meeting of the Royal Empire Society in 1933:

> "Sir Alfred Watson said that industrially India was a land of missed opportunities, and that the main blame for this rested heavily on the British....Though India possessed in abundance all the conditions for a great industrial country, she was to-day one of the backward nations of the world economically, and was very backward in industry....We had never tackled seriously the problem of developing India's undoubted capacity for industry....
>
> "Unless India could provide in the coming years a wholly unprecedented industrial development based on growth of demand by her vast population, the level of subsistence of the country, which was now appallingly low, would fall below the starvation point."
>
> *(Sir Alfred Watson, lecture to the Royal Empire Society, "The Times," January 4, 1933.)*

2. THE POVERTY OF INDIA

It is against this background of the real potential wealth of India and the failure to develop it that the terrible poverty of the Indian population stands out with ominous significance.

Indian statistics, though voluminous in quantity for all the purposes of the functioning of the administrative machine, are extremely poor and deficient in quality when it comes to the questions of the condition of the people. There is no authoritative estimate of national income or average income (the results of various official enquiries have been kept private and confidential), just as there are no regular statistics, for India or British India as a whole, of total production, of wage rates or the average level of wages, of hours of work or labour conditions, no adequate health statistics and no statistics of housing.

A series of estimates of average income per head have been made, and have been the subject of sharp controversy. These include the following from 1868 up to the post-war period.

ESTIMATES OF PER CAPITA NATIONAL INCOME

Estimated by—

	Official or Unofficial	Year when made	Relating to year	Annual Income per head Rs.	Sh
D. Naoroji[1]	Unofficial	1876	1868	20	20
Baring and Barbour	Official	1882	1881	27	45
Lord Curzon	Official	1901	1897-98	30	40
W. Digby[2]	Unofficial	1902	1899	18	24
Findlay Shirras[3]	Official	1924	1911	49	65
Wadia and Joshi[4]	Unofficial	1925	1913-14	44½	59
Shah and Khambata[5]	Unofficial	1924	1921-22	74	95
Simon Report	Official	1930	1921-22	116	155
V.K.R.V. Rao[6]	Unofficial	1939	1925-29	78	117
Central Banking Enquiry Committee (agricultural population only)	Official	1931	1928	42	63
Findlay Shirras[7]	Official	1932	1931	63	94½
Sir James Grigg[8]	Official	1938	1937-38	56	84
V.K.R.V. Rao[9]	Unofficial	1940	1931-32	62	93

These figures are not comparable, owing to the differences of basis of computation, as well as owing to far-reaching changes in the level of prices. The Index Number of Indian Prices, based on 1873 as 100 (thirty-nine articles unweighted, but excluding food grains up to 1897) rose to 116 by 1900, to 143 by 1913 and to 281 by 1920; then declined to 236 in 1921 227 in 1925, 171 in 1930 and 125 in 1936.

The basis of computation also shows a wide range of variation, and the various estimates can only be taken as rough indications. The older official estimates were based on the total value of agricultural output, with an assumed addition of 50 per cent for non-agricultural income (almost

[1]D. Naoroji, "Poverty and Un-British Rule in India," 1876.
[2]W. Digby, "Prosperous British India," 1902.
[3]G. Findlay Shirras, "The Science of Public Finance," 1924.
[4]Wadia and Joshi, "The Wealth of India," 1925.
[5]Shah and Khambata, "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India," 1924.
[6]V.K.R.V. Rao, "India's National Income," 1939.
[7]G. Findlay Shirras, "Poverty and Kindred Economic Problems in India," 1932.
[8]Sir James Grigg, Finance Member of the Government of India, Budget speech in the Central Legislative Assembly, April, 1938.
[9]V.K.R.V. Rao, "The National Income of British India," 1940.

certainly an over-estimate). Digby's figure excluded income for services. The best known and most generally accepted older estimates were those of Naoroji for 1868, which gave £2 a head; of Major Baring (later Lord Cromer), announced in 1882, which gave £2 5s. a head; and of Lord Curzon, when Viceroy, in a speech in 1901, which gave £2 a head. These figures speak for themselves for the officially admitted condition of India after over a century of British rule.

The later figures show a much wider variation. That is partly a reflection of the extreme instability of prices, which more than doubled between 1912 and 1920, and then a decade later, form 1931 onwards, fell to below the old pre-war level. The post-war estimates of Professor Findlay Shirras, who held the position of Director of Statistics to the Government of India from 1914 to 1921, also assumed an increase in the proportion of non-agricultural income after the war.

The Simon Commission Report in 1930, whose first volume was designed for wide circulation as a general apologia for imperialist rule in India, produced an inflated figure of nearly £8 a year for the average Indian income; and this estimate has since received wide currency. As this estimate represents the highest estimate that has at any time been put forward, it is worth examining the basis on which it was reached.

Although reporting in 1930, the Simon Commission chose for its basis the years of highly inflated prices immediately after the war, then nearly a decade old. It quoted a series of estimates of average income during 1919-20, 1920-21 and 1921-22, ranging from 74 rupees to 116 rupees. It then chose the highest of these, admittedly as "the most optimistic of the above estimates" (Vol. I, p. 334). Thereafter it adopted and continued to use this exceptional figure in its subsequent calculations, as if it were typical of the period as a whole, even though it has represented a point close to the peak of the post-war boom ("considering that prices have meanwhile fallen, it can hardly be put at a higher figure today," Vol. II, p. 207—in fact, the price index fell from 281 in 1920 to 171 in 1930 and 119 by 1934), and equated this inflated figure to nearly ("less than") £8 a year in English money as the average Indian's annual income, compared to a corresponding figure of £95 for the average English income.

Even so, this "most optimistic" estimate by the official Simon Commission of the average Indian's income amounts to 5d. a day in 1921-22.

To get closer to the real facts, however, it is necessary to make corrections for the factors left out of account.

The Government Index of Indian Prices fell from 236 in 1921 to 125 in 1936—a drop of nearly one half. This drop affected most acutely agricultural prices, the main basis of Indian income. Between 1921 and 1936 the index of retail prices of food grains shows a fall, for rice from 355 to 178, for wheat from 360 to 152, for gram from 406 to 105, for barley from 325 to 134—a general drop of more than one half.

Thus, allowing for this collapse of agricultural prices, the Simon Commission's 5d. a day for 1921-22 becomes for the nineteen-thirties more like two and a half pence a day.

This, however, is only a gross average income, not the actual income of the overwhelming majority. From it have to be deducted the heavy home charges and tribute of imperialism (interest on debt, dividends on British capital investments, banking and financial commissions, etc.) drawn out of India without return in the shape of imported goods. This drain is estimated by Shah and Khambata at a little over one-tenth of the gross national income. The two and a half pence thus becomes two and a quarter pence.

Next, allowance has to be made for the extreme inequality of income covered in the average. If, for example, the average for Britain of £95 per head, given by the Simon Commission, were in fact typical, it would mean that a British worker with a wife and three children would be enjoying £475 a year. Actually the worker who gets half this is in an extremely favoured position, and the average worker gets more like one-third at the best—usually under one-third. The same inequality of division applies to India. Professor K. T. Shah and K. J. Khambata in their "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India" (1924) showed that 1 per cent of the population gets one-third of the national income, while 60 per cent of the population get 30 per cent of the income. This means that for the 60 per cent or majority of the population any gross figure of the average national income per head must be exactly halved to represent what they actually get.[1]

[1]Some light on the division of incomes, and on the lowness of incomes, in India is afforded by the commercial estimate of "The Indian Market" in *The Times Trade and Engineering Indian Supplement* of April 1939. In this unofficial estimate for their own use the British capitalists are not concerned with any propaganda purpose of painting a rosy picture of the results of imperialist exploitation, but are solely concerned with the

Thus, applying the statistics of the division of income to the Simon Commission's "most optimistic" estimate, after allowing for the subsequent fall of prices and the drain of home charges and tribute, we reach the conclusion that the average Indian of the majority of the population on the eve of the second world war was getting from one penny to one and a quarter penny a day.

This calculation is on the basis of allowing every factor favourable to imperialism and on the basis of imperialism's own estimates.

Confirmation of the general conjecture (it cannot be more, owing to the absence of exact statistics) is afforded by two more recent estimates from official sources. In 1931 the Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee reported:

> "From the reports of the Provincial Committees and other published statistical information, the total gross value of the annual agricultural produce would work to about Rs. 1200 crores on the basis of the 1928 price levels. On this basis and taking into consideration the probable income from certain subsidiary occupations estimated at 20 per cent of the agricultural income, and ignoring the rise in population in the last decade and the fall in prices since 1929, the average income of an agriculturist in British India does not work out at a higher figure than about Rs. 42 or a little over £3 a year."
>
> *(Report of the Indian Central Banking Committee, 1931, Vol. I, p. 39.)*

This gives 2*d.* a day per head gross income for the agricultural population. The figure is based on 1928 price levels. Between 1928 and 1936 the index of prices fell from 201 to 125. This

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actual facts for the business purpose of judging the range of consumers to be reached; and the result is a strikingly different picture from that of the Simon Commission. The estimated range of incomes of Indian households is presented as follows:

Income in Rupees	*English Equivalent*	*Number of Households*
Over 100,000	£7,500	6,000
Averaging 5,000	£375	270,000
Averaging 1,000	£75	250,000
Averaging 200	£15	35,000,000
Averaging 50	£3 10s.	the remainder

This table, compiled by the British capitalists for their private use, speaks for itself.

would reduce the income of 2*d*. a day to one and a quarter penny a day for the pre-war period.

In April 1938 Sir James Grigg, Finance Member of the Government of India, estimated the total national income of India at 16,000 million rupees, or £1,200 million. Assuming that this figure, which was given for the purpose of indicating the proportion of taxation to gross national income, applies only to British India (if it were a figure for all India, the income per head would, of course, be proportionately lower) and dividing this by the population of British India, estimated at 285 millions in 1938, we get a result of gross average income of 56 rupees or 84*s*. per head. Applying the statistics of division of income to this gross figure (i.e., 60% of the population sharing 30% of the income) we once again reach a result of 1.38 *d*. a day for the average Indian of the majority of the population in British India, or just over 1.25 *d*. a day. Dr. V.K.R.V. Rao has estimated the gross income at Rs.62, or 93 shillings per head per annum.[1] By applying again the ratio established by Professors Shah and Khambata, we get a figure of about 1½d. per head for a majority of Indian population.

These figures are only important to give a preliminary conception of the depth of Indian poverty.

What do these mean in living conditions? The leading Indian economists, Shah and Khambata, express it as follows:

> "The average Indian income is just enough either to feed two men in every three of the population, or give them all two in place of every three meals they need, on condition that they all consent to go naked, live out of doors all the year round, have no amusement or recrea-

[1]According to Dr. Rao, the urban income per head is more than thrice as high as the rural income, the rural income being Rs. 51, or 77 shillings, and urban income being Rs. 166, or 249 shillings. There is a vast difference in the economic conditions of the people living in the villages and towns and then between the conditions of various strata of the people.

In the villages, of course, as we shall see later, almost the entire crop is usurped by the landlord and moneylender.

In the urban areas too, nearly one half of the income belongs to less than one-tenth of the total population. Even among the comparatively well-to-do with an income of over Rs. 2,000 per year, 38 per cent possess only 17 per cent of the total income while a little more than one per cent claim as much as 10 per cent of the total income. (*V. K. R. V. Rao, "The National Income of British India, 1931-32,"* page 189).

tion, and want nothing else but food, and that the lowest, the coarsest, the least nutritious."

(Shah and Khambata, "The Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India," 1924, p. 253.)

Some notion can be obtained by comparing the costs of the Jail Code and the Famine Code. The cost of maintaining one prisoner in India in 1939 for one year was 116.67 rupees, or nearly three times the Banking Enquiry Committee's estimate of the average Indian agriculturist's income. An official enquiry into working-class budgets in Bombay in 1923 revealed the following comparison between the workers' standard of life and the standard of the Jail Code and the Famine Code:

DAILY CONSUMPTION PER ADULT MALE

	Bombay Workers' Budgets	*BOMBAY JAILS*		*Bombay Famine Code*
		Hard labour	*Light labour*	*(diggers)*
Cereals	1.29 lb.	1.5 lb.	1.38 lb.	1.29 lb.
Pulses	0.09 „	0.27 „	0.21 „	
Meat	0.03 „	0.04 „	0.04 „	Figures
Salt	0.04 „	0.03 „	0.03 „	*not*
Oils	0.02 „	0.03 „	0.03 „	available
Others	0.07 „	— „	— „	
	1.54 „	1.87 „	1.69 „	

(Report on an Enquiry into Working-Class Budgets in Bombay, Bombay Labour Office, 1923)

The Bombay worker, who is better off than the mass of the rural population, is only able to eat on the level of famine rations and below the jail rations of prisoners.[1]

[1]Subsequent criticism of the above startling result, to the effect that it left out of account the small extras in the way of cheap sweetmeats, condiments, fish, vegetables or fruit that the worker might consume, led to further careful official calculations in 1925. These showed that all such extras amounted to only 4.6 per cent of the food balance shown in the above table, or the equivalent of 113 calories added to the previous total of 2,450 making a final daily total of 2,563 calories consumed by a Bombay adult worker *(Bombay Labour Gazette,* April 1925, pp. 841-2). This may be contrasted with the minimum scale of 3,390 calories laid down by the Report of the British Medical Association's Sub-Committee on Nutrition, or with the minimum of 2,800 calories for Indian conditions estimated by Professor R. Mukerjee ("Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions," 1938).

As for the conditions of the mass of the population, from year to year Government Reports reveal the same picture.

> "All but the most highly skilled workmen in India receive wages which are sufficient to feed and clothe them. Everywhere will be seen overcrowding, dirt and squalid misery."
>
> *("India in 1927-28.")*

> "A large proportion of the inhabitants in India are still beset with poverty of a kind which finds no parallel in Western lands, and are living on the very margin of subsistence"
>
> *("India in 1929-30.")*

> "70 to 80% of the population are still living on almost the margin of subsistence."
>
> *(Sir Alfred Chatterton, "Journal of the East India Association," July 1930.)*

In 1933 Major-General Sir John Megaw, Director of the Indian Medical Service, issued a report on Public Health, in which he estimated that 39 per cent of the population is well nourished, 41 per cent poorly nourished and 20 per cent very badly nourished—that is, that 61 per cent, or nearly two-thirds, are under-nourished. The corresponding figures for Bengal are 22 per cent, 47 per cent, and 31 per cent respectively—that is, that 78 per cent in Bengal, or nearly four-fifths, are under-nourished. He further reported that disease is "widely disseminated throughout India" and "is increasing steadily and rather rapidly."

Dr. Aykroyd, the nutritional expert, had stated that in India "there is at all times serious under-nourishment of some third of the population." (Quoted in the Food Grains Policy Committee's Report, 1943, p. 33.)

In 1926 the Government appointed a Royal Commission on Agriculture in India. Although it was precluded by its terms of reference from touching the real questions of land ownership, land tenure, rent and land-revenue exactions underlying the poverty, it was immediately inundated with evidence from the Government's own officers of the terrible conditions of the peasantry. Dr. D. Clouston, Agricultural Adviser to the Government of India, first witness, declared that "the rural population is of poor physique and easily succumbs to epidemics." Colonel Graham told the Commission that "malnutrition is one of the outstanding difficulties in improving agriculture."

Lieut.-Colonel R. McHarrison, in charge of the Deficiency Diseases Enquiry at the Pasteur Institute at Coonoor, was even more emphatic:

> "Of all the disabilities from which the masses in India suffer Malnutrition is perhaps the chief....Malnutrition is the most far-reaching of the causes of diseases in India."
>
> *(Lt.-Col. R. McHarrison, "Memorandum on Malnutrition as a Cause of Physical Inefficiency and Ill-health among the Masses in India," Evidence to the Royal Commission on Agriculture, I, ii, p. 95.)*

In 1929 the Government appointed a Royal Commission on Labour in India. It found that "in most industrial centres the proportion of families and individuals who are in debt is not less than two-thirds of the whole....in the great majority of cases the amount of debt exceeds three months' wages and is often far in excess of this amount" (p.224). It found wages ranging from the most favourable average for Bombay textile workers of 56*s.* a month for men and 26*s.* for women: for Bombay unskilled workers, 30*s.* a month; for coal-miners in the principal Jharia coal-field, an average of from 15*s.* to 22*s.* a month; for workers in seasonal factories, from 6*d.* to 1*s.* a day for men, and from 4*d.* to 9*d.* a day for women; for unskilled workers in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, 9*d.* a day for men, 6*d.* for women and 4*d.* for children, and in Madras and the United Provinces, as low as 5*d.* a day for men. It found that in the "unregulated" factories and industries, in which the overwhelming majority of Indian industrial workers are employed, and where no factory legislation applies, "workers as young as five years of age may be found in some of these places working without adequate meal intervals or weekly rest days, and often for 10 or 12 hours daily, for sums as low as 2 annas [2.25*d.*] in the case of those of tenderest years" (p. 96).

In respect of housing, the average working-class family does not even enjoy one room, but more often shares part of a room. In 1911, 69 per cent of the total population of Bombay were living in one-room tenements (as against 6 per cent in London in the same year), averaging 4.5 persons per tenement. The 1931 census showed that 74 per cent of the total population of Bombay were living in one-room tenements—thus revealing an increase in overcrowding after two decades. One-third of the population were living more than five persons to a room: 256,379 from six to nine persons per room;

8,133 from ten to nineteen persons per room; 15,490 twenty persons and over per room. The terrible overcrowding is even more sharply revealed when working-class conditions are taken separately and not merged in an average.

The Textile Labour Inquiry Committee, appointed by the Congress Ministry in 1937, in its report published in 1940 says:

> "In Bombay, the investigation was confined to the E, F and G Wards which are the principal working-class localities in the City. The statistics collected show that, of the families covered, 91.24 per cent live in one-room tenements and that the average number of persons residing in each such tenement is 3.84. The approximate floor space available per person and tenement is 26.86 and 103.23 sq. ft. respectively."
>
> *(Textile Labour Inquiry Committee Report, Vol. II, 1940, p. 273.)*

In Karachi, the Whitley Report found that almost one-third of the whole population was crowded at the rate of six to nine persons in a room. In Ahmedabad, 73 per cent of the working class lived in one-room tenements.

The conditions of living have become far worse since 1931 and particularly since the war. The population of Bombay had increased to 23 lakhs in 1945 as against 11 lakhs in 1931 and 14.89 lakhs in 1941; whereas the number of tenements has increased by only 83,828 since 1931. The overall average per tenement comes to about 7.01 against 4.01 in 1931. Congestion, of course, is much greater in one-room tenements than in higher tenements.

The Housing Panel (a committee appointed by the Bombay Municipality) placed the average available floor space per person in Bombay at $12\frac{1}{2}$ sq. feet whereas even "the standard of floor space per convict allowed according to the Bombay Jail Manual is 40 sq. feet. (Report of the Housing Panel, January 1946.)

In addition, 13 per cent of Bombay's population are sleeping on the streets to-day, against 5 per cent before the war.

As for sanitation, the Whitley report found:

> "Neglect of sanitation is often evidenced by heaps of rotting garbage and pools of sewage, whilst the absence of latrines enhances the general pollution of air and soil. Houses, many without plinths, windows and adequate

ventilation, usually consist of a single small room, the only opening being a doorway too low to enter without stooping. In order to secure some privacy, old kerosene tins and gunny bags are used to form screens which further restrict the entrance of light and air. In dwellings such as these, human beings are born, sleep and eat, live and die" (p. 271).

The Bombay Labour Office enquiry into working-class budgets in 1932-33 found that in respect of water supply 26 per cent of the tenements had one tap for eight tenements and less, 44 per cent had one tap for nine to fifteen tenements, and 29 per cent had one tap for sixteen tenements and over (Report of Enquiry into Working-Class Budgets in Bombay, 1935). Eighty-five per cent had only one privy for eight tenements or less; 12 per cent had one privy for nine to fifteen tenements, and 24 per cent had one privy for sixteen tenements and over. In 1935 the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Union conducted an enquiry into industrial housing, and found that out of a total of 23,706 tenements investigated, 5,669 had no provision of any kind for water, while those which had a supply had one to two taps in an area occupied by 200 or more families; 5,000 tenements had no latrine accommodation; there was no sanitation or drainage.

A witness before the Industrial Commission declared:

> "Although I have witnessed a good deal of poverty in my walk through life and in many countries, and although I have read a great deal about poverty....I did not realise its poignancy and its utter wretchedness until I came to inspect the so-called homes of the poorer classes of Bombay .... (See the labourer) in his home amongst his family, and one instinctively asks oneself: Is this a human being or am I conjuring up some imaginary creature without a soul from the underworld?
>
> "In such a room—ten by ten feet—where there is hardly space to move, whole families sleep, breed, cook their food with the aid of pungent cow-dung cakes, and perform all the functions of family life, the common latrines alone being set apart. Some of the rooms so-called in the upper stories of the older houses are often nothing more than holes beneath the sloping roof, in which a man cannot stand upright. The rear rooms are usually dark and gloomy, and it is only at a closer inspection, when

one's eyes have become accustomed to the gloom, that the occupants can be seen at all."

(A. E. Mirams, "Evidence before the Indian Industrial Commission," IV, p. 351.)

An Indian woman doctor, appointed by the Bombay Government to investigate, reported:

"In one room on the second floor of a chawl, measuring some 15 by 12 feet, I found six families living. Six separate ovens on the floor proved this statement. On enquiry, I ascertained that the actual number of adults and children living in this room was 30....Three out of six of the women who lived in this room were shortly expecting to be delivered....The atmosphere at night of that room filled with smoke from six ovens and other impurities would certainly physically handicap any woman and infant both before and after delivery. This was one of many such rooms I saw. In the rooms in the basement of a house conditions were far worse. Here daylight with difficulty penetrated, sunlight never."

("Bombay Labour Gazette," September 1922, p. 31.)

On the 21st April, 1946, I visited the chawls, or workers' tenements, of the textile workers in the heart of Parel, Bombay's Red Centre. Here were closely packed rows upon rows of miserably constructed one-room hutments, each about 12 feet by 10 feet, without light or air. There were no windows and, as we went inside, the darkness was only pierced by a fluttering oil wick while there was oppressive heat from the burning stove. Here, in the first hut we entered, there were 10 persons living. The rent is 7 rupees a month. In another I counted 13 tiny stoves and burners, showing that 13 households lived there. My guide, himself from that area, expressed that this meant at least 20 people or more lived there. But they were afraid to give the full number for fear the rent would be raised. For the first three rows of tenements, representing 30 in all or 300 persons, there were only three taps available with water running in a small trickle only in the morning and evening. There were three lavatories, holes in the ground directly over the drain, one had already filled up and was unusable. In the next row there were 160 tenements and there were only six taps; water was available only for two hours in the evening and in the early morning because of shortage, although water is available all day in the well-to-do quarters of Bombay.

The effects of these conditions—of semi-starvation, overcrowding and no sanitation — on health can be imagined. They are reflected in a recorded death rate of 22.4 per thousand in 1937, compared with 12.4 for England and Wales. The expectation of life for an Indian is less than half that of an inhabitant of England and Wales.

> "The average length of life in India is low as compared with that in most of the Western countries; according to the census of 1921, the average for males and females was respectively 24.8 and 24.7 years, or a general average of 24.75 years in India as compared with 56.6 years in England and Wales. It was found to have decreased further in 1931, being 23.2 and 22.8 years for males and females respectively."
>
> *("Industrial Labour in India," International Labour Office, 1938, p. 8, based on Census of India, 1931, p. 98.)*[1]

They are reflected in a maternal mortality rate of 24.5 per thousand live births compared with 4.1 in England and Wales. They are reflected in the contrast between the death rate of 41.05 per thousand for Ahmedabad City, where the Indian people live under the conditions just described, and 12.84 for Ahmedabad Cantonment, where the Europeans live with every lavish provision for their own health and convenience.

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[1] Vital statistics in India are hopelessly inaccurate, The Census Report of 1931 places the margin of error at 20 per cent. The official returns of the expectation of life show the following figure from 1881 to 1911:

	1881	1891	1901	1911
Males	23.67	24.59	23.63	22.59
Females	25.58	25.54	23 96	23.31

According to these returns given by the 1921 Census Commissioners, the expectation of life decreased from 1881 to 1911; no figure was calculated for 1921. This situation in India over the past half-century contrasts with England and Wales, where the expectation of life increased from 45.4 in 1881-90 to 60.8 in 1933.

An alternative calculation for 1931 places the figure at 26.9 years for males and 26.6 years for females. This would indicate a slight increase; but the inaccuracy of these figures is evidenced when we compare the returns for the expectation of life and the recorded death rate. When we calculate the death rate even from the more favourable figure of the expectation of life given in 1931, it would show a death rate of 37 per thousand for males and 38 per thousand for females, as against the recorded figure of 23. "The expectation-of-life figures are themselves defective, but such as they are they support the conclusion that the assumption that the normal death rate in India is not less than 33 per thousand is correct." (G. Chand, "India's Teeming Millions," p. 113.)

They are reflected in an infantile death rate of 163 out of every thousand born within one year for India, during 1943, contrasting with 46 for England and Wales, and reaching to 239 in Calcutta, 248 in Bombay and 227 in Madras (much higher in the one-room tenements; thus in Bombay in 1926 the rate in one-room tenements was 577 per thousand births, in two-room tenements of 254 per thousand, and in hospitals 107 per thousand).

Deaths in India are mainly ascribed in the official records to "fevers" (3.6 millions out of 6.2 millions annually in British India in 1932-41)—a conveniently vague term to cover the effects of semi-starvation, poverty conditions and their consequences in ill health. That three deaths in four in India are due to "diseases of poverty" is the judgement of the standard economic authority on India, a writer sympathetic to imperialism:

> "20.5 out of a total death rate of 26.7 per thousand of the population, in 1926, were accounted for by cholera, small-pox, plague, 'fevers,' dysentery and diarrhoea — nearly all of which may be considered to fall under the heading of 'diseases of poverty,' and most of which may be considered to be preventable. Better sanitation (including the provision of a pure water-supply, the prevention of the contamination of food, efficient drainage and sewage systems, and better housing) together with the provision of sufficient proper medical advice and institutional treatment, would undoubtedly reduce drastically the excessive death rates in the cities and the deaths from tuberculosis and respiratory diseases...A large proportion of the deaths (and ill-health) due to disease in India could be prevented by the introduction of means already successfully adopted in most Western countries."
>
> *(V. Anstey, "The Economic Development of India," p. 69.)*

The Health Survey and Development Committee, appointed by the Government of India in October 1943 under the chairmanship of Sir Joseph Bhore, in their report published in 1946 have very categorically stated:

> "The maintenance of public health requires the fulfilment of certain fundamental conditions, which include the provision of an environment conducive to healthful living, adequate nutrition, the availability of health pro-

tection,[1] preventive and curative, to all members of the community, irrespective of their ability to pay for it, and active cooperation of the people in the maintenance of their own health. The large amount of preventable suffering and mortality, to which reference has already been made, is mainly the result of an inadequacy of provision in respect of these fundamental factors. Environmental sanitation is at a low level in most parts of the country, malnutrition and under-nutrition reduce the vitality and power to resistance of an appreciable section of the population and the existing health services are altogether inadequate to meet the need of the people, while lack of general education and health education add materially to the difficulty of overcoming the indifference with which the people tolerate the insanitary conditions around them and the large amount of sickness that prevails."

(Report of the Health Survey & Development Committee, 1946, Vol. 1, p. 11)

This picture of a poverty and misery on the lowest level in the world is borne out by all unofficial observers. Here is the impression of an American who went to live in an Indian village, and found that all attempts at medical aid or other assistance to the villages broke against the basic problem of poverty:

"Between 30 and 40 millions of the population do not have more than one meal a day and live on the verge of perpetual starvation. Diet was the hopeless feature in any attempt to prescribe for the sick people who flocked to my door."

"If the suggestion is made that the sordid clothes of a cholera patient be burned, the answer is that, in case he gets well, he will have nothing to put on. Poverty prevents such an extravagance."

"It is food and education, not pills, that are needed in an Indian village."

(G. Emerson, "Voiceless India," 1931.)

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[1]The number of hospital beds available in British India including those for the treatment of general and special diseases, may be compared with other countries:

U.S.A.	10.48	beds per	1,000 population
England and Wales ..	7.14	„ „	1,000 „
British India	0.24	„ „	1,000 „

The conservative imperialist Calcutta correspondent of *The Times* can only record the same impression, that the view of India at close quarters is the view of "semi-starvation" which "obtrudes upon the eye":

> "No one can pass through various parts of India without being profoundly touched at the sad spectacles of malnutrition and semi-starvation that obtrude themselves upon the eye, or can doubt that very many of the inhabitants of India never know what it is to have enough to eat.
>
> "Similarly the health authorities in Bengal, to cite the province with which I am most familiar, assert that the inhabitants are not so well-nourished to-day as they were a generation or so ago."
>
> *(Calcutta correspondent, "The Times," February 1, 1927.)*

This is the situation of the people of India after 180 years of imperialist rule.

It is important to note that this situation of poverty is not a static one. It is a dynamic and developing one. Many competent observers agree with *The Times* correspondent in remarking on a worsening of conditions in the modern period. The Report of the Bengal Director of Health for 1927-8 recorded that "the present peasantry of Bengal are in a very large proportion taking to a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than five weeks," and that "their vitality is now so undermined by inadequate diet that they cannot stand the infection of foul diseases." Similarly in 1933 the Director of the Indian Medical Service reported, as already noted, that "throughout India" disease "is increasing steadily and rather rapidly." This worsening of the situation is connected with the growing agrarian crisis under the conditions of imperialist rule, which is the most powerful driving force to basic social and political change.

3. OVER-POPULATION FALLACIES

What lies behind this terrible poverty of the Indian people?

Before we can begin to consider the real causes, it is necessary to clear out of the way some of the current superficial explanations which are often made a substitute for serious analysis.

Typical of these is the explanation of Indian poverty in terms of the social backwardness, ignorance and superstition of the masses of the people (conservatism in technique, caste restrictions, cow-worship, neglect of hygiene, the position of women, etc.). Undoubtedly these factors play a formidable role in Indian poverty, and the overcoming of all such retrogressive features is a leading part of the task of reconstruction before the Indian people. But when these factors are declared to be the explanation of Indian poverty, then the cart is put before the horse. The social and cultural backwardness is the expression and consequence of the low economic level and political subjection, and not vice versa. Illiteracy can be the condemnation of a government which refuses education and holds a people in ignorance, but not of the people which is refused the opportunity to learn. The root problem is economic-political, and the cultural problem depends on this. The social and cultural backwardness cannot be overcome by preaching uplift or giving lectures on health, while the grinding poverty remains the same and defeats all such efforts. It can only be overcome by a change in the material basis of organisation, which is the key to open every other door. The achievement of this requires a change in class relations, which means a change in the form of State. Only a powerful popular movement, by breaking the yoke of imperialist and feudal relations over the land, can open the way to simultaneous material, social and cultural advance.

The truth of this analysis has been abundantly shown by the example of the Soviet Union. The poverty and low level of the people under Tsarism were commonly explained by the learned as the inevitable consequence of the supposed innate backwardness of the Russian peasantry. But once the workers and peasants combined to throw off their exploiters, they showed themselves capable of a technical and cultural progress which has left the most advanced countries behind. The same will be shown, through whatever different forms and stages of development the process may have to pass, in India. The real backwardness of the Indian peasantry consists, not only in the obvious outer signs of the technical and cultural level, which are the visible symptoms of subjection and arrested development, but above all in the subjection itself and submission to the imperialists and landlords, whose domination prevents development. But this is a backwardness that is coming to an end, and herein lies the hope for the future.

No less widely current is the oft-repeated explanation of Indian poverty as the supposed consequence of "over-population." This view is so prevalent, and through constant repetition so readily springs to the minds of nine out of ten Western readers who have not had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the facts, that it is important to deal with it more fully in order to show how completely it is contradicted by the known facts.

Of all the "easy lies that comfort cruel men" the myth of over-population as the cause of poverty under capitalism is the grossest. Its modern vogue dates, as is well known, from the reactionary parson Malthus, who, indeed, came out with nothing new, but produced his theory appositely in 1798 as a political weapon (as the title of his work declared) against the French Revolution and liberal theories, and was rewarded with a professorship at the East India Company's college. His theory "was greeted with jubilation by the English oligarchy as the great destroyer of all hankerings after human development" (Marx, "Capital," Vol. I, ch. xxv), and, though laughed at by scientists and economists of all schools, has remained the favourite philosophy of reaction. Its argument rested on the assumption of placing arbitrary iron limits to the possibilities of productive development at the very moment when productive development was entering on its greatest expansion. The experience of the nineteenth century smashed it, when the expansion of wealth so glaringly exceeded the growth of population and revealed the causes of poverty to lie elsewhere. In the twentieth century, especially after the first world war and with the world economic crisis, attempts were made to revive it. The existence of international statistics, however, killed it again; the fact that, despite the wholesale destruction of the war and after, world production of foodstuffs, of raw materials and of industrial goods showed a continuous increase far exceeding the growth of world population compelled men to look for the cause of their miseries in the social system. The ruling class began to find their problem how to restrict the production of wealth, and evolved many ingenious schemes for this purpose; while in respect of population, their complaint became that the peoples of Europe and America were not producing enough babies for the supply of cannon-fodder. Less wealth and more human beings became the cry of the modern ruling class, reversing Malthus.

Driven from Europe and America, this discredited theory of old-fashioned reaction now tries to find its last lair in Asia.

The poverty of India and China is solemnly ascribed, not to the social system, but to "over-population." The beneficent effects of imperialist rule, it is declared, having eliminated war from the Indian continent, and having supposedly diminished the range of pestilence and famine (about the last claim there is a hesitant note, in view of the notoriously heavy famines under British rule from 1770 to the opening of the twentieth century, followed by the 14 million deaths from influenza in 1918, the death of 3.5 million people during the recent Bengal famine and the "rat's dietary" conditions of the majority of the population to-day), have unfortunately removed the blessed "natural checks" to the growth of population and permitted the improvident and prolific Indian people to breed beyond the limits of subsistence. Hence the growing pressure on the land and semi-starvation conditions which are the inevitable natural consequence of the benevolence of British rule. These can only be changed when the Indian people learn to limit their rate of growth to something more like the proportions of the sensible European peoples.

This kind of argumentation becomes more and more fashionable in imperialist circles as the problem of India grows more pressing. "Where is the Indian Malthus," cries out a leading imperialist economic expert dramatically, "who will inveigh against the devastating torrent of Indian children?" (Anstey, "Economic Development of India," p. 475.) "India seems to illustrate the theories of Malthus," declares another expert of Empire economics, "as to the increase of population up to the margin of subsistence when unchecked by war, pestilence or famine" (L.C.A. Knowles, "The Economic Development of the British Overseas Empire," p. 351). The view spreads to "left" "progressive" circles who are caught in the imperialist trap; a conference on "Birth Control in Asia" was organised in 1933 at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine under the auspices of the Birth Control International Centre, to press the claims of birth control, not merely as a medical question, but as an economic means towards the solution of the problems of poverty in Asia (see the report, "Birth Control of Asia," published by the Birth Control International Information Centre in 1935). It spreads to Government Reports:

> "Increased production of food ultimately effects little improvement in the standard of living or in the quantity of foodstuffs available, since the population quickly

multiplies under these favourable conditions. Formerly war, famine and pestilence were all active in reducing the numbers for which the land had to provide sustenance; war and famine have been largely negatived as active influences, whilst deaths from pestilence have been considerably reduced. The result is a steadily growing pressure on the land....We are not alone in holding that this factor exerts considerable influence in depressing the general standard of living."

(Whitley Commission Report on Labour in India 1931, p. 249.)

Behold Malthus in all his glory, presiding over a Government Royal Commission, and speaking through the lips of a former Speaker of the House of Commons.

What are the facts?

In the first place, all the above arguments convey the picture of an enormously rapid increase of Indian population under British rule, extending far beyond the rate of increase of other countries, and therefore leading to a situation of extreme poverty owing to this abnormally rapid multiplication of population. How many realise that the actual facts of the history of India under British rule reveal the exact opposite?

The actual rate of increase of population in India under British rule has been more markedly less than that of almost any European country, and is even near the bottom in the general scale of world increase. This applies equally to the period as a whole of British rule or to the last half-century.

For the period as a whole estimates only can be used, since the first census was not taken in India till 1872. The population of India at the end of the sixteenth century has been estimated by Moreland ("India at the Death of Akbar," p. 22) at 100 million. To-day the figure is 389 million. This makes an increase of nearly four times in over three centuries. The population of England and Wales in 1700, according to the first careful estimate (that of Finlaison, the Government Actuary in the Preface to the Census Returns of 1931) was 5.1 million. To-day the figure is 41.8 million. That makes an increase of eight times in a shorter period of two and one-third centuries. The increase in England has been at a rate considerably more than double that of India.[1]

[1]It is interesting to note that Professor Carr-Saunders in his recent standard work on World Population ("World Popula-

More important is the last half-century, after the special expansion in Europe associated with the industrial revolution had begun to slow down. We may take first the comparison of India and Europe before 1914, in order to keep out of account the complications following thereafter and the changes of territories in the European countries. Here are the figures for the rate of increase of population for India and the leading European countries between 1870 and 1910.

INCREASE OF POPULATION, 1870-1910

	Increase per cent
India	18.9
England and Wales	58.0
Germany	59.0
Belgium	47.8
Holland	62.0
Russia	73.9
Europe (average)	45.4

(B. Narain, "Population of India," 1925, p. 11)

With the exception of France, the rate of growth in India was less than that of any European country.

Coming to the period 1872-1931, we find the following comparison. During this period the increase in India was 30 per cent whereas in England and Wales an increase of 77 per cent took place. The rate of increase in England and Wales for the last sixty years has still been more than double that of India.[1]

Only in the period 1921-40 has the rate of increase in India (21 per cent, as against 24 per cent for the United States in the same period) been higher than that of England and the Western European countries. But the problem of poverty in India does not date from after 1921.[2]

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tion: Past Growth and Present Trends," by A. M. Carr-Saunders, 1936) calls attention to the fact that between 1650 and 1933 Europe's share in the total of world population has increased from 18.3 to 25.2 per cent, while Asia's share has fallen from 60.6 to 54.5 per cent. Contrary to the still widely prevalent mythologies, teeming Europe has been displacing the relatively declining populations of Asia during the bourgeois period of world history.

[1] Famine Inquiry Commission, Final Report, 1945, p. 75.

[2] The leading statistician, Dr. R. R. Kuczynski, throws some doubt on the significance and conclusions commonly drawn from the apparent sudden leap forward of population in India between 1921 and 1931, on the basis of which the prognostica-

The Central Banking Enquiry Committee, whose Report, issued in 1931, constitutes the most extensive and authoritative recent survey of economic conditions in India over a wide range, found itself compelled to expose the fallacy of the conventional explanation of Indian poverty through "over-population":

> "The produce from land per head of the population and per acre is low compared with that of many other countries....The average cultivator still continues to live on an insufficiency of food which reacts on his physical capacity for work and largely accounts for the high percentage of mortality in the country..... These conditions cannot be wholly ascribed to an undue increase in population and consequent pressure on land. Let us compare the growth of population in India with that in England. Taking the three decades for which census figures are available for both countries, we find that in England and Wales the increase of population between 1891 to 1901 was 12.17%, between 1901 to 1911, 10.91%, and between 1911 to 1921, 4.8%, while the increase of population in British India during the same decades was respectively 2.4%, 5.5%, and 1.3%."
>
> *(Report of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee, 1931, pp. 40-1.)*

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tions of future "over-population" have been usually built. He writes.

> "For many countries where censuses are taken, we may be able to tell approximately the present number of inhabitants, but, owing to the lack of adequate records of births and deaths, we know almost nothing about population trends. Thus it would appear from the census statistics of India that the population increased between 1921 and 1931 by 34 million or 10.6 per cent. But, according to the 1931 life tables, mortality appears to be excessive, while the 1931 investigation of the number of children per marriage and the large proportion of non-reproductive widows would indicate that fertility is rather low. It may well be, therefore, that the apparent increase in population in India between 1921 and 1931 was no genuine growth, but was due, for example, to the combined effects of more accurate enumeration in 1931 and a temporary age composition which tends to swell the number of births and to reduce the number of deaths."
>
> *(Dr. R. R. Kuczynski, "Population Trends in the World," in the "Statist", December 25, 1937.)*

It is worth noting that the birth rate in India is apparently declining; the recorded birth rate per thousand has fallen from 38 in the decade 1901-1910 to 34 in the decade 1931-40 and stood at 26 in 1943.

What of the density of population? The density of population for India as a whole in 1941 was 246 per square mile as against 703 for England and Wales, 702 for Belgium, 639 for Holland and 348 for Germany. These figures are of limited value in view of the unequal density of population in different districts. But even if we take the most thickly populated, Bengal, we find a figure of 779 per square mile, or a little more than the level of England or Wales or Belgium. It is true that in particular districts of Bengal a very high density exists, as in Dacca with 1,542 per square mile, in Tippera with 1,525 or Faridpur with 1,024. But on the special question of these overcrowded districts, and the issue whether the facts give any warranty for the assumption that the population has outstripped the means of subsistence even in thickly populated Bengal, without reference to the rest of India, reference may be made to the judgement of the 1931 "Bengal Census Report," quoted below *(see pages 56-7)*.

Has the growth of population outstripped the growth of the volume of food produced? Despite the culpable neglect of agricultural development, and the only partial use of the cultivable area, the available figures up to the present indicate the contrary. The absolute volume of food produced is far from adequate; and, even so, part of that is exported; but the reasons for this inadequacy lie in the low technique of production, the system of land ownership and the crippling burdens on agriculture, not in any growth of population outstripping the growth of food production. On the contrary, the rate of growth of food production has up to the present outstripped the rate of growth of population.

Between 1891 and 1921 the population increased by 9.3 per cent. In the same period the area under food grains increased by 19 per cent, or twice as fast as the growth of population.

For the period 1921-31 we have the figures of Professor P. J. Thomas in his "Population and Production," issued in 1935. Taking the average of the years 1920-21 and 1921-22 as 100, he estimated the index figures for the average of 1930-31 and 1931-32 as 110.4 for population, 116 for agricultural production and 151 for industrial production. In other words, during the decade of greatest recorded increase of population, while population increased by 10.4 per cent, agricultural production increased by 16 per cent and industrial production by 51 per cent.

Professor Radhakamal Mukerjee, a confirmed disciple of Malthus and prophet of woe in his recent "Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions" (1938), is nevertheless compelled to admit that "the increase of total agricultural production has outstripped population growth" (p. 18), and to produce figures which confirm this verdict.

MOVEMENT OF POPULATION AND PRODUCTION IN INDIA, 1910-1933

(Index Numbers on base of average of 1910-11 to 1914-15)

	Population	All Crops	Food Crops	Non-Food Crops	Industrial Production
Average of 1910-11 to 1914-15 ..	100	100	100	100	100
1932-33 ..	117	127	134	121	156

(R. Mukerjee, "Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions," 1938, pp. 17, 27.)

The volume of food crops produced has advanced twice as fast as population, and the volume of industrial production three times as fast.

Summing up for the whole three decades 1900-30, Professor Thomas writes:

> "Between 1900 and 1930 population in India increased by 19 per cent, but production of foodstuffs and raw materials increased by about 30 per cent, and industrial production by 189 per cent. During the decade 1921-30 population has indeed made a leap forward; but production has also kept pace....Such progress has been kept up subsequently, in spite of the trade depression; the index of industrial production (1928—100) stood at 144 in 1934-35, and may be higher in the current year.
>
> "All this indicates that population has not outstripped production....The alarm about population outstripping production is not supported by statistics. Those who are alarmed about the 'devastating torrent of babies' in India will do well to direct their attention to improvements in the distribution of national income, in quality of consumption, and in the geographical distribution of population, and to other allied matters."
>
> *(Professor P. J. Thomas, in "The Times," October 24, 1935.)*

The verdict of facts thus shows that the cause of poverty in India cannot be ascribed to the increase of population.

going forward more rapidly than the increase in the production of the means of subsistence, since the latter increased more rapidly. The cause of poverty must be sought elsewhere.[1]

That is not to say that the existing production of the means of subsistence, under the existing conditions of ownership, tenure, technique, parasitism and waste of the available labour forces of the population, is adequate for the needs of the population. On the contrary, it is grossly inadequate. The daily energy requirements of an adult of either sex, living an ordinary life without manual labour, has been estimated at 2,400 calories to be derived from the food that is assimilated. Those who do moderate work require 2,500 to 2,600 calories and those who are engaged in occupations involving heavy manual work require about 2,800 to 3,000. In the Health Bulletin No. 23, "The Nutritive Value of Indian Foods and the Planning of Satisfactory Diets" (1941), an insufficient and ill-balanced diet giving only 1,750 calories per day is described by Dr. Aykroyd, the Director of the Nutrition Research Laboratories, Coonoor, as "typical of diets consumed by millions in India."[2] (Report of Health Survey & Development Committee, Vol. I, pp. 69-70.) In addition, there is an especially serious

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[1] That it lies in the Indian socio-economic conditions, imposed by imperialism, leading to a growing impoverishment of the peasantry and a decline in the food production, is borne out even more sharply by the following figures for British India, given by W. Burns, a Government of India official:

	Area under major food grains (million acres)	Production of major food grains (million tons)	Population (million persons)
1921-2 ..	158.6	54.3	233.6
1931-2 ..	156.9	50.1	256.8
1941-2 ..	156.5	45.7	295.8

(W. Burns: "Technological Possibilities of Agricultural Development in India," 1944)

Whereas during the period 1921-2 to 1941-2 the population of British India has gone up by 62.2 millions the cultivated area under major food grains has actually declined by over 2 million acres. The decline in the production figures is even more alarming, production having gone down by 8.6 million tons.

This *absolute* decline in the area under cultivation and yield of food grains has set in, in the recent years, as a direct consequence of the disorganisation caused by the world war and the economic crisis of 1929.

It will be noted, however, that these estimates given by W. Burns, in contrast to those previously quoted, indicate the decline beginning already from 1921.

[2] At present, as a result of the tremendous cut in the rations, the average Indian consumption in terms of calories has been reduced to 960 as against 3,150 in U.S.A. and 3,000 in Britain.

shortage of fats, proteins and, generally, of protective foods. The total milk production, estimated at 113,000 million pounds weight, is less than half the minimum required for a balanced diet.

These facts are an indictment of the existing social and economic organisation, which fails to utilise and develop the abundant natural resources of India to supply the needs of the population. But they are not a proof of over-population. On the contrary, it is universally admitted by the experts that a correct utilisation of Indian resources could support on an abundant standard a considerably larger population than exists or is in prospect in any near future in India. More than one-third of the existing cultivable area in India has not yet been brought into cultivation; the existing cultivated area is cultivated under such restricted primitive conditions as to result in a yield per acre about one-third of that obtained for a similar crop (comparing wheat yields) with less man-power in the United Kingdom. The overcoming of the obstacles which stand in the way of such a full utilisation of Indian resources is the real heart of the problem for overcoming Indian poverty.

It is here that the most glaring example of begging the question is slipped in by the imperialist economists and apologists, who declare that "under present conditions"—i.e., assuming the existing imperialist and feudal burdens, money-lenders' exactions, thwarting of development and economic disorganisation as God-given natural necessities—the existing production is inadequate, and therefore India is "over-populated." Thus the same Dr. Anstey, whose impassioned outcry for an "Indian Malthus" to dam the "devastating torrent of Indian children" we have already quoted, calmly presents the argument in the following form:

> "It has been argued that India is not over-populated, but could advantageously support an even larger population if the best known means of production, distribution and consumption were adopted. *That an even larger population could be supported under such conditions is not denied,* but this does not affect the question of what would be the optimum population. *Under present conditions* it is practically certain that a smaller total could produce more per head."
>
> *(V. Anstey, "The Economic Development of India," 1936, p. 40—italics added.)*

The catch here lies in the use of the phrase "under present conditions," which appears like a practical, objective recognition of facts, but in reality assumes the necessity of the whole structure of imperialist and landlord exploitation and its consequences.

In the same way the pompous Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, with its bulky volumes of Report and Evidence, was forbidden to enquire into the basic questions of land ownership, tenure and revenue. Granted this little assumption, the problem is found to be insoluble, and India is declared to be "over-populated."

This is the typical Procrustes' bed of the modern flunkey economists. If the existing organisation of production under imperialism is found to be vicious and inefficient to meet the needs of the population and of its natural increase —which admittedly could be met by improved organisation —then the conclusion is drawn, not that the organisation should be improved, but that the population should be cut down. "Cut off his legs; this man is too long for this bed."

Dr. Kuczynski, "the most distinguished living authority on problems of population," in the words of the Conference Chairman, and the leader of modern statistical economists, mercilessly exposed this fallacy in relation to India at the Conference on "Birth Control in Asia" at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1933:

> "We must not look at these things from a static view-point. We are told that to-day there are 200 millions of acres under cultivation in India, and that in order to feed the population well we need 353 million acres. But why do we need as many, and under what conditions do we need them? We need them if we do not apply fertilisers, if we do not improve agriculture. No person who knows anything about modern agriculture can deny that we might have plenty of food for all the Indians on 200 million acres without even any education of the Indian farmers which would go beyond what they would easily learn in a year or two. Just as it is possible to do away with the high mortality in India by hygienic measures, so it is possible to do away with the lack of food by the improvement of agriculture."

Similarly we may recall the judgement of Sir George Watts, in the "Memorandum on the Resources of British India" in 1894 *(quoted on p. 25)*, that in respect of agriculture "the

productiveness of India might easily be increased by at least 50% and that "few countries in the world can be said to possess so brilliant an agricultural prospect, if judged of merely by intrinsic value and extent of undeveloped resources."

Even a very recent plan prepared by some pro-imperialist British experts blows up the entire Malthusian theory of population. As Professor A. V. Hill in his Foreword has said, the plan aims at "working out a possible machinery by which a few simple, practical measures, known from experience to be capable of giving substantial results, could be put into effect on such a scale as to increase the overall food production in India by between one-quarter and one-half in seven years." ("A Food Plan for India," 1945.)

In this connection interest attaches to the judgement of the Bengal Census Report for 1931, where the introductory note discusses the problem of food supply and population.

> "The prospect or even the possibility of so considerable an increase in a population already one of the densest in the world may lead to apprehension that the population of Bengal is rapidly approaching numbers which cannot be sustained at any reasonable standard of living upon the means of subsistence which Bengal can produce for long ...It cannot be denied that a very large part of the population of Bengal lives at a very low level of subsistence, and that any increase of population must lead to increased distress unless the potentialities of the province are developed. What is suggested here is that these potentialities are such that pessimism as to the future condition of its population if considerable increase takes place is not necessarily justified. Like the rest of India Bengal is notable for its undeveloped resources and the inefficiency with which such resources as it has are exploited. The soil is unlikely to deteriorate further, and the general opinion about areas such as Bengal, where scanty manuring necessitates small crops, is that a dead level of yield was reached long ago and is conditioned by the rate at which plant food constituents are made available by weathering. The cultivator in Bengal practically never enriches the soil with any manure, and the use of manure together with an improvement in the implements of agriculture which would then be rendered possible would probably increase enormously the output of the soil. It has

been estimated (G. Clark, Proceedings of the Seventeenth Indian Science Conference) that improved methods would result in a reasonable expectation of increased food output of thirty per cent throughout the whole of India. There is no doubt that any additional labour required under a more intensive form of cultivation could be easily obtained since the agriculturist in Bengal on the whole probably works less than agriculturists in almost any other part of the world. Subsidiary Table I also shows that of the total area cultivable only 67 per cent is now actually under cultivation. If the total cultivable area were brought under cultivation, and if improved methods of cultivation yielding an increase of 30 per cent over the present yield were adopted, it is clear from a simple rule of three calculation that Bengal could support at its present standard of living a population very nearly twice as large as that recorded in 1931."

(Bengal Census Report, 1931, Vol. I, p. 63.)

The decisive difference between India and the European countries is not in the rate of growth of population, which has been more rapid in the European countries. What makes the difference between the conditions of India and Europe is that the economic development and expansion of production which have taken place in the European countries, and have facilitated a more rapid growth of population, have not taken place in India, and have, as we shall see, been artificially arrested by the workings and requirements of British capitalism, driving an increasing proportion of the population into dependence on a primitive and overburdened agriculture. While the wealth of the country has been drained, while industrial and other outlets and development have been checked and thwarted, the agriculture which has been made the overburdened sole source of subsistence for the mass of the people has itself been placed under crippling conditions and condemned to neglect and deterioration.

Herein, and not in any natural causes outside human agency or control, nor in any mythical causes of a non-existent over-population, but in the social-economic conditions under imperialist rule, lies the secret of the extreme poverty of the Indian people. The evidence for this will be presented in the succeeding chapters. The political conclusion to which this evidence points, the social-political transformation which is now imperative in India in order to give the Indian people the means of subsistence, follows inevitably from this analysis.

Chapter III

A CONTRAST OF TWO WORLDS

"The chronic want of food and water, the lack of sanitation and medical help, the neglect of means of communication, the poverty of educational provision, the all-pervading spirit of depression that I have myself seen to prevail in our villages after over a hundred years of British rule make me despair of its beneficence. It is almost a crime to talk of Soviet Russia in this country, and yet I cannot but refer to the contrast it presents. I must confess to the envy with which my admiration was mixed to see the extraordinary enthusiasm and skill with which the measures for producing food, providing education and fighting against disease were being pushed forward in their territories. There is no separating line of mistrust or insulting distinctions between Soviet Europe and Soviet Asia. I am only comparing the state of things obtaining there and here as I have actually seen them. And I state my conclusion that what is responsible for our condition in the so-called British Empire is the yawning gulf between its dominant and subjugated sections."

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE IN 1936.

THIS INITIAL picture of "India As It Is and As It Might Be" may be usefully completed with a practical demonstration.

Before 1917 it was still possible to argue that any theoretical condemnation of imperialism for its failure to develop Indian resources or raise the standards of the people represented a criticism from a Utopian standpoint and failed to take into account the overwhelming obstacles in the conditions of an Asiatic country of extremely low technique with a vast, backward and mainly illiterate population. Abysmal as are

the existing conditions, and as they have to be freely admitted to be by apologists, nevertheless from such a situation, it is often pleaded in defence, no more could have been achieved or could be achieved under any regime.

Today such a plea can no longer even attempt to lay claim to validity. The experience of the modern period has enlarged the horizon of the possibilities of rapid transformation even under the most backward conditions. But especially the experience of the achievement of the socialist revolution in the Soviet Union since 1917, operating in a vast country of initially backward technique, extreme disorganisation and a largely illiterate population, and uniting European and Asiatic peoples, affords a practical demonstration of what can be done, which is opening the eyes of the peoples of all countries, and not least of the people of India. It will be useful to pursue this comparison with a certain degree of detail, both for the light it throws on the present stagnant position of India in contrast with an advancing community, and for the hopeful indication it holds out of what can be achieved, given the appropriate social and political conditions.

1. TWO DECADES OF SOCIALISM AND OF IMPERIALISM

It so happened that the completion of the twentieth year of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1937 fell in the same year which saw the completion of the one hundred and eightieth year of British rule in India, if this is dated from the conventional starting-point of the Battle of Plassey. Imperialism had thus had nine times as long in India to show what it can accomplish as socialism had had in Russia.

Vital as have been the differences in the precedent conditions of these two vast territories (especially the differences between an independent imperialist country and a colonial country), there are nevertheless certain features of analogy in the situation inherited on either side—the overwhelming illiterate and backward peasant majority of the population, the immensity of the territory inhabited by a series of races and nationalities at differing stages of civilisation, the rich natural resources relatively undeveloped, the traditions of despotic rule with no experience of democratic forms save for a decomposing village system—which make it tempting to

compare what imperialism has made of India in 180 years and what socialism has made of Russia in twenty years.

The conception of socialism, or the collective organisation of production for use, in place of the preceding systems of exploitation, is a modern conception sprung from modern conditions. It is less than a century since this conception passed from the realm of Utopia into that of a science; and it is only in our time that this science has been able to be completed by the experience of the practical realisation of the new social order. To-day socialism has been realised in practice. It is therefore possible to compare, not only in theory, but also in practice the achievement of imperialism and the achievement of socialism.

For the purpose of this comparison we may take Tsarist Russia, not in the condition of utter breakdown and disorganisation in 1917, as it had actually to be taken over by the socialist regime, but at its highest point of achievement in 1913-14, and compare what socialism had made of the country after twenty years of rule by 1937. We may then take India similarly on the eve of the war in 1914, and measure the achievement of imperialism in twenty years by 1934. Finally, an even more instructive comparison may be drawn with the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union, where all the special difficulties and problems of India were closely paralleled and the general stage of development of the people was at the outset far more backward.

Let us begin with the basic test of the development of the productive forces.

In the Soviet Union the index of industrial production (of large-scale industry) rose from 100 in 1913 to 816.4 in 1937—an eightfold increase. This increase—an advance without parallel in the economic history of any country—represented not only the decisive industrialisation of Russia, the establishment of heavy industry and machine production, independent of foreign capital, as well as light industry, but the transformation of Russia from a backward country, which had previously been a "peasant continent" with only partially developed industry under the domination of foreign capital, into the foremost industrial country of Europe and the second most powerful industrial country of the world. The proportion of the industrial output to the gross national output rose from 42 per cent in 1913 to 77 per cent in 1937—that is to say, Russia was transformed from a predominantly agricultural

country into a predominantly industrial country. The proportion of industrial workers to the total working population rose from 16 per cent to 31 per cent. The national income rose from 21 thousand million roubles (at 1926-27 prices) in 1913 to 96 thousand million in 1937, or a four and a half times increase.

For India it is significant at the outset that there is no attempt at any general statistics or index of industrial production, or of gross national output or income. An unofficial estimate for an index of industrial production in the main industries was attempted in D. B. Meek's paper on "Indian External Trade" read before the Indian section of the Royal Society of Arts in April 1936, and reached the result, on the basis of 100 for the average of the five years 1910-11 to 1914-15, of 156 for 1932-33—an increase of 56 per cent, or one-sixteenth the rate of the Soviet increase, from a much lower initial point. An Industrial Census was taken in 1911 and 1921, though not in 1931; this showed an advance in the number of workers in "organised industries" or establishments employing over 20 workers from 2.1 million in 1911 to 2.6 million in 1921, or a rate of increase of 2.4 per cent per year, equivalent to 48 per cent if it were maintained over twenty years (in fact, the rate of expansion in the war years and immediately after was not maintained in the later period), or one-nineteenth the rate of the Soviet increase. The number of workers returned as employed in industries in 1911 was 17.5 million, and in 1931, 15.3 million, or an absolute *decrease* of 12.6 per cent, despite the increase of the population. This was a reflection of the continuing destruction of petty hand industry without corresponding growth of modern industry. In consequence, while the proportion of the population dependent on agriculture increased from 72 per cent in 1911 to 73 per cent in 1921, and remained at the same level in 1931, the proportion of the industrial workers to the total working population *fell* from 11.7 per cent in 1911 to 10 per cent in 1931. Such was the "advance" achieved in twenty years by imperialism.

This general picture can be supplemented by a more exact comparison in respect of the most important material products. Coal output in India rose from 16.4 million tons in 1914 to 22 million in 1934, or an increase of 5½ million tons in twenty years, representing 34 per cent. Coal output in Russia rose from 29 million tons in 1913 to 128 million in 1937, or an increase of 99 million tons, representing 340 per cent, or exactly ten times as rapid a rate of increase on a larger initial

figure. Steel output, which had only just begun in India before the war had not yet reached 1 million tons by 1934-35 (834,000 tons); in the Soviet Union it had reached 17½ million tons by 1937, representing an increase of over 13 million tons on pre-war. Electric power output rose in the Soviet Union from 1,900 million kilowatt-hours in 1913 to 36,500 million in 1937, a more than eighteenfold increase; no electrical statistics are available for India, though in 1935 the output was estimated at 2,500 million kilowatt-hours, or less than one-fourteenth the Soviet level, and less than one-thirtieth the Soviet level per head.

In the sphere of agriculture the contrast is even more striking, because of the basic significance of the transformation for the overwhelming majority of the population. The poverty-stricken land-hungry peasantry of Tsarist Russia, at the mercy of the landlords, the money-lenders and the kulaks, have become the free and prosperous collective peasantry of today, cultivating their large-scale collective farms with the most advanced machinery and technique of any country in the world, and already trebling their money income in the first five years since the completion of collectivisation. While the crop area shows an increase of one-third on 1913, the grain harvest increased from 801 million centners in 1913 to 1,202 million in 1937, or an increase of one half; the output of raw cotton increased from 7.4 million centners in 1913 to 25.8 million in 1937, or an increase of three and a half times. In India the agrarian crisis, which will be examined in detail in later chapters, becomes every year more threatening; the combined pressure of the landlords, the money-lenders and the Government is pauperising the peasantry and expropriating growing numbers from the land; and while the increase of the sown area and of the volume of crops has only barely exceeded the growth of population, in the last few years there are ominous signs of an absolute recession.

If we turn from the basic measures of production and the development of resources to social measures of the State in promoting education, health and the well-being of the people, the contrast between imperialism and socialism is no less overwhelming.

In the field of education the illiteracy of the population which was deliberately maintained by Tsardom, and extended to 78 per cent of the population, has been reduced to 8 per cent in the Soviet Union; the decree of 1930 established

universal compulsory primary education, and the decree of 1934 carried this forward to the universal seven-year system of education, which is being extended, beginning from the big industrial centres, to the universal ten-year system.

In India illiteracy, which in 1911 extended to 94 per cent of the population, in 1931 still extended to 92 per cent. In twenty years imperialism had diminished illiteracy by one-fiftieth of the population.

The number of children receiving education in primary and secondary schools in the Soviet Union in 1937 was 29.4 million (against 7.8 million in Tsarist Russia) or 17.2 per cent of the population.

The number of children statistically recorded as receiving any sort of education in primary and secondary schools in British India in 1934-35 was 13.5 million, or 4.9 per cent of the total population. But of these an enquiry revealed that two-thirds of those supposed to be receiving primary education never passed beyond the first year, and not one-fifth reached the fourth year supposed to complete the primary education (see "Education in India, 1928-29," 1931, p. 28). Thus, the real figure of those receiving even the limited four-year primary education laid down is one-fifth of the official statistical figure of 11.1 million, or 2.2 million—that is, 0.8 per cent of the population.

The number of students in universities and higher educational institutions in the Soviet Union in 1937 was 551,000 (against 120,000 in Tsarist Russia), equivalent to 3.2 per thousand of the total population.

The number of students in universities and higher educational institutions in British India in 1934-35 was 109,800, equivalent to 0.4 per thousand of the total population, or exactly one-eighth of the Soviet proportion.

Most striking is the contrast in the sphere of technical training, the vital need for developing an undeveloped country. The vast network of technical secondary schools and factory schools in the Soviet Union is without any parallel in India. The number of technical specialists who graduated in the Soviet Union in the single year 1937 (industrial and building engineers, transport and communications engineers, engineers for mechanisation of agriculture and agronomists) was 45,900. In India the total number graduating in engineering, agriculture or commerce in 1934-35 was 960, or one forty-eighth of the Soviet total, and proportionately to population, one seventy-eighth of the Soviet total.

Taking another measure of cultural development, in respect of Press and publications, the number of daily newspapers in the Soviet Union rose from the 1913 figure of 859 to 8,521 in 1937, or a tenfold increase, and their daily circulation from 2.7 million to 36.2 million, or a fourteenfold increase. In India the number of newspapers rose from 827 in 1913-14 to 1,748 in 1933-34; the daily circulation is unrecorded, but would be very small. The number of copies of books published in the Soviet Union rose from 86.7 million in 1913 to 673 million in 1937, or a nearly eightfold increase. In India the number of books published (no circulation figures) rose from 12,189 in 1913-14 to 16,763 in 1933-34, or a minute increase of one-third in twenty years.

If we turn to the field of public health or social provision, the complete and systematic network of care and provision in the Soviet Union—without parallel in any country—for the health and well-being of every citizen from the cradle to the grave, including medical attention and material provision for all sickness and accidents, maternity and infant welfare, holidays with pay, workers' rest homes, and provision for old age, stands in staggering contrast with the ocean of neglect in India, where even the most limited system of social insurance, as established in normal capitalist countries, is unknown, where there is no Public Health Act, and provision for the most elementary needs of public hygiene, sanitation or health is so low, in respect of the working masses in the towns or in the villages, as to be practically non-existent.

Expenditure on public health in the Soviet Union (measured in comparable roubles) rose from 128 million roubles in 1913 to 699 million in 1928, 3,802 million in 1933 and 9,050 million in 1937, or a seventyfold increase. The 9,050 million roubles in 1937 were equivalent to 53 roubles per head. In India the administrative changes consequent on the reforms and transference of the main burden of public health expenditure to the Provinces prevent an effective comparison with 1913; but the combined Central and Provincial expenditure on public health rose from 47.3 million rupees in 1921-22 to 57.2 million in 1935-36, or from 2.1 per cent of the gross total Central and Provincial expenditure in 1921-22 to 2.6 per cent in 1935-36. The total of 57.2 million rupees in 1935-36 was equivalent to £4.3 million, or 2.75 *d.* per head.

If we take a material common measure of comparison—the number of hospital beds—we find that in the Soviet Union the number rose from 138,000 in 1913 to 543,000 in 1937, or 1 per 313 of the population. In British India the number (including all institutions, public and private, many of which would be for Europeans or the services) rose from 48,435 in 1914 to 72,271 in 1934, or 1 per 3,810 of the population—less than one-twelfth the provision in the Soviet Union.

The death rate in Tsarist Russia in 1913 was 28.3 per thousand, or closely similar to the rate in India in 1914 of 30 per thousand. By 1926 the rate in the Soviet Union had been brought down to 20.9, while that in India for the same year was still 26.7. In Moscow the death rate in 1913 was 23.1 per thousand and in 1926, 13.4. In Bombay the death rate in 1914 was 32.7 and in 1926, 27.6. Infantile mortality in Moscow, which in 1913 was 270 per thousand, had by 1928-29 been brought down to 120 per thousand. In the same year infantile mortality in Bombay was 255 per thousand.

Or take sanitation and its effect on contagious diseases. In the Soviet Union typhus had been reduced from 7.3 per ten thousand of the population in 1913 to 2.0 in 1929, a reduction of 72 per cent; diphtheria from 31.4 per ten thousand to 5.9, a reduction of 80 per cent; and small pox from 4.7 to 0.37, a reduction of 90 per cent (H. E. Sigerist, "Socialised Medicine in the Soviet Union," p. 357). For India there are no records for typhus and diphtheria; but the records of deaths from small pox afford an instructive comparison. In 1914 there were 76,590 deaths from small pox in India, or 3.2 per ten thousand of the population. In 1934 there were 83,925 deaths from small pox, or 3.0 per ten thousand of the population: 1935 showed a slight increase. The stationary situation of deaths from small pox in India after twenty years (3.2 and 3.0 per ten thousand) contrasts with the reduction of cases of small pox in the Soviet Union from 4.7 to 0.37.

The number of doctors in the Soviet Union rose from 19,800 in 1913 to 97,000 in 1937. In India in 1934-35 the total number of medical graduates who graduated from the universities was 630, to which should be added the tiny number returning from training in England.

If we turn, finally, to labour conditions in the narrower sense, and choose from this vast field of care and provision in the Soviet Union only the specimen comparable measure of hours, we find that the Soviet Union established the universal

eight-hour day in 1922, and in 1927 replaced this by the universal seven-hour day, with six hours for workers in dangerous trades, underground workers, brain-workers and minors between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years; children under fourteen are in no conditions allowed to enter into employment, those between fourteen and sixteen years only in exceptional circumstances, and for a maximum working time of four hours.

In India the Factories Act of 1922 established the eleven-hour day, and the Factories Act of 1934 replaced this by the ten-hour day, with prohibition of employment for children under twelve. But the number of inspectors is kept so low (thirty-nine for all India in 1929, according to the Whitley Commission Report) as to render impossible even an annual inspection of every factory, with obvious results of evasion, especially in respect of the employment of children. In addition, the Factories Act applies to only a small minority of the industrial workers (1.6 million in 1936, as against 17.7 million returned in the 1931 census as engaged in industry and transport). For the overwhelming majority of workers in India there are no limits of hours, no labour protection or limits of exploitation of the youngest children; and, as noted, the Whitley Report found children of five working twelve hours a day.

The contrast here set out is in every field a contrast of hard concrete facts. On the basis of these facts, irrespective of political viewpoint, the verdict must be given that the contrast between the Soviet Union and India is the contrast between civilisation and barbarism.

Yet twenty years ago there was no such yawning gulf between the conditions of the people in Tsarist Russia and British-ruled India. Twenty years of socialist rule have wrought this transformation. It is therefore evident that a corresponding transformation can be achieved in India, given the necessary political conditions and change in the relation of class forces.

2. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

This comparison is further confirmed by the testimony of the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union.

If we compare Tsarist Russia as a whole in 1913 with India to-day, then it is undoubtedly true, and requires to be

borne in mind, that the initial starting-point for a transformation in India is in general lower than was the stage of development of Tsarist Russia in 1913—although this does not affect the contrast in the subsequent rate of development (in fact, Tsarist Russia was retrogressing in the world scale of productive levels in the decade preceding 1913). But this qualification gives all the more importance to the example of the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union, which were twenty years ago far more backward than India to-day, and whose present high stage of progress achieved consequently affords a specially valuable demonstration for India.

If the general contrast between the Soviet Union and British-ruled India is striking, even more so is the contrast when we come to these Central Asian Soviet Republics. Here we are able to see the same process of development in relation to a much closer approximation to Indian conditions at the outset, and to all the special difficulties which confront us in the Indian situation. In these Republics the conditions of the population were far more backward, primitive, oppressed and poverty-stricken than in India; and all the special problems associated with the Asiatic economy and Asiatic social conditions, the position of women, religion, etc., were present in an extreme form. Here, therefore, we can see as nowhere else the contrast between imperialist colonial policy and the policy of socialism in relation to backward peoples.

The three Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics, which are united as equal self-governing republics in the 16 Soviet Socialist Republics composing the U.S.S.R., comprise Turkmenistan, with an area of 171,000 square miles and a population of 1.25 million; Uzbekistan, with an area of 66,000 square miles and a population of 5 million; and Tajikistan, with an area of 55,000 square miles and a population of 1½ million. Closely associated with these lie the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Republic and the Kirghiz Autonomous Republic. These five Republics lie south of Kazakhstan and close to the borders of India.

> "To the south of Kazakhstan lies Central Asia—five socialist republics, whose names speak of the nationalities which inhabit them: the Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, Kirghiz, and Kara-Kalpak Republics.
>
> "This is the extreme south of the U.S.S.R. Here the country borders on Persia, Afghanistan, and West China.

India begins 15 kilometres from the frontier of Central Asia.

"Before the Revolution Central Asia was a land of semi-slave and colonial labour. Now it has become a land of equal nationalities, socialist agriculture and newly created industry."

(Mikhailov, "Soviet Geography," 1937, pp. 6-7.)

Let us begin with an examination of Tajikistan, which lies within a few miles of India. In the past the life of the Tajik people was not a happy one. Up to the revolution they were under the yoke of Tsarist Russia and the feudal theocratic despotism of the Emir of Bokhara. The civil wars which followed the break-up of the Tsarist Empire were not finally ended till 1925; in 1925 Tajikistan became an autonomous Republic, and in 1929, it entered the U.S.S.R. as an independent federated Republic.

The extreme backwardness in which Tsarism had held the Tajik people can be seen from the fact that before the revolution only one half of 1 per cent of the population could read and write (as against 6 per cent literate in India in 1911). By 1933, 60 per cent were literate (as against 8 per cent in India in 1931). By 1936 the Republic had 3,000 schools (or 1 per 500 of the population), five higher educational institutions and over thirty technical schools. By 1939 there were 323,000 school pupils (as against 100 in 1914), with twenty-one higher educational institutions.

The total sown area in 1942 was 1,005,000 acres. By 1936 it was 1,626,000 acres, the main crop being cotton. The overwhelming majority of the peasant households have adopted the collective method of cultivation. The processes of cotton-growing have been largely mechanised. Ploughing, sowing, etc., are mostly done by tractors. Of especial interest is the development of irrigation:

"The growth of the cotton area here depended a great deal on irrigation. In 1929 Tajikistan spent 3 million roubles in round figures on irrigation; in 1930, 12 million roubles, and the budget for 1931 was 61 million, i.e., 50 per inhabitant. And most of the money was obtained, not from taxing the local population, but from sums granted by the Central Government of the Soviet Union."

(J. Kunitz, "Dawn Over Samarkhand", 1935, p. 235.)

The contrasts with the slow and stingy development of irrigation in India, and even neglect and allowing to fall into disrepair of previous irrigation work; while, where the extremely limited new irrigation work has been carried out (extension of the total irrigated area from 46.8 million acres in 1913-14 to 50.5 million in 1933-34), it has only been carried out on a basis of capital investment demanding a high rate of return, averaging over 7 per cent, thus imposing heavy additional burdens on the peasantry and placing the benefits beyond the reach of the poor peasants.

Even more significant is the rapid industrial development where previously industry was unknown. There is no question under socialism of the former colonial regions being held back as agrarian hinterlands, while modern industry is concentrated, as previously, in the privileged "metropolitan" areas. On the contrary, the most active steps are taken to promote and favour especially industrial development in the previously backward regions.

> "Up to the revolution Tajikistan possessed no industries whatever. To-day it has preserving factories and silk factories, all built within the last few years....The Varzobsk electric power station now being completed will supply power to the industrial enterprises of the town.... Clothing factories are working at full pressure in Stalinabad and a big silk combine in Leninabad. The building was commenced this year of a big textile combine, a meat combine, a brewery and a cement factory. Two brick factories are in operation and two oil factories, ten cotton-cleaning factories, ten printing works, etc."
>
> *(U.S.S.R. Trade Delegation in Britain, "Monthly Review," October 1936, p. 552.)*

Before the revolution Tajikistan was devoid of modern roads. During the first Five-Year Plan Tajikistan built 181 kilometres of railway and 12,000 kilometres of surfaced roads, 6,000 kilometres of which are excellent motor roads.

Or take public health. In 1914 there were thirteen doctors in Tajikistan; in 1939 there were 440. In 1914 there were 100 hospital beds for the whole population; in 1939 there were 3,675. In 1914 there were no maternity beds in maternity homes and hospitals; in 1937 there were 240. In 1914 there were no maternity and infant welfare centres; in 1937 there were thirty-six.

The sense of abounding new life of the Tajik people under

socialism is expressed in the following song of the Tajik collective farmer, quoted by Joshua Kunitz in his "Dawn Over Samarkhand":

"My breath is free and warm
when I see our dry plain being ploughed,
when I see a finished dam;
and when I see with me who strive for this new life,
I am pleased as a father is with his own son.
I cannot help but cry: 'Hail! all new men,'
when I see my son driving a machine along the field,
when I see a plough that's piercing root and soil,
I cannot help but cry: 'Glory to those who labour!'
When I am threatened 'The old world will return,'
I fall to the ground and freeze in fear.
Give me a gun, comrade; give me some bullets.
I'll go to battle; I shall defend my land, my Soviet land."

Let us turn to Uzbekistan, the largest of these Republics, with 5½ million population. Before the revolution only 3.5 per cent were literate. By 1932 there were 531,000 pupils in elementary schools and 130,000 in secondary schools, as well as 710,000 learning in institutions for the liquidation of illiteracy. In addition to the rapid development of collective agriculture, industry was carried forward from an output of 269 million roubles in 1913 to 1,175 million in 1936, and electrical output from 34 million units in 1928 to 230 million in 1936. Industry included fifty-one cotton-spinning factories, coal-mining, a large works for the manufacture of agricultural machinery (in Tashkent), a cement factory, a sulphur mine, an oxygen factory, a paper mill, a leather factory and clothing factories. Between 1914 and 1937 the number of doctors increased from 128 to 2,185. Before the revolution this country had not even an alphabet of its own. This difficulty was solved by the new Latinised alphabet. By 1935 there were 118 newspapers in the Republic, in five languages, with an annual circulation of over 100 million copies.

How is the financial cost of this gigantic transformation met? The answer to this question throws the most revealing light on the contrast between imperialist methods of colonial exploitation of backward peoples and the equal cooperative relations of nations under socialism. Under imperialism a vast annual tribute is drawn from the poverty-stricken backward peoples under colonial domination to the wealthy exploiting class of the possessing Powers. Under socialism

the extra cost involved in rapidly helping forward the backward peoples is met by allotting to them a disproportionate share of the total U.S.S.R. budget expenditure, so that in this transitional period they receive more than they give (and receive freely, without piling up any load of debt). The following table shows the budget expenditure per head for the various Soviet Republics in 1927-28:

SOVIET REPUBLICS' BUDGET EXPENDITURE PER HEAD IN 1927-28

(In roubles)

PURPOSE	R.S.-F.S.R.	Ukraine	White Russia	Trans-Caucasia	Uzbekistan	Turkmenistan	Average
Government	0.69	0.86	1.06	2.23	1.60	2.45	1.02
Economic administrative departments	1.08	0.88	1.57	1.13	1.04	1.46	1.06
Social-cultural needs	2.16	1.92	2.57	3.59	2.48	3.84	2.20
Financing national economy	1.65	1.62	2.37	4.95	3.39	8.90	1.91
Transferred to local budgets	5.87	5.56	5.57	6.70	5.77	5.58	5.83
Other expenditure	0.04	—	—	0.53	0.20	—	0.06
Total	11.76	10.84	13.14	19.13	14.48	22.23	12.08

It will be seen that in all fundamental items the most powerful Republics — the Russian and the Ukrainian — fall behind the other Republics. The Union assumes the care of quickening the cultural and economic progress of the backward national States.

The same picture is shown by the Soviet Union Budget for 1939. While the aggregate budget for the entire Union and Republics together showed an increase of 12.4 per cent over the previous year, the budget for Kazakhstan increased by 20.1 per cent and that for Turkmenistan by 22.4 per cent. Social and cultural expenditure during the decade from 1928-29 to 1939 increased twenty-five times for the Soviet

Union as a whole; for Turkmenistan it increased twenty-nine times, and for Kazakhstan thirty-one times. New industrial construction revealed the same special attention to the territories of the national minorities. Thus, while the total budget of Kazakhstan amounted to 1,513 million roubles, no less than 509 million roubles were allocated from Union funds for the construction of the giant Balkhash copper-smelting works in its territories; Karaganda represents now the third coal basin of the U.S.S.R.; and the lead works of Tchimkent and Riddersk supply three-quarters of the lead production of the U.S.S.R.

In this way is consciously carried out the new distribution of industry under socialism. Previously in the Tsarist Empire, as Mikhailov points out in his "Soviet Geography," industry was unevenly distributed over the vast territories of the Empire. Fully half of the output of Russian industry was concentrated in the area of the present Moscow, Leningrad, Ivanov region, etc. On the economic map this region appeared as an island. It was here that industrial capital originated and developed, radiating from here the tentacles of Tsarist conquest and holding the huge lands of agriculture and raw materials subject to the industrial centre. Manufacture was separated at great distances from raw materials. Social labour was thereby wasted, but the colonies bore the expense. "The Uzbek, producer of cotton, was not paid a fair price, and he also paid exorbitant sums for the finished fabric....The hands of the ruined handicraftsmen were cheaper than electricity."

Planned socialist production introduced the new principles of the distribution of industry along lines of cooperative development and equality of nations:

> "Planned socialist production and distribution excluded competition from the centre. In the place of the old prohibitory laws there grew up the policy of industrial and cultural development of the national outlying districts.
>
> "All the people inhabiting the U.S.S.R. have equal rights. Equality *de jure* of all the nationalities was established in the very first days of the Russian Revolution. But in order to destroy inequality *de facto* it is necessary to destroy the economic backwardness of the population of the former colonies of Russia."
>
> *(N. Mikhailov, "Soviet Geography," 1935, p. 51.)*

So the principle was proclaimed by Stalin at the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1923:

> "Apart from schools and language, the Russian proletariat must take every measure to establish centres of industry in the border regions, in the Republics which are culturally backward—backward not through any fault of their own, but because they were formerly looked upon as sources of raw materials."
>
> *(Stalin, "Report on the National Question to the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party," April, 1923.)*

We see here the contrast between imperialist colonial exploitation and the socialist realisation of the equality of nations, with the most backward rapidly helped forward to the level of the most advanced.

The picture of this equality and rapid advance of the Central Asian Soviet Republics cannot but give cause for furious thought to the Indian people. It is a picture which inevitably arouses bitter comparison with the stagnation and exploitation of India under imperialism. But it is a picture which also holds out glowing hope and confidence for the future advance which can be equally achieved in India, when the imperialist yoke has been thrown off and the Indian working people have become masters of their own country.

Part II

BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

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Chapter IV

THE SECRET OF INDIAN POVERTY

"There yet remains a class, the general one,
Which has no merit, and pretends to none;
Good easy folk who know that eels are eels,
But never pause to think how skinning feels,
Content to know that eels are made to flay,
And Indians formed by destiny to pay...
And hence when they become the great and high,
There is no word they hate so much as—Why?"

"INDIA" A POEM IN THREE CANTOS. BY A YOUNG CIVILIAN OF BENGAL LONDON, 1834.

IN ORDER to understand the role of imperialism in India it is necessary to cover certain historical ground.

During recent years the real history of British rule in India is beginning to be disinterred from the official wrappings. But it still remains true, as Sir William Hunter, the Editor of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India,* declared in 1897 :

> "A true history of the Indian people under British rule has still to be pieced together from the archives of a hundred distant record rooms, with a labour almost beyond the powers of any single man, and at an expense almost beyond the reach of any ordinary private fortune."

What Lord Rosebery said of the Irish question, that "it has never passed into history, for it has never passed out of politics," applies no less to India. Only when the Indians have won their independence is the serious study of Indian history likely to be undertaken from a standpoint other than that of the conquerors.

In a famous passage the leader of nineteenth-century English conservatism wrote of English history:

> "If the history of England be ever written by one who has the knowledge and the courage, and both qualities are equally necessary for the undertaking, the world would be more astonished than when reading the annals of Niebuhr. Generally speaking, all the great events have been distorted, most of the important causes concealed, some of the principal characters never appear and all who figure are so misunderstood and misrepresented that the result is a complete mystification."
>
> *(Disraeli, "Sybil," ch. iii.)*

This "mystification" of English history since the capitalist era, and especially since the "Glorious Revolution," is only the reflection of the fact that the reality of the rule of a narrow financial oligarchy has had to be concealed behind mythological forms.

But if this is true of English history, how much more is it true of that history which deals with the deepest basis of power of the English ruling class, its inexhaustible reservoir of strength against every rival, and its decisive field of activity governing all its policies for three centuries—the history of the British Empire, which means, above all, the history of British dominion in India?

Here we come close to the mainsprings of English policy, to an essential part of the secret of the sudden primacy of capitalism in England in the second half of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, and to the underlying factors of its strategy up to the present day.

In this sphere the tendency to official mythology and apologetics is especially marked. The most elementary facts of a record which lays bare the true character of bourgeois civilisation in all its nakedness are elaborately veiled and suppressed from the general consciousness of the English people, and only remain treasured in the burning memories of an Irishman or an Indian. Serious historical analysis is commonly replaced in the Press or on the platform by a schoolboy-Kiplingesque romance. Even the acquisition of the Empire, which was a grimly tenacious a process of accumulation as the lifework of a Rockefeller, is presented in conventional history as an "accident" acquired in "a fit of absence of mind." Rhetoric about "the brightest jewel in Britain's Imperial Crown" replaces any serious attempt to consider the terrible and

shameful conditions of the Indian masses, which are an indictment of any Government responsible for their care.

Nowhere is this mythology more conspicuous than in the record of the relations of England and India.

It is further notable that this tendency to mythology has increased in the modern period. Where a Wellington, a Burke, a Clive, a Hastings or an Adam Smith spoke frankly and brutally of the facts of tribute, plunder and spoliation, where even a Salisbury still spoke of "bleeding" India, to-day when the basis of power is no longer secure, modern official utterance breathes a sickly-sweet philanthropy, behind which is nonetheless concealed the real basis of exploitation and a very elaborate machine of repression.

The most recent historians of India in an interesting Bibliographical Note have remarked on this transformation from "frankness" to what they term a "silent censorship" in the past half century.

> "Of general histories of British India, those written a century or more ago are, with hardly an exception, franker, fuller and more interesting than those of the last fifty years. In days when no one dreamed that anyone would be seditious enough to ask really fundamental questions (such as 'What right have you to be in India at all?') and when no one ever thought of any public but a British one, criticism was lively and well informed, and judgment was passed without regard to political exigencies. Of late years, increasingly and no doubt naturally, all Indian questions have tended to be approached from the standpoint of administration: 'Will this make for easier and quieter government?' The writer of to-day inevitably has a world outside his own people, listening intently and as touchy as his own people, as swift to take offence. 'He that is not for us is against us.' This knowledge of an overhearing, even eavesdropping public, of being *in partibus infidelum*, exercises a constant silent censorship, which has made British-Indian history the worst patch in current scholarship."
>
> *(E. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, "Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India," 1934, p. 665.)*

For our present purposes we are not concerned to follow in any detail the chronicle of British rule in India, which would require a separate volume for any useful treatment,

and the conventional facts of which can be studied in any of the current standard works. We are only concerned to bring out some of the decisive forces of development which underlie the present situation and its problems.

The past is past. The record of British rule in India, when truthfully told, is not an edifying record. It is important that Englishmen should be acquainted with some of the facts of that record (which are normally suppressed from the school books) in order to free themselves from imperialist prejudice; and it is important that Indians should be acquainted with them in order to equip themselves as uncompromising fighters for Indian freedom. But nothing is to be gained by dwelling on the past or centring national propaganda on the recital of past injustices or grievances. Oppressors and oppressed of the past are alike long dead; and if the bones of the Indian weavers, in the famous words of a Governor-General, were bleaching the plains of India in 1834, to-day the bones of the Governor-General are in no better case in the family mausoleum. The burning question to-day is the present oppression and the path of liberation. We are only concerned with the past in order to bring to light the dynamic forces which still live in the present.

The first to bring this dynamic approach to Indian history, to turn the floodlight of scientific method on to the social driving forces of Indian development both before and after British rule, and to lay bare alike the destructive role of British rule in India and its regenerative revolutionising significance for the future, was the founder of modern socialism, Karl Marx. He accomplished this work—among his most important work for the future of humanity—in the middle of the nineteenth century. For over half a century it lay buried and almost unknown, even when the main fields of his work had become known throughout the world. Only in the past quarter of a century is their content beginning to become more widely familiar among students and increasingly to influence current thought on Indian questions. To-day modern historical research is increasingly confirming the main outlines of their approach.

1. MARX ON INDIA

Thirteen years ago a leading English socialist writer could still put out the view that "the effort to read the problem of

India in the set terms of Marxism is rather an exercise in ingenuity than a serious intellectual contribution to socialist advance" (H. Laski, "Communism," 1927, p. 194).

This unawareness that Marx had continuously devoted some of his leading thought and work to India was typical of the limitations of Western European socialist thought. In fact, the well-known articles of Marx on India, written as a series in 1853, are among the most fertile of his writings, and the starting-point of modern thought on the questions covered A fuller study of Marx's writings would show how continuously he had in the forefront of attention the distinctive problems of Asiatic economy, especially in India and China, the effects of the impact of European capitalism upon it, and the conclusions to be drawn for the future of world development as well as for the emancipation of the Indian and Chinese peoples. This close attention is instanced by some fifty references to India in "Capital," and the considerably larger number of references in the Marx-Engels correspondence.

Immediately after the "Communist Manifesto" (in which Marx and Engels had called attention to the importance of the opening of the Indian and Chinese markets for the development of capitalist production), and the collapse of the 1848 revolutionary wave, Marx concentrated his attention on the reasons underlying that collapse, and found them above all in the new expansion of capitalism outside Europe, into Asia, Australia and California. This line of thought, which was already touched on in a letter of Engels in 1852 (letter of Engels to Marx, August 21, 1852), received further sharp expression in a letter in 1858:

> "We cannot deny that bourgeois society has been for a second time living through its sixteenth century, a sixteenth century which I hope will sound its death-knell as surely as the first brought it into life. The special task of bourgeois society is the establishment of the world market, at any rate in its main outlines, and of a production upon this basis. Since the world is round, this process appears to have reached its completion with the colonisation of California and Australia and the opening up of China and Japan. The weighty question for us now is this: On the Continent the revolution is imminent, and will from the first take on a socialist character. But will it not inevitably be crushed in this small corner, since

the movement of bourgeois society is still ascendant on a far wider area?"

(Marx, letter to Engels, October 8, 1858.)

Here, in this understanding of the significance of the extra-European expansion of capitalism for the perspective of the development of capitalism and the socialist revolution in Europe, lay the key thought which Marx had grasped in the eighteen-fifties, but which the main body of European socialists has only slowly begun to realise in the recent period.

In 1853, when the renewal of the East India Company's charter came for the last time before Parliament, Marx wrote a series of eight articles on India for the *New York Daily Tribune*. These, taken in conjunction with "Capital" and the references in the Correspondence give the kernel of Marx's thought on India.

2. THE SHATTERING OF THE INDIAN VILLAGE ECONOMY

Marx's analysis starts from the characteristics of "Asiatic economy," which the impact of capitalism for the first time overthrew. "The key to the whole East," wrote Engels in June, 1853, "is the absence of private property in land" But this absence of private property in land is not originally different from the primitive starting-point of European economy; the difference lies in the subsequent development.

> "A ridiculous presumption has gained currency of late to the effect that common property in its primitive form is specifically a Slavonian or even exclusively Russian form. It is the primitive form which we can prove to have existed among Romans, Teutons and Celts; and of which numerous examples are still to be found in India, though in a partly ruined state. A closer study of the Asiatic, especially of Indian forms of communal ownership, would show how from the different forms of primitive communism different forms of its dissolution have developed. Thus, for example, the various original types of Roman and Teutonic private property can be traced back to various forms of Indian communism."
>
> *(Marx, "Critique of the Political Economy," ch. I.)*

Why, then, did primitive communism in the East not develop to landed property and feudalism, as in the West? Engels

suggests that the answer is to be found in climatic and geographical conditions:

> "How comes it that the Orientals did not reach to landed property or feudalism? I think the reason lies principally in the climate, combined with the conditions of the soil, especially the great desert stretches which reach from the Sahara right through Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary to the highest Asiatic uplands. Artificial irrigation is here the first condition of cultivation, and this is the concern either of the communes, the Provinces or the Central Government."
>
> *(Engels, letter to Marx, June 6, 1853.)*

The conditions of cultivation were not compatible with private property in land, and so arose the typical "Asiatic economy" of the remains of primitive communism in the village system below, and the despotic Central Government above, in charge of irrigation and public works, alongside war and plunder.

The understanding of the village system is thus the key to the understanding of India. The classic description of the village system is contained in "Capital":

> "Those small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme ready cut and dried. Occupying areas of from 100 up to several thousand acres, each forms a compact whole producing all that it requires. The chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities. It is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity, and a portion of even that, not until it has reached the hands of the State, into whose hands from time immemorial a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind.
>
> "The constitution of these ancient communities varies in different parts of India. In those of the simplest form, the land is tilled in common, and the produce

divided among the members. At the same time, spinning and weaving are carried on in each family as subsidiary industries. Side by side with the masses thus occupied with one and the same work, we find the 'chief inhabitant,' who is judge, police and tax-gatherer in one; the book-keeper who keeps the accounts of the tillage and registers everything relating thereto; another official, who prosecutes criminals, protects strangers travelling through, and escorts them to the next village; the boundary man, who guards the boundaries against neighbouring communities; the water-overseer, who distributes the water from the common tanks for irrigation; the Brahmin, who conducts the religious services; the schoolmaster, who on the sand teaches the children reading and writing; the calender-Brahmin, or astrologer, who makes known the lucky or unlucky days for seed-time and harvest, and for every other kind of agricultural work; a smith and a carpenter, who make and repair all the agricultural implements; the potter, who makes all the pottery of the village; the barber, the washerman, who washes clothes, the silversmith, here and there the poet, who in some communities replaces the silversmith, in others the schoolmaster. This dozen of individuals is maintained at the expense of the whole community. If the population increases, a new community is founded, on the pattern of the old one, on unoccupied land....

"The simplicity of the organisation for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and when accidentally destroyed, spring up again on the spot and with the same name—this simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economical elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky."

(Marx, "Capital," Vol. I, ch. xiv, section 4.)

This is the traditional Indian economy which was shattered in its foundations by the onset of foreign capitalism, represented by British rule. Herein the British conquest differed from every previous conquest, in that, while the previous foreign conquerors left untouched the economic basis

and eventually grew into its structure, the British conquest shattered that basis and remained a foreign force, acting from outside and withdrawing its tribute outside. Herein also the victory of foreign capitalism in India differed from the victory of capitalism in Europe, in that the destructive process was not accompanied by any corresponding growth of new forces. From this arises the "particular melancholy" attaching to the misery of the Indian under British rule, who finds himself faced with "the loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one."

> "There cannot remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindostan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindostan had to suffer before. I do not allude to European despotism, planted upon Asiatic despotism, by the British East India Company, forming a more monstrous combination than any of the divine monsters startling us in the Temple of Salsette....
>
> "All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex rapid and destructive as their successive action in Hindostan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface. England has broken down the whole framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstruction yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindoo, and separates Hindostan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions and from the whole of its past history."
>
> *(Marx, "The British Rule in India," New York Daily Tribune, June 25, 1853.)*

3. THE DESTRUCTIVE ROLE OF BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

How this destructive role was accomplished, Marx traced with careful attention, distinguishing between the earlier period of the monopoly of the East India Company up to 1813, and the later period, after 1813, when the monopoly was broken and the invasion of industrial capitalist manufactures overran India and completed the work.

In the earlier period the initial steps of destruction were accomplished, first, by the Company's colossal direct plunder

("during the whole course of the eighteenth century, the treasures transported from India to England were gained much less by the comparatively insignificant commerce, than by the direct exploitation of that country and by the colossal fortunes extorted and transmitted to England"); second, by the neglect of irrigation and public works, which had been maintained under previous governments and were now allowed to fall into neglect, third, by the introduction of the English landed system, private property in land, with sale and alienation, and the whole English criminal code; and fourth, by the direct prohibition or heavy duties on the import of Indian manufactures, first into England, and later also to Europe.

All this, however, did not yet give "the final blow." That came with the era of nineteenth-century capitalism.

The monopoly of the East India Company had been closely associated with the financial oligarchy which finally established its power with the Whig Revolution:

> "The true commencement of the East India Company cannot be dated from a more remote epoch than the year 1702, when the different societies, claiming the monopoly of the East India trade, united together in one single company. Till then, the very existence of the original East India Company was repeatedly endangered, once suspended for years under the protectorate of Cromwell, and once threatened with utter dissolution by Parliamentary interference under the reign of William III.
>
> "It was under the ascendancy of that Dutch Prince, when the Whigs became the farmers of the revenues of the British Empire, when the Bank of England sprang into life, when the protective system was formally established in England, and the Balance of Power in Europe was definitely settled, that the existence of an East India Company was recognised by Parliament. That era of apparent liberty was in reality the era of monopolies, not created by Royal Grants, as in the times of Elizabeth and Charles I, but authorised and nationalised by the sanction of Parliament."
>
> *(Marx, "The East India Company, Its History and Outcome," New York Daily Tribune, July 11, 1853.)*

Against this monopoly the English manufacturing interests, who demanded and secured the exclusion of Indian manufactures, and the other English trading interests, who found themselves excluded from the lucrative Indian trade, carried

on ceaseless agitation. This struggle underlay the fall of Fox's Government in 1783 over the India Bill, which sought to abolish the Courts of Directors and Proprietors of the Company, and the subsequent long-drawn battle of the impeachment of Hastings from 1786 to 1795. But it was not until the completion of the Industrial Revolution had brought English manufacturing capitalism to the forefront that the monopoly was overthrown in 1813 and its final abolition completed in 1833.

It was only after 1813, with the invasion of English industrial manufactures, that the decisive wrecking of the Indian economic structure took place. The effects of this wrecking during the first half of the nineteenth century Marx traced with formidable facts. Between 1780 and 1850 the total British exports to India rose from £ 386,152 to £ 8,024,000, or from one thirty-second part to one-eighth of British exports; while the cotton manufacture in 1850, for which the Indian market provided one-fourth of the foreign markets, employed one-eighth of the population of Britain and contributed one-twelfth of the whole national revenue.

> "From 1818 to 1836 the export of twist from Great Britain to India rose in the proportion of 1 to 5,200. In 1824 the export of British muslins to India hardly amounted to 6,000,000 yards, while in 1837 it surpassed 64,000,000 yards. But at the same time population of Dacca decreased from 150,000 inhabitants to 20,000. This decline of Indian towns celebrated for their fabrics was by no means the worst consequence. British steam and science uprooted, over the whole surface of Hindostan, the union between agricultural and manufacturing industry."
>
> *(Marx, "The British Rule in India," New York Daily Tribune, June 10, 1853.)*
>
> "The English cotton machinery produced an acute effect in India. The Governor-General reported in 1834-35: 'The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India'."
>
> *(Marx, "Capital," Vol. I, ch. xv, section 5.)*

The village system had been built on "the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits." "The handloom and the spinning-wheel were the pivots of the structure of the old Indian society." But "it was the British intruder who broke up the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning-wheel." Thereby Britain produced "the greatest, and

to speak the truth, the only *social* revolution ever heard of in Asia." This revolution not only destroyed the old manufacturing towns, driving their population to crowd the villages, but destroyed the balance of economic life in the villages. From this arose the desperate over-pressure on agriculture, which has continued on a cumulative scale right up to the present day. At the same time the merciless extraction of the maximum revenue from the cultivators, without giving any return for necessary expansion and works (out of £19,300,000 revenue in 1850-1, only £166,390 or 0.8 per cent was returned as spent on Public Works of any kind), prevented agricultural development.

> "This rent may assume dimensions which seriously threaten the reproduction of the conditions of labour, of the means of production. It may render an expansion of production more or less impossible, and grind the direct producers down to the physical minimum of means of subsistence. This is particularly the case, when this form is met and exploited by a conquering industrial nation, as India is by the English."
>
> *(Marx, "Capital," Vol. III, ch. xlvii, section 3.)*

The "tribute" exacted by Britain from India is estimated by Marx in the following terms:

> "India alone has to pay £5 million in tribute for 'good government,' interest and dividends of British capital, etc., not counting the sums sent home annually by officials as savings of their salaries, or by English merchants as a part of their profit in order to be invested in England."
>
> *(Marx, "Capital," Vol. III, ch. xxxv, section 4.)*

Does Marx shed tears over the fall of the village system and the destruction of the old basis of Indian society? Marx saw the infinite suffering caused by the bourgeois social revolution, as in every country, and all the greater in India on account of its being carried through under such conditions. But he saw also the deeply reactionary character of that village system, and the indispensable necessity of its destruction if mankind is to advance. In burning words he describes the degradation of humanity involved in those "idyllic village communities," and his words lose none of their force to-day for those who, in India as in Europe, seek to look backwards instead of forwards, and in India seek to fight British rule by

appealing for the revival of the vanished pre-British India of the spinning-wheel and the hand-loom.

"Sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious, patriarchal and inoffensive social organisations disorganised and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilisation and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies.

"We must not forget the barbarian egoism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all.

"We must not forget that this stagnatory, undignified and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other hand, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan.

"We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never-changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalising worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow."

(Marx, "The British Rule in India.")

Therefore, although Marx describes British economy in India as "swinish" (in a letter to Engels on June 14, 1853), he sees at the same time in the British conquest "the unconscious tool of history":

"England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is: can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution." *(Ibid.)*

4. THE "REGENERATING" ROLE OF BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

England, in Marx's view, had "a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of the old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia." So far, the destructive side had been mainly visible; nevertheless, the work of regeneration had begun.

"The British were the first conquerors superior, and therefore inaccessible, to Hindoo civilisation. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins. Nevertheless it has begun."

(Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India," New York Daily Tribune, August 8, 1853.)

Wherein did Marx see the beginnings of such "regeneration"? He enumerates a series of indications:

(1) "political unity....more consolidated and extending further than ever it did under the Great Moguls," and destined to be "strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph";

(2) the "native army" (this was before its disbandment after the Revolt of 1857, and the consequent deliberate strengthening of British forces to one-third of the whole, and the strengthening of British military control);

(3) "the free press, introduced for the first time into Asiatic society" (this was following the proclamation of the freedom of the press in India in 1835, and before the

series of Press Acts, begun in 1873, and steadily strengthened in the modern period of declining imperialist rule);

(4) the establishment of "private property in land—the great desideratum of Asiatic society";

(5) the building up, however reluctantly and sparingly, of an educated Indian class "endowed with the requirements for government and imbued with European science";

(6) "regular and rapid communication with Europe" through steam transport.

More important than all these was the inevitable consequence of industrial capitalist exploitation of India. In order to develop the Indian market, it was essential to secure the "transformation of India into a reproductive country"—that is, into a source of raw materials to export in exchange for the imported manufactured goods. This made necessary the development of railways, roads and irrigation. This new phase was only beginning at the time when Marx wrote. From the consequences of this new development Marx made the prophecy which is the most famous of his declarations on India.

> "I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other raw materials for their manufactures. But when you have once introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country, which possesses iron and coals, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication. You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing all those industrial processes necessary to meet the immediate and current wants of railway locomotion, and out of which there must grow the application of machinery to those branches of industry not immediately connected with the railways. The railway system will therefore become in India truly the forerunner of modern industry...Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power."
>
> *(Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India.")*

Does this mean that Marx saw imperialism in India as a progressive force capable of emancipating the Indian people

and carrying them forward along the path of social progress? On the contrary. When Marx spoke of the "regenerating" role of British capitalist rule in India, he made clear that he was referring only to its role in laying down the material conditions for new advance. But that new advance could only be realised by the Indian people themselves on condition that they won liberation from imperialist rule, either by their own successful revolt, or by the victory of the industrial working class in Britain, carrying with it the liberation of the Indian people. Until then, all the material achievements of imperialism in India could bring no benefit or improvement of conditions to the Indian people.

> "All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive power, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both. Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?
>
> "The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether." *(Ibid.)*

With this may be compared Engels' statement on the prospect of the Indian Revolution and the necessity of the liberation of the subject colonial peoples in 1882:

> "India will perhaps, indeed very probably, produce a revolution, and as the proletariat emancipating itself cannot conduct any colonial wars, this would have to be given full scope; it would not pass off without all sorts of destruction, of course, but that sort of thing is inseparable from all revolutions. The same thing might also take place elsewhere, e.g., in Algiers and Egypt, and would certainly be the best thing *for us.*"
>
> *(Engels, letter to Kautsky, September 12, 1882.)*

It will be seen that Marx's analysis of the Indian situation up to the middle of the nineteenth century turns on three

main factors: first, the destructive role of British rule in India, uprooting the old society; second, the regenerative role of British rule in India in the period of free-trade capitalism, laying down the material premises for the future new society; third, the consequent practical conclusion of the necessity of a political transformation whereby the Indian people should free themselves from imperialist rule in order to build the new society.

To-day imperialist rule in India, like capitalism all over the world, has long outlived its objectively progressive or regenerating role, corresponding to the period of free-trade capitalism, and has become the most powerful reactionary force in India, buttressing all the other forms of Indian reaction. The stage has thus been reached when the task of the political transformation indicated by Marx is directly the order of the day.

Chapter V

BRITISH RULE IN INDIA – THE OLD BASIS

> "There is no end to the violence and plunder which is called British rule in India"
> —LENIN "INFLAMMABLE MATERIAL IN WORLD POLITICS," 1908.

MORE THAN ninety years have passed since Marx wrote on India. Far-reaching changes have taken place. The main outlines of Marx's historical analysis still stand, and his vision into the future of India (to which no parallel can be found in any nineteenth-century writer on India) has not only been confirmed by experience in all the development that has taken place since then, but is at the present day visibly in process of being confirmed also in the political conclusion which he drew.

But to-day we can carry forward this analysis for a whole further epoch of development, both of British imperialism in India and of the forces of the Indian people.

Three main periods stand out in this history of imperialist rule in India. The first is the period of Merchant Capital, represented by the East India Company, and extending in the general character of its system to the end of the eighteenth century. The second is the period of Industrial Capital which established a new basis of exploitation of India in the nineteenth century. The third is the modern period of Finance-Capital, developing its distinctive system of the exploitation of India on the remains of the old, and growing up from its first beginnings in the closing years of the nineteenth century to its fuller development in the most recent phase.

Marx dealt with the two first periods, of Merchant Capital and of Industrial Capital, in relation to India. We have now to carry forward this analysis to the modern period of Finance-Capital and its policy in India.

We may therefore cover in summary fashion the two first stages, which are of primary importance as laying the basis for the present system, and for understanding the line of development to the present situation, in order then to concentrate mainly on the modern development.[1]

1. THE PLUNDER OF INDIA

The era of the East India Company is conventionally measured from its first Charter in 1600 to its final merging in the Crown in 1858. In fact its main period of domination of India was the second half of the eighteenth century.

Although the early trading depots were established in the seventeenth century (Surat in 1612; Fort St. George, Madras, in 1639; Bombay leased to the Company from 1669; and Fort William, Calcutta, in 1696), the new East India Company which subsequently conquered India only received its first Charter in 1698, and did not reach its final consolidated form till 1708. The East India Company which conquered India was thus a typical monopolist creation of the oligarchy which fixed its grip on England with the Whig Revolution.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the Company began to build up its territorial power in India. The internal wars which racked India in the eighteenth century after the decline of the Moghul Empire represented a period of inner confusion (comparable in some respects to the Wars of the Roses in England or the Thirty Years War in Germany) necessary for the break-up of the old order and preparing the way, in the normal course of evolution, for the rise of bourgeois power on the basis of the advancing merchant, shipping and manufacturing interests in Indian society. The invasion, however, during this critical period of the representatives of the more highly developed European bourgeoisie, with their superior technical and military equipment and social-political cohesion, thwarted this normal course of evolution, and led to the outcome that the bourgeois rule which supervened in India on the break-up of the old order was not Indian bourgeois rule, growing up within the shell of the old order, but

[1]For much of the material in this chapter special indebtedness should be expressed to R. C. Dutt's "Economic History of India under Early British Rule" (1901) and "Economic History of India in the Victorian Age" (1903), which remain the most authoritative studies on the development up to the end of the 19th century.

foreign bourgeois rule, forcibly superimposing itself on the old society and smashing the germs of the rising Indian bourgeois class. Herein lay the tragedy of Indian development, which thereafter became a thwarted or distorted social development for the benefit of a foreign bourgeoisie.

It was this critical period of confusion and transition characterising eighteenth-century India which gave the foreign invaders the opportunity to fight and intrigue for areas of domination. In this war of all against all, the British bourgeoisie, representing the most advanced bourgeois Power, was successful. Territorial power in India, at first nominally within the old forms, was established with the conquest of Bengal in the beginning of the second half of the eighteenth century, and was steadily extended to supreme power in India by the opening of the nineteenth century.

The company continued formally in charge till 1858. In reality, however, the sovereignty of the British State as the ruler of the new conquered territories had already been established since Lord North's Regulating Act of 1773, which set up the Governor-General, his Council and a Supreme Court, and with Pitt's Act of 1784, which set up the Indian Secretary of State and Board of Control in London. The distinctive economic role of the Company was brought to an end with the ending of its monopoly in 1813 (except for its monopoly of the China trade, which was ended in 1833). The shell of the dual system, continued during the first half of the nineteenth century until the Revolt of 1857, exposed its bankrupt and obsolete character, and led to the final liquidation of the Company in the following year.

It will thus be seen that the decisive period of the East India Company's domination and special exploitation of India was the second half of the eighteenth century, the great germinal period of modern capitalism. The character of that exploitation differs from the subsequent nineteenth-century exploitation by industrial capital, and requires its separate analysis.

The original aim of the East India Company in its trade with India was the typical aim of the monopolist companies of Merchant Capital, to make a profit by securing a monopoly trade in the goods and products of an overseas country. The governing objective was, not the hunt for a market for British manufactures, but the endeavour to secure a supply of the

products of India and the East Indies (especially spices, cotton goods and silk goods), which found a ready market in England and Europe, and could thus yield a rich profit on every successful expedition that could return with a supply.

The problem, however, which faced the Company from the outset was that, in order to secure these goods from India by way of trade, it was necessary to offer India something in exchange. England, at the stage of development reached in the early seventeenth century, had nothing of value to offer India in the way of products comparable in quality or technical standard with Indian products, the only important industry then developed being the manufacture of woollen goods, which were of no use for India. Therefore precious metals had to be taken out to buy the goods in India.

> "The whole difficulty of trading with the East lay in the fact that Europe had so little to send out that the East wanted—a few luxury articles for the Courts, lead, copper, quicksilver and tin, coral, gold and ivory, were the only commodities except silver that India would absorb. Therefore it was mainly silver that was taken out."
>
> *(L. C. A. Knowles, "Economic Development of the Overseas Empire," p. 73.)*

Accordingly, at its commencement the East India Company was given a special authorisation to export an annual value of £30,000 in silver, gold and foreign coin. But this was most painful and repugnant to the whole system of Mercantile Capitalism, which regarded the precious metals as the only real wealth a country could possess, and the essential object of trade as to secure a net favourable balance expressed in an influx of precious metals or increase of real wealth.

From the outset the merchant "adventurers" of the East India Company were much concerned to devise a means to solve this problem and secure the goods of India for little or no payment. One of their first devices was to develop a system of roundabout trade, and, in particular, to utilise the plunder from the rest of the colonial system, in Africa and America, to meet the costs in India, where they had not yet the power to plunder directly:

> "The English trade with India was really a chase to find something that India would be willing to take, and the silver obtained by the sale of the slaves in the West Indies and Spanish America was all-important in this connection." *(Knowles, op. cit., p. 74.)*

As soon, however, as domination began to be established in India, by the middle of the eighteenth century, methods of power could be increasingly used to weight the balance of exchange and secure the maximum goods for the minimum payment. The margin between trade and plunder, from the outset never very sharply drawn (the original "adventurers" often combined trade with piracy), began to grow conspicuously thin. The merchant, in any case always favourably placed in relation to the individual producer, whether weaver or peasant, to dictate terms favourable to himself, was now able to throw the sword into the scales to secure a bargain which abandoned all pretence of equality of exchange. By 1762 the Nawab of Bengal was complaining impotently to the Company about the Company's agents:

> "They forcibly take away the goods and commodities of the Ryots (peasants), merchants, etc., for a fourth part of their value; and by ways of violence and oppression they oblige the Ryots, etc., to give five rupees for goods which are worth but one rupee."
>
> *(Memorandum of the Nawab of Bengal to the English Governor, May, 1762.)*

Similarly an English merchant, William Bolts, in his "Considerations on India Affairs," published in 1772, described the process:

> "The English, with their Banyans and black Gomastahs, arbitrarily decide what quantities of goods each manufacturer shall deliver, and the prices he shall receive for them....The assent of the poor weaver is in general not deemed necessary; for the Gomastahs, when employed on the Company's investment, frequently make them sign what they please; and upon the weavers refusing to take the money offered, it has been known that they have been tied in their girdles, and they have been sent away with a flogging.... A number of these weavers are generally also registered in the books of the Company's Gomastahs, and not permitted to work for any others, being transferred from one to another as so many slaves... The roguery practised in this department is beyond imagination; but all terminates in the defrauding of the poor weaver; for the prices which the Company's Gomastahs, and in confederacy with them the Jachendars (examiners of fabrics) fix upon the goods, are in all places at least

15 per cent, and some even 40 per cent less than the goods so manufactured would sell in the public bazaar or market upon free sale."

(William Bolts, "Considerations on India Affairs," 1772, pp. 191-4.)

Nominal "trade" was thus already more plunder than trade.

But when the administration of the revenues passed into the hands of the Company, with the granting of the Dewani or civil administration of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765, a new field of limitless direct plunder was opened up in addition to the profits of "trade." Then began a process of wholesale unashamed spoliation which has made the Company's administration during the last third of the eighteenth century a by-word in history. In the words of the House of Commons resolution in 1784:

"The result of the Parliamentary enquiries has been that the East India Company was found totally corrupted and totally perverted from the purposes of its institution, whether political or commercial; that the powers of war and peace given by the Charter had been abused by kindling hostilities in every quarter for the purpose of rapine; that almost all the treaties of peace they have made have only given cause to so many breaches of public faith; that countries once the most flourishing are reduced to a state of impotence, decay and depopulation."

With this may be compared the Company's own opinion on its role, as set out in its Petition to Parliament in 1858 (written by the sanctimonious prig, John Stuart Mill):

"The Government in which they have borne a part has been not only one of the purest in intention, but one of the most beneficent in act ever known among mankind."

On this claim Sir George Cornwell Lewis declared in Parliament in 1858:

"I do most confidently maintain that no civilised Government ever existed on the face of this earth which was more corrupt, more perfidious and more rapacious than the Government of the East India Company from 1765 to 1784."

(Sir George Cornwell Lewis in the House of Commons, February 12, 1858.)

Clive's own view of the considerations governing the East India Company (and not merely its individual servants, whose private plunder was additional to that of the Company) was given in his speech to Parliament in 1772 :

> "The Company had acquired an Empire more extensive than any kingdom in Europe, France and Russia excepted. They had acquired a Revenue of four million sterling, and a Trade in Proportion. It was natural to suppose that such an object would merit the most serious attention of the Administration....Did they take it into consideration? No, they did not. They treated it rather as South Sea Bubble than as anything solid and substantial. They thought of nothing but the present time, regardless of the future: they said, let us get what we can to-day, let tomorrow take care for itself; they thought of nothing but the immediate division of the loaves and fishes."
>
> *(Clive, in the House of Commons, March 30, 1772.)*

What was the character of the system established by the East India Company when it had won the civil power in Bengal and in other territories it conquered? The direct calculation of the profit to be made and remitted to England as the sole consideration in taking over the administration was set out by Clive in his letter to the Directors in 1765 with a clearness and simplicity which are in refreshing contrast to subsequent philanthropic humbug :

> "Your revenues, by means of this acquisition, will, as near as I can judge, not fall far short for the ensuing year of 250 lakhs of Sicca Rupees, including your former possessions of Burdwain, etc. Hereafter they will at least amount to 20 or 30 lakhs more. Your civil and military expenses in time of peace can never exceed 60 lakhs of Rupees; the Nabob's allowances are already reduced to 42 lakhs, and the tribute to the King (the Great Mogul) at 26, so that there will be remaining a clear gain to the Company of 122 lakhs of Sicca Rupees or £1,650,900 sterling."
>
> *(Clive, letter to the Directors of the East India Company, September 30, 1765.)*

Here all is as straightforward and business-like as a merchant's ledger. Of the total revenue extracted from the population one quarter is considered sufficient for the purposes of

government; one quarter is still needed to square the claims of the local potentates (Nabob and Mogul), the remainder, or half the revenue, estimated at £1½ million, is "clear gain" Bottomley's old dream of the "Business Man's Government" is here realised with a completeness never equalled before or since.

How far the results achieved corresponded to the aims is shown by the statement of the revenues and expenses of Bengal during the first six years of the Company's administration, as reported to Parliament in 1773 The total net revenue was given as £13,066, 761; the total expenditure as £9,027,609; the balance of £4,037,152 was remitted. Thus nearly one-third of the revenues of Bengal was sent out of the country as "clear gain."

But this was by no means the total of the tribute. Enormous fortunes were made by individual officers of the Company. Clive himself, who started from nothing, returned home with a fortune estimated at a quarter of a million pounds, in addition to an Indian estate bringing in £27,000 a year; he reported that "fortunes of £100,000 have been obtained in two years." A measure closer to the full tribute is revealed by the figures of exports and imports; during the three years 1766-68, according to the report of the Governor, Verelst, exports amounted to £6,311,250, while imports amounted to only £624,375. Thus ten times as much was taken out of the country as was sent into it under the ruling care of this new type of merchant company governing a country

The dearest dream of the merchants of the East India Company was thus realised: to draw the wealth out of India without having to send wealth in return. As a member of Clive's Council, L. Scrafton, exulted already in 1763, on the basis of the initial stages of spoliation achieved after Plassey, it had been possible, for three years to carry on the whole India trade "without sending out one ounce of bullion":

> "These glorious successes have brought near three millions of money to the nation; for, properly speaking, almost the whole of the immense sums received from the Soubah finally centres in England. So great a proportion of it fell into the Company's hands, either from their own share, or by sums paid into the treasury at Calcutta for bills and receipts, that they have been enabled to carry on the whole trade of India (China excepted) for three years together, without sending out one ounce of bullion.

> Vast sums have been also remitted through the hands of foreign companies, which weigh in the balance of trade to their amount in our favour with such foreign nations."
>
> *(L. Scrafton, "Reflections on the Government of Indostan," 1763.)*

The portion of the revenues of Bengal which was remitted to England was termed, by a judiciously inverted terminology, the Company's "investment." On this system the Select Committee of the House of Commons reported in 1783 :

> "A certain portion of the revenues of Bengal has been for many years set apart in the purchase of goods for exportation to England, and this is called the Investment. The greatness of this Investment has been the standard by which the merit of the Company's principal servants has been too generally estimated; and this main cause of the impoverishment of India has been generally taken as a measure of its wealth and prosperity....But the payment of a tribute, and not a beneficial commerce to that country, wore this specious and delusive appearance...
>
> "When an account is taken of the intercourse, for it is not commerce, which is carried on between Bengal and England, the pernicious effects of the system of Investment from revenue will appear in the strongest point of view. In that view, the whole exported produce of the country, so far as the Company is concerned, is not exchanged in the course of barter, but it is taken away without any return or payment whatever."
>
> *("House of Commons Select Committee's Ninth Report," 1783, pp. 54-5.)*

The effects of this system on the population of Bengal can be imagined. The ceaselessly renewed demand for more and yet more spoils led to the most reckless raising of the land revenue demands to heights which in many cases even meant taking the seed corn and the bullocks from the peasants. In the last year of administration of the last Indian ruler of Bengal, in 1764-5, the land revenue realised was £817,000. In the first year of the Company's administration, in 1765-6, the land revenue realised in Bengal was £1,470,000. By 1771-72, it was £2,341,000, and by 1775-6 it was £2,818,000. When Lord Cornwallis fixed the Permanent Settlement in 1793, he fixed it at £3,400,000.

All contemporary witnesses have given evidence of the rapid devastation of the country within a few years by this process, the cutting down of the population by one-third through the consequent famine, and the transformation of one-third of the country into "a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts."

In 1769 the Company's Resident at Murshidabad, Becher, reported to the Company:

> "It must give pain to an Englishman to have reason to think that since the accession of the Company to the Dewani the condition of the people of this country has been worse than it was before, and yet I am afraid the fact is undoubted....This fine country, which flourished under the most despotic and arbitrary Government, is verging towards its ruin while the English have really so great a share in the Administration....
>
> "I well remember this country when trade was free and the flourishing state it was then in; with concern I now see its present ruinous condition, which I am convinced is greatly owing to the monopoly that has been made of late years in the Company's name of almost all the manufactures in the country."

By 1770 this "ruinous condition" was succeeded by a famine in Bengal which, in the Company's official report "exceeds all description. Above one-third of the inhabitants have perished in the once-plentiful province of Purneah, and in other parts the misery is equal." Ten million people were estimated to have perished in this famine. Yet the land revenue was not only rigorously collected without mercy through this famine, but was actually increased. The Calcutta Council of the Company reported on February 12, 1771: "Notwithstanding the great severity of the late famine and the great reduction of people thereby, some increase has been made in the settlements both of the Bengal and the Bihar provinces for the present year." How this was achieved the grim note of Warren Hastings in 1772 records:

> "Notwithstanding the loss of at least one-third of the inhabitants of the province, and the consequent decrease of the cultivation, the net collections of the year 1771 exceeded even those of 1768....It was naturally to be expected that the diminution of the revenue should have kept an equal pace with the other consequences of so great

calamity That it did not was owing to it being violently kept up to its former standard

(Warren Hastings, Report to the Court of Directors, November 1, 1772)

A decade and a half later William Bullaton, MP described the transformation of Bengal after twenty years of the Company's rule

"In former times the Bengal countries were the country of nations and the repository of commerce, wealth and manufacture in the East

But what has been the fatal progress of our misrule within the short space of twenty years? Many of the countries have been reduced to the appearance of a desert The fields are no longer cultivated, numerous tracts are already overgrown with thickets, where human habitation is plundered, the manufacturer expires, and famine has been repeatedly endured and depopulation has ensued"

(William Bullaton, MP 'A View of the English Interests in India,' 1787)

"Were we to be driven out of India this day," Burke declared in a political denunciation, "nothing would remain to tell that we had been possessed during this inglorious period of full sixty years by anything better than the orangotang race"

Burke's thesis was echoed by fact when the Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, reported

"I may safely assert that one-third of the Company's territories in Hindustan is now a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts"

(Lord Cornwallis's minute of September 18, 1789)

2 INDIA AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

On the basis of the plunder of India in the second half of the eighteenth century modern England was built up

In the middle of the eighteenth century England was still predominantly agricultural In 1750 the Northern Counties still contained less than one-third of the population, Gloucestershire was more thickly populated than Lancashire (A Toynbee, "The Industrial Revolution," pp 9-10) The woollen industry

was still the main industry; in 1770 woollen exports, according to Baines' "History of the Cotton Manufacture" (p. 112), comprised between one-third and one-fourth of all exports. "The machines used in the cotton manufacture", writes Baines, "were, up to the year 1760, nearly as simple as those of India" (p. 115).

Socially, in respect of the division of classes, the creation of a proletariat and the establishment of secure bourgeois rule, the conditions were ripe for the advance to industrial capitalism. The commercial basis had been laid. But the advance to the industrial capitalist stage required also an initial accumulation of capital on a much larger scale than was yet present in England of the middle eighteenth century.

Then in 1757 came the Battle of Plassey, and the wealth of India began to flood the country in an ever-growing stream.

Immediately after, the great series of inventions began which initiated the Industrial Revolution. In 1764 came the spinning-jenny of Hargreaves; in 1765 came Watt's steam engine, patented in 1769, in 1769 came the water-frame of Arkwright, followed by his patents in 1775 for carding-, drawing- and spinning-machines; in 1779 the mule of Crompton, and in 1785 the power-loom of Cartwright; and in 1788 the steam engine was applied to blast furnaces.

That this series of inventions should come in a throng in this period indicates that the social conditions were ripe for their exploitation. Previous inventions had not been taken up for profitable use: "in 1733 Kay patented his fly-shuttle, and in 1738 Wyatt patented his roller-spinning machine worked by water power; but neither of these inventions seems to have come into use" (G. H. Perris, "The Industrial History of Modern England," p. 16).

The leading authority on English industrial history, Dr. Cunningham, pointed out in his "Growth of English Industry and Commerce in Modern Times" that the development of the age of inventions depended, not simply on "some special and unaccountable burst of inventive genius," but on the accumulation of a sufficient body of capital as the indispensable condition to make possible the large-scale outlay for their utilisation:

> "Inventions and discoveries often seem to be merely fortuitous; men are apt to regard the new machinery as the outcome of a special and unaccountable burst of inventive genius in the eighteenth century. But to point

out that Arkwright and Watt were fortunate in the fact that the times were ripe for them, is not to detract from their merits. There had been many ingenious men from the time of William Lee and Dodo Dudley; but the conditions of their day were unfavourable to their success.

"The introduction of expensive implements or processes involves a large outlay; it is not worth while for any man, however energetic, to make the attempt, unless he has a considerable command of capital, and has access to large markets. In the eighteenth century these conditions were being more and more realised. The institution of the Bank of England, and of other banks, had given a great impulse to the formation of capital; and it was much more possible than it had ever been before for a capable man to obtain the means of introducing costly improvements in the management of his business."

(W. Cunningham, "Growth of English Industry and Commerce in Modern Times," p. 610.)

The institution of the Bank of England in 1694, however, could not itself provide the primary accumulation of capital. Until the middle eighteenth century banking capital and mobile capital were still scarce. Whence came the sudden access to the accumulation of capital in the second half of the eighteenth century? Marx has shown how the primary accumulation of capital of the modern world, alike in the earlier stages of bourgeois growth and in its further development, derives above all from the spoils of the colonial system, from the silver of Mexico and South America, from the slave trade and from the plunder of India ("if money, according to Augier, 'comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek,' capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt": "Capital," Vol. I, ch. xxxi). And the sudden access of capital in England in the second half of the eighteenth century came above all from the plunder of India.

"For more than sixty years after the foundation of the Bank of England, its smallest note had been for £20, a note too large to circulate freely, and which rarely travelled far from Lombard Street. Writing in 1790, Burke said that when he came to England in 1750, there were not 'twelve bankers' shops' in the provinces, though then (in 1790) he said, they were in every market town. Thus the arrival of the Bengal silver not only increased the mass of money, but stimulated its movement; for at once, in 1759,

the Bank issued £10 and £15 notes, and in the country private firms poured forth a flood of paper."

(Brooks Adams, "The Law of Civilisation and Decay," pp. 263-4.)

"The influx of the Indian treasure, by adding considerably to the nation's cash capital, not only increased its stock of energy, but added much to its flexibility and the rapidity of its movement. Very soon after Plassey, the Bengal plunder began to arrive in London, and the effect appears to have been instantaneous; for all the authorities agree that the 'industrial revolution,' the event which has divided the nineteenth century from all antecedent time, began with the year 1760. Prior to 1760, according to Baines, the machinery used for spinning cotton in Lancashire was almost as simple as in India; while about 1750 the English iron industry was in full decline because of the destruction of the forests for fuel. At that time four-fifths of the iron used in the kingdom came from Sweden.

"Plassey was fought in 1757, and probably nothing has ever equalled in rapidity of the change which followed. In 1760 the flying shuttle appeared, and coal began to replace wood in smelting. In 1764 Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny, in 1776 Crompton contrived the mule, in 1785 Cartwright patented the powerloom, and, chief of all, in 1768 Watt matured the steam engine, the most perfect of all vents of centralising energy. But, though these machines served as outlets for the accelerating movement of the time, they did not cause that acceleration. In themselves inventions are passive, many of the most important having lain dormant for centuries, waiting for a sufficient store of force to have accumulated to set them working. That store must always take the shape of money, and money not hoarded, but in motion. Before the influx of the Indian treasure, and the expansion of credit which followed, no force sufficient for this purpose existed; and had Watt lived fifty years earlier, he and his invention must have perished together. Possibly since the world began, no investment has ever yielded the profit reaped from the Indian plunder, because for nearly fifty years Great Britain stood without a competitor. From 1694 to Plassey (1757) the growth had been relatively slow. Between 1760 and 1815 the growth was very rapid and prodigious." *(Ibid, pp. 259-60.)*

In this way the spoliation of India was the hidden source of accumulation which played an all-important role in helping to make possible the Industrial Revolution in England.

But once the Industrial Revolution had been achieved in England with the aid of plunder of India, the new task became to find adequate outlets for the flood of manufactured goods. This necessitated a revolution in the economic system, from the principles of mercantile capitalism to the principles of free-trade capitalism. And this in turn involved a corresponding complete change in the methods of the colonial system.

The new needs required the creation of a free market in India in place of the previous monopoly. It became necessary to transform India from an exporter of cotton goods to the whole world into an importer of cotton goods. This meant a revolution in the economy of India. It meant at the same time a complete change-over from the whole previous system of the East India Company. A transformation had to be carried through in the methods of exploitation of India, and a transformation that would have to be fought through against the strenuous opposition of the vested interests of the Company's monopoly.

The first steps preparing the way for this change had already been undertaken in the last decade and a half of the eighteenth century.

It was obvious that, in the interests of effective exploitation, the wholesale anarchic and destructive methods of spoliation pursued by the East India Company and its servants could not continue without some change. The stupid and reckless rapacity of the Company and its servants was destroying the basis of exploitation, just as in England a few years later the unbounded greed of the Lancashire manufacturers was to devour nine generations of the people in one. And just as the greed of the manufacturers had to be curbed by the action of the State on behalf of the capitalist class as a whole, in the interests of future exploitation (the attack being led by their economic rivals, the landed interests), so in the last quarter of the eighteenth century the central organs of the State had to be invoked to regulate the operations of the Company in India. Here also the attack was led by the rival interests. All the numerous interests opposed to the exclusive monopoly of the East India Company combined to organise a powerful offensive against it. From this offensive arose a vast literature of opposition during this period against the misgovernment of the East India

Company, a literature of opposition which, for completeness, detail and authority, is without equal in the exposure of imperialism at any time.

Already the English manufacturers in the earlier eighteenth century had led an attack against the East India Company because the imports of the superior Indian fabrics were creating a dangerous competition. By 1720 they had succeeded in securing the complete prohibition of the import of Indian silks and printed calicoes into England, and increasingly heavy duties were imposed on all Indian manufactured cotton goods. The Company's trade in Indian manufactures was conducted as an entrepot trade by way of English ports for export to Europe.

But the new offensive which developed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century was directed against the entire corrupt monopolist administration of the East India Company in India. This offensive, which had the support, not only of the rising English manufacturing interests, but of the powerful trading interests excluded from the monopoly of the East India Company, was the precursor of the new developing industrial capitalism, with its demand for free entry into India as a market, and for the removal of all obstacles, through individual corruption and spoliation, to the effective exploitation of that market.

Significantly enough, the offensive was launched in 1776 by the father of the classical economy of free-trade manufacturing capitalism, and precursor of the new era, Adam Smith. In his "Wealth of Nations," published in 1776, which became the bible of the new school of statesmen represented by the younger Pitt, Adam Smith devoted a section to a merciless onslaught on the entire basis of the East India Company. In his classic downright style he wrote:

> "Such exclusive companies are nuisances in every respect; always more or less inconvenient to the countries in which they are established, and destructive to those which have the misfortune to fall under their government.
>
> "It is the interest of the East India Company, considered as sovereigns, that the European goods which are carried to their Indian dominions should be sold there as cheap as possible; and that the Indian goods which are brought from thence should bring there as good a price, or should be sold there as dear as possible. But the reverse of this is their interest as merchants. As sovereigns,

their interest is exactly the same with that of the country which they govern. As merchants their interest is directly opposite to that interest....

"It is a very singular government in which every member of the administration wishes to get out of the country, and consequently to have done with the government as soon as he can, and to whose interest, the day after he has left it and carried his whole fortune with him, it is perfectly indifferent though the whole country was swallowed up by an earthquake."

(Adam Smith, "Wealth of Nations," Book IV, chapter vii.)

"Frequently a man of great, sometimes even a man of small fortune, is willing to purchase a thousand pounds' share of India stock merely for the influence which he expects to acquire by a vote in the Court of Proprietors. It gives him a share, though not in the plunder, yet in the appointment of the plunderers of India....Provided he can enjoy this influence for a few years, and thereby provide for a certain number of his friends, he frequently cares little about the dividend, or even about the value of the stock upon which his vote is founded. About the prosperity of the great empire, in the government of which that vote gives him a share, he seldom cares at all. No other sovereigns ever were, or, from the nature of things, ever could be, so perfectly indifferent about the happiness or misery of their subjects, the improvement or waste of their dominions, the glory or disgrace of their administration, as, from irresistible moral causes, the greater part of the proprietors of such a mercantile company are, and necessarily must be."

(Ibid, Book V, chapter i.)

Here we have the voice of the rising manufacturers' opposition to the mercantile basis of the East India Company, and the prelude to the victory of the industrial capitalists over the old system.

The attack on the old basis of the East India Company and demand for change were carried forward in the proceedings of the House of Commons Select Committee in 1782-83. In 1783 came Fox's India Bill, which sought to abolish the Courts of Directors and Proprietors and replace them by Commissioners appointed by Parliament. This was defeated by the opposition of the Company. Its defeat resulted in the fall of Fox's Govern-

ment and the succession of Pitt, who held power thereafter for the next two decades. At this critical turning-point India was thus revealed as the pivotal issue of English politics. In 1784 Pitt's India Act, which, although compromising on Fox's proposals by the alternative of the clumsy dual system, established the same essential principle of direct control by the State, was carried against the opposition of Hastings and the Company. In 1786 Lord Cornwallis was sent out as Governor-General to carry through drastic changes in administration. In 1788 Warren Hastings, who had been in charge as Governor- and Governor-General from 1772-85 was impeached for corruption and misgovernment. This impeachment was in reality a Government act, directly authorised by the decision of Pitt, with the support of the leading Parliamentary forces, Fox, Burke and Sheridan, and represented an offensive, not so much against an individual, as against a system.

The further development of this offensive was interrupted by the overshadowing world issues of the French Revolution, which ended the reforming period of Pitt's administration and revealed the role of the English bourgeoisie as the leader of world counter-revolution. Burke passed from his violent denunciations of tyranny and misrule in India, which had won him the admiration of liberal elements, to his even more violent denunciation of the fight for liberty in France, which won him the admiration and acknowledgments of the monarchs of Europe. It is interesting to note that Philip Francis, the member of the Governor's Council in India who had fought Hastings on the Council, and who had supplied the main materials to Burke and the others for the impeachment, wrote to Burke a letter of burning scorn for his reactionary role in relation to the French Revolution. The impeachment of Hastings was allowed to drag into a dreary protraction for seven years, and ended in a complete acquittal in 1795. Pitt passed from his early moves towards free trade to the high protectionist system of the French wars. It was not until towards the close of the French wars, in 1813, with industrial capital now strongly established, that the question of India was taken up afresh, and the decisive step made towards the new stage.

Lord Cornwallis as Governor-General had reorganised the administration in order to replace the system of anarchic individual corruption and spoliation by a well-paid civil service. He sought to end the previous arbitrary continual increases of land revenue, which were turning the country into

jungle and destroying the basis of exploitation, by the experiment of the Permanent Land Settlement in Bengal, which established a new landlord class as the social basis of British rule, with a permanently fixed payment to the Government.

All these measures were intended as reforms In reality, they were the necessary measures to clear the ground for the more scientific exploitation of India in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole They prepared the way for the new stage of exploitation by industrial capital, which was to work far deeper havoc on the whole economy of India than the previous haphazard plunder.

3. INDUSTRIAL DEVASTATION

In 1813 the offensive of the industrialists and other trading interests was at last successful, and the monopoly of the East India Company in trade with India was ended. The new stage of industrial capitalist exploitation of India may thus be dated from 1813.

Prior to 1813 trade with India had been relatively small. Seeley, in his "Expansion of England," published in 1883, noted the transformation that had taken place in the nineteenth century:

> "Macculloch, in the Note on India in his edition of Adam Smith, speaks of the trade between England and India about 1811— that is, in the days of the monopoly— as being utterly insignificant, of little more importance than that between England and Jersey or the Isle of Man....
>
> "But now instead of Jersey or the Isle of Man we compare our trade with India to that with the United States or France....India heads France and all other nations except the United States as an importer from England."
>
> *(J. R. Seeley, "Expansion of England," 1883, p. 299.)*

Similarly the official Report of the Company in 1812 made clear that the value of India at that time was as a source of direct tribute or spoliation, not as a market for goods:

> "The importance of that immense Empire to this country is rather to be estimated by the great annual addition it makes to the wealth and capital of the King-

dom, than by any eminent advantage which the manufacturers of the country can derive from the consumption of the natives of India."

(Report of the East India Company for 1812, quoted in Parshad, "Some Aspects of India's Foreign Trade," p. 49.)

The proceedings of the parliamentary enquiry of 1813, preceding the renewal of the Charter and abolition of the monopoly, showed how completely the current of thought was now directed to the new aim of the development of India as a market for the rising British machine industry. It was further notable how the replies of the representatives of the old school, like Warren Hastings, denied the possibility of the development of India as a market.

At the time of this enquiry the duties on the import of Indian calicoes into Britain were 78 per cent. Without these prohibitive duties the British cotton industry could not have developed in its early stages.

"It was stated in evidence (in 1813) that the cotton and silk goods of India up to the period could be sold for a profit in the British market at a price from 50% to 60% lower than those fabricated in England. It consequently became necessary to protect the latter by duties of 70% and 80% on their value, or by positive prohibition. Had this not been the case, had not such prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and Manchester would have been stopped in their outset, and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the power of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of the Indian manufacture."

(H. H. Wilson, "History of British India," Vol. I, p. 385.)

This tariff discrimination against Indian manufactures to build up the British textile industry was carried on in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the parliamentary enquiry of 1840 it was reported that, while British cotton and silk goods imported into India paid duty of 3½ per cent and woollen goods 2 per cent, Indian cotton goods imported into Britain paid 10 per cent, silk goods 20 per cent and woollen goods 30 per cent.

Thus it was not only on the basis of the technical superiority of machine industry, but also with the direct State assistance of one-way free trade (free entry, or virtual free

entry, for British goods into India, but tariffs against the entry of Indian manufactures into Britain, and prevention of direct trade between India and European or rather foreign countries by the operation of the Navigation Acts) that the predominance of British manufactures was built up in the Indian market and the Indian manufacturing industries were destroyed.

This process was decisively carried through in the first half of the nineteenth century, although its effects continued to operate right through the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century. Alongside the headlong advance of British manufactures went the decline of Indian manufactures.

Between 1814 and 1835 British cotton manufactures exported to India rose from less than 1 million yards to over 51 million yards. In the same period Indian cotton piecegoods imported into Britain fell from one and a quarter million pieces to 306,000 pieces, and by 1844 to 63,000 pieces.

The contrast in values is no less striking. Between 1815 and 1832 the value of Indian cotton goods exported fell from £1.3 million to below £100,000, or a loss of twelve-thirteenths of the trade in seventeen years. In the same period the value of English cotton goods imported into India rose from £26,000 to £400,000, or an increase of sixteen times. By 1850 India, which had for centuries exported cotton goods to the whole world, was importing one-fourth of all British cotton exports.

While machine-made cotton goods from England ruined the weavers, machine-made twist ruined the spinners. Between 1818 and 1836 the export of cotton twist from England to India rose 5,200 times.

The same process could be traced in respect of silk goods, woollen goods, iron, pottery, glass and paper.

The effects of this wholesale destruction of the Indian manufacturing industries on the economy of the country can be imagined. In England the ruin of the old hand-loom weavers was accompanied by the growth of the new machine industry. But in India the ruin of the millions of artisans and craftsmen was not accompanied by any alternative growth of new forms of industry. The old port as manufacturing towns, Dacca, Murshidabad (which Clive had described in 1757 to be "as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London"), Surat and the like, were in a few years rendered desolate under the "pax britannica" with a completeness which no ravages of the most destructive war or foreign conquest could have accomplished. "The population of the town of Dacca has fallen from

150,000 to 30,000 or 40,000," declared Sir Charles Trevelyan to the parliamentary enquiry in 1840, "and the jungle and malaria are fast encroaching upon the town....Dacca, which was the Manchester of India, has fallen off from a very flourishing town to a very poor and small one; the distress there has been very great indeed." "The decay and destruction," reported Montgomery Martin, the early historian of the British Empire, to the same enquiry, "of Surat, of Dacca, of Murshidabad and other places where native manufactures have been carried on, is too painful a fact to dwell upon. I do not consider that it has been in the fair course of trade; I think it has been the power of the stronger exercised over the weaker." "Less than a hundred years ago," wrote Sir Henry Cotton in 1890, "the whole commerce of Dacca was estimated at one crore (ten millions) of rupees, and its population at 200,000 souls. In 1787 the exports of Dacca muslin to England amounted to 30 lakhs (three millions) of rupees; in 1817 they had ceased altogether. The arts of spinning and weaving, which for ages afforded employment to a numerous and industrial population, have now become extinct. Families which were formerly in a state of affluence have been driven to desert the towns and betake themselves to the villages for a livelihood... This decadence has occurred not in Dacca only, but in all districts. Not a year passes in which the Commissioners and District Officers do not bring to the notice of Government that the manufacturing classes in all parts of the country are becoming impoverished."

The 1911 Census Report revealed the same process to be still going on. In textiles, for example, the 1911 Report recorded a decrease in the number of textile workers by 6 per cent in the preceding ten years, despite the gradual extension by that time of textile manufacturing in India. This decrease is attributed to "the almost complete extinction of cotton spinning by hand."

In the hide, skin and metal trades the 1911 Census recorded a decrease in the number of workers by 6 per cent although at the same time the number of metal dealers increased six times. The reason is again clearly set out:

> "The decrease in the number of metal workers and the concomitant increase in the number of metal dealers is due largely to the substitution for the indigenous brass and copper utensils of enamelled ware and aluminium articles imported from Europe."
>
> (*"Census of India Report," 1911.*)

The iron and steel industry revealed the same picture:

"The native iron-smelting industry has been practically stamped out by cheap imported iron and steel within range of the railways, but it still persists in the more remote parts of the peninsula."

("Imperial Gazetteer of India," 1907, Vol. III, p.145.)

"In India steel was used for weapons, for decorative purposes and for tools, and remarkably high grade articles were produced. The old weapons are second to none, and it is said that the famous damascus blades were forged from steel imported from Hyderabad in India. The famous iron column, called the Kutub pillar at Delhi, weighs over six tons and carried an epitaph composed about 415 A.D. No one yet understands how so large a forging could have been produced at that time. Remains of old smelting furnaces found throughout India are essentially like those in Europe prior to modern times....

"The Agarias, or iron smelting caste, were widely dispersed, and the name Lohara is applied to a great many districts producing iron ore. But the introduction of cheaply made European iron has taken away nearly all their trade, and most Agarias have turned to unskilled labour. A century and a quarter ago Dr. Francis Buchanan found many of these smelters."

(D. H. Buchanan, "Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India," 1934, p. 274.)

It was not only the old manufacturing towns and centres that were laid waste, and their population driven to crowd and overcrowd the villages; it was above all the basis of the old village economy, the union of agriculture and domestic industry, that received its mortal blow. The millions of ruined artisans and craftsmen, spinners, weavers, potters, tanners, smelters, smiths, alike from the towns and from the villages, had no alternative save to crowd into agriculture. In this way India was forcibly transformed, from being a country of combined agriculture and manufactures, into an agricultural colony of British manufacturing capitalism. It is from this period of British rule, and from the direct effects of British rule, that originates the deadly over-pressure on agriculture in India, which is still blandly described in official literature as if it were a natural phenomenon of the old Indian society, and is diagnosed by the superficial and ignorant as a symptom

of "over-population." In fact the increase in the proportion of the population dependent on agriculture has developed under British rule, continuously extending, not only throughout the nineteenth century, but even in the twentieth century, as an examination of the census figures will show (between 1891 and 1921 the proportion of the population dependent on agriculture increased from 61 per cent to 73 per cent; for a fuller examination of these figures see Chapter VII).

Already in 1840, at the parliamentary enquiry previously quoted, Montgomery Martin gave warning of the dangerous transformation that was taking place, to turn India into "the agricultural farm of England":

> "I do not agree that India is an agricultural country; India is as much a manufacturing country as an agricultural; and he who would seek to reduce her to the position of an agricultural country seeks to lower her in the scale of civilisation. I do not suppose that India is to become the agricultural farm of England; she is a manufacturing country, her manufactures of various descriptions have existed for ages, and have never been able to be competed with by any nation wherever fair play has been given to them....To reduce her now to an agricultural country would be an injustice to India."

The East India Company in 1829, deprived of its trading monopoly and therefore now more interested in revenue than in trade, painted a gloomy picture of the "commercial revolution" being carried through in India, according to the minute of the Governor-General, Lord William Cavendish-Bentinck, on May 30, 1829, giving the views of the Court of Directors:

> "The sympathy of the Court is deeply excited by the report of the Board of Trade, exhibiting the gloomy picture of the effects of a commercial revolution productive of so much present suffering to numerous classes in India, and hardly to be paralleled in the history of commerce."

But the manufacturing interests were determined to press forward. "I certainly pity the East Indian labourer," declared Mr. Cope, a Macclesfield manufacturer, to the 1840 parliamentary enquiry, "but at the same time I have a greater feeling for my own family than for the East Indian labourer's family; I think it is wrong to sacrifice the comforts of my family for

the sake of the East Indian labourer because his condition happens to be worse than mine."

The industrial capitalists had their policy for India clearly defined: to make India the agricultural colony of British capitalism, supplying raw materials and buying manufactured goods. This policy was explicitly set out as the objective by the President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, Thomas Bazley, in his evidence to the 1840 parliamentary enquiry:

> "In India there is an immense extent of territory, and the population of it would consume British manufactures to a most enormous extent. The whole question with respect to our Indian trade is whether they can pay us, by the products of their soil, for what we are prepared to send out as manufactures."

The calculation here for the new stage of exploitation of India is as sharp and precise as the previous calculation of Clive three-quarters of a century earlier, already quoted, for the preceding stage.

To develop the Indian market it was necessary to develop the production and export of raw materials from India. It was to this objective that British policy now turned.

> "The importance of India to England in the first half of the century lay in the fact that India supplied some of the essential raw materials—hides, oil, dyes, jute and cotton—required for the industrial revolution in England, and at the same time afforded a growing market for English manufactures of iron and cotton."
>
> *(L. C. A. Knowles, "Economic Development of the Overseas Empire," p. 305.)*

The indication of the new stage of policy was the decision in 1833 to permit Englishmen to acquire land and set up as planters in India. In that same year slavery had been abolished in the West Indies. The new plantation system, which was nothing but thinly veiled slavery, was immediately developed in India, and it is significant that many of the original planters were slave drivers from the West Indies ("Experienced planters were brought from the West Indies....The area attracted a rather rough set of planters, some of whom had been slave drivers in America and carried unfortunate ideas and practices with them": Buchanan, "Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India," pp. 36-7). The horrors that resulted were

exposed in the Indigo Commission of 1860. To-day there are more than a million workers tied to the tea, rubber and coffee plantations, or more than the total number of workers in the textile, coal-mining, engineering, iron and steel industries combined.

The export of raw materials leapt up, especially after 1833. Raw cotton exports rose from 9 million pounds weight in 1813 to 32 million in 1833 and 88 million in 1844; sheep's wool from 3.7 thousand pounds weight in 1833 to 2.7 million in 1844; linseed from 2,100 bushels in 1833 to 237,000 in 1844. (Porter, "Progress of the Nation," 1847, p. 750.)

Between 1849 and 1914 exports of raw cotton rose from £1.7 million in value to £22 million. In weight, raw cotton exports rose from 32 million pounds in 1833 to 963 million in 1914, or thirty times over. Jute exports rose from £68,000 in 1849 to £8.6 million in 1914, or 126 times over.

Even more significant was the rising export of food grains from starving India. The export of food grains, principally rice and wheat, rose from £858,000 in 1849 to £3.8 million by 1858, £7.9 million by 1877, £9.3 million by 1901, and £19.3 million in 1914, or an increase twenty-two times over.

Alongside this process went a heavy increase in the number and intensity of famines in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the first half of the nineteenth century there were seven famines, with an estimated total of 1½ million deaths from famine. In the second half of the nineteenth century there were twenty-four famines (six between 1851 and 1875, and eighteen between 1876 and 1900), with an estimated total, according to official records, of over 20 million deaths. "Stated roughly, famines and scarcities have been four times as numerous during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century as they were one hundred years earlier, and four times more widespread" (W. Digby, "Prosperous British India," 1901). W. S. Lilley, in his "India and its Problems," gives the following approximate figures on the basis of official estimates:

Years	*Famine Deaths*
1800-25	1,000,000
1825-50	400,000
1850-75	5,000,000
1875-1900	15,000,000

In 1878 a Famine Commission was appointed to consider the problem of the growing famines. Its Report, published in

1880, found that "a main cause of the disastrous consequences of Indian famines, and one of the greatest difficulties in the way of providing relief in an effectual shape is, to be found in the fact that the great mass of the people directly depend on agriculture, and that there is no other industry from which any considerable part of the population derives its support"

> "At the root of much of the poverty of the people of India, and of the risks to which they are exposed in seasons of scarcity, lies the unfortunate circumstance that agriculture forms almost the sole occupation of the mass of the population, and that no remedy for present evils can be complete which does not include the introduction of a diversity of occupations, through which the surplus population may be drawn from agricultural pursuits and led to find the means of subsistence in manufactures or some such employments"
>
> *(Indian Famine Commission Report, 1880)*

With these words Industrial Capital passed judgement on its own handiwork in India.

Chapter VI

MODERN IMPERIALISM IN INDIA

"Administration and exploitation go hand in hand"—
LORD CURZON IN 1905

SINCE THE war of 1914-18, imperialism in India has been widely regarded as having entered on a new stage which has little in common with the preceding period.

In the political field the old absolutism is judged to have ended with the Declaration of 1917, which promised the new goal of "the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the Empire"; and the succeeding history is seen as a history of gradual evolution (marred by periods of mass hostility and non-co-operation) through successive constitutional reforms towards the ultimate realisation of this aim, through the British Cabinet Mission's declaration of May 16, 1946.

In the economic field the old *laissez-faire* hostility to Indian industrial development is regarded as having given place to a new angle of vision, which is transforming India into a modern industrialised country under the fostering care of British rule and with the aid of British capital.

A closer examination of the facts of the period since 1918 will show that they are far from bearing out this picture of a progressive imperialism in its declining days.

Undoubtedly a transformation has taken place from the old free-trade industrial capitalist exploitation of India. But the decisive starting-point of change was not in reality constituted by the war of 1914, much as this may appear on a first view to have made the gulf between the old and the new. The first world war, with its far-reaching effects, super-

vened on a process of change which was already developing in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century That change is constituted by the transition from the free-trade industrial capitalist stage to finance-capital and its rule in India. The foundations of this transition had already been laid.

The war of 1914 accelerated and forced forward the whole development, at the same time as, by unloosing the general crisis of capitalism, it launched a series of political mass struggles of a type previously unknown in India. From this double process arises the distinctive character of the modern period in India. This period has simultaneously seen the unfolding of the full characteristics of finance-capitalist rule in India, which were present only in a partial uncompleted form in the earlier phase, and at the same time the breaking of a series of waves of mass assault which have rocked the foundations of imperialist supremacy. These two governing forces have moulded the new India of to-day.

Constitutional reforms in India are no recent invention. They have developed in a continuous line from the Councils Act of 1861 (described in E. A. Horne's standard "Political System of British India" as having "sown the first seeds of representative institutions in British India"), the development of the municipal and district boards in 1865 and 1882, the Councils Act of 1892 and the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. The modern stage, generally dated from the 1917 Declaration, has its real opening in the years just before 1914 with the Morley-Minto Reforms, which inaugurated the process of loudly trumpeted liberal reforms and concessions (alongside coercion), while retaining the reality of power. It is true that the Montagu-Chelmsford Report sought to disparage and minimise the Morley-Minto Reforms in order to signalise its own advance ("excessive claims were made for them in the enthusiasm of the moment"); but its own methods of dyarchy have been no less disparaged and condemned by its successors. Admittedly, the earlier schemes did not grant self-government; this criticism, however, applies also to the later schemes. The post-1918 period may have been presented to the British public as one of relaxing authority and the handing over of power. But to the Indian people the picture has been a different one; alongside the concessions, it has been characterised by waves of elaborate and extensive repression, imprisonment on a scale previously unknown, widespread violence and shooting, and extreme restrictive legislation.

Similarly in the economic field the first signs of the new stage may be traced in the early years of the twentieth century. It was in 1905 that Lord Curzon established the new Department of Commerce and Industry and in 1907 that the first Industrial Conference was held. The growth of the Indian cotton-mill industry was not only relatively, but also absolutely, greater in the twenty years before 1914 than in the twenty years after. The proclamations of the change of policy in relation to the aim of industrialisation have been more marked since then than before, and the new tariff policy dates from the post-1918 period. But the results have been, by universal admission, extremely meagre compared to the needs and possibilities; and the antagonisms thwarting productive development have continued and even been intensified in new forms.

The main transformation of the modern period has been the political transformation through the advance of the Indian people to a new stage in the struggle for their freedom. This advance, however, has been achieved in opposition to imperialism.

For the analysis of the driving forces of the modern period of imperialist rule in India the key lies in the transition from the era of industrial capital to the era of finance-capital. The understanding of this process and its consequences is the first necessity for the understanding of this period.

1. TRANSITION TO FINANCE-CAPITAL

The distinctive forms of nineteenth-century exploitation of India by industrial capital did not exclude the continuance of the old forms of direct plunder, which were also carried forward and at the same time transformed.

The "tribute," as it was still openly called by official spokesmen up to the middle of the nineteenth century, or direct annual removal of millions of pounds of wealth to England, both under the claim "home charges" as well as by private remitting, without return of goods to India (except for the proportionately small amount of governmental stores from England), continued and grew rapidly throughout the nineteenth century alongside the growth of trade. In the twentieth century it grew even more rapidly alongside a relative decline in trade.

In 1848, before the House of Commons Select Committee

Company's rule, the debt in England was still under £4 million. By 1860 it had leapt to £30 million, by 1880 to £71 million, by 1900 to £133 million, by 1913 to £177 million, and by 1939 to £351.8 million.

The origin of this debt lay, in the first place, in the costs of wars and other charges debited to India, and later also in the costs of the railway and public works schemes initiated by the Government. The original £70 million had been largely built up by the wars of Lord Wellesley, the first Afghan Wars, the Sikh Wars and the suppression of the rising in 1857. Of the next £70 million, by which the British Government doubled the total in eighteen years, only £24 million were spent on State railways and irrigation works. Much of the rest of the debt was built up by the system of charging to India every conceivable charge that could be remotely or even fantastically connected with India and British rule in India, even to the extent of debiting India for the costs of a reception to the Sultan of Turkey in London, for the maintenance of the diplomatic and consular establishments of the United Kingdom in China and Persia, for a war on Abyssinia, or for part of the expenses of the Mediterranean fleet.

> "The burdens that it was found convenient to charge to India seem preposterous. The costs of the Mutiny, the price of the transfer of the Company's rights to the Crown, the expenses of simultaneous wars in China and Abyssinia, every governmental item in London that remotely related to India down to the fees of the charwomen in the India Office and the expenses of ships that sailed but did not participate in hostilities and the cost of Indian regiments for six months' training at home before they sailed—all were charged to the account of the unrepresented ryot. The Sultan of Turkey visited London in 1868 in state, and his official ball was arranged for at the India Office and the bill charged to India. A lunatic asylum in Ealing, gifts to members of a Zanzibar mission, the consular and diplomatic establishments of Great Britain in China and in Persia, part of the permanent expenses of the Mediterranean fleet and the entire cost of a line of telegraph from England to India had been charged before 1870 to the Indian Treasury. It is small wonder that the Indian revenues swelled from £33 million to £52 million a year during the first thirteen years of Crown administration, and that deficits accumulated

from 1866 to 1870 amounting to £11½ million. A Home Debt of £30,000,000 was brought into existence between 1857 and 1860 and steadily added to, while British statesmen achieved reputations for economy and financial skill through the judicious manipulation of the India accounts."

(L. H. Jenks, "The Migration of British Capital" pp. 223-4.)

The development of railway construction with State aid and guarantees for the private companies undertaking it as well as later with direct State construction, enormously swelled the debt. The system adopted was one of a Government guarantee of 5 per cent interest for whatever capital was expended by British investors in the construction of the railways. It is evident that this system encouraged the most extravagant and uneconomic expenditure. The first 6,000 miles up to 1872 cost £100 million or over £16,000 a mile. "There was a kind of understanding," declared the former Government auditor of railway accounts to the Parliamentary Enquiry on Indian Finance in 1872, "that they were not to be controlled very closely....nothing was known of the money expended till the accounts were rendered." "Enormous sums were lavished," reported the former Finance Minister in India, W. N. Massey, to the same Enquiry, "and the contractors had no motive whatever for economy. All the money came from the English capitalist, and so long as he was guaranteed five per cent on the revenues of India, it was immaterial to him whether the funds that he lent were thrown into the Hooghly or converted into bricks and mortar....It seems to me that they are the most extravagant works that were ever undertaken."

Up to the end of the nineteenth century £226 million were spent on railways, resulting, not in a profit, but in a loss of £40 million, which fell on the Indian Budget. After the turn of the century a profit was wrung out of the railways and till 1943-4, when the sterling debt due to railways repatriated, close on £10 million a year (£9.7 million in 1933-34) have been transmitted from India to England for railway debt.

With the development of railway construction, and also with the development of tea, coffee and rubber plantations and a few minor enterprises, private capitalist investment from

Britain in India began to advance rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the same period private British banking began to advance in India after the removal of the restrictions of the Company's monopoly. The Presidency Banks Act of 1876 regulated the three Presidency Banks under Goverment protection, which later, in 1921, were amalgamated into the all-powerful Imperial Bank of India. The Exchange Banks, with headquarters outside India, especially the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, which obtained its charter in 1853, the Mercantile Bank of India originating from an earlier bank which obtained its charter in the same year, the National Bank of India, dating from 1864, and the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, dating from 1867 (the "Big Four" of the Exchange Banks), developed their operations in India, in unison with the Presidency Banks dominating finance, commerce and industry under British control. The Indian Joint Stock Banks endeavoured to make headway against their domination, but with small success in face of the superior advantages enjoyed by the foreign banks. By 1913 the foreign banks (Presidency Banks and Exchange Banks) held over three-fourths of the total of bank deposits, while the Indian Joint Stock Banks held less than one-fourth.

For 1909-10 Sir George Paish, in a paper read before the Royal Statistical Society in 1911, estimated the total of British capital investments in India and Ceylon (excluding private capital other than of companies—i.e., capital for which no documentary evidence was readily available) at £365 million, composed as follows (*Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. LXXIV, Part I, Jan. 2, 1911, p. 186) :

	£ *million*
Government and municipal	182.5
Railways	136.5
Plantations (tea, coffee, rubber)	24.2
Tramways	4.1
Mines	3.5
Banks	3.4
Oil	3.2
Commercial and Industrial	2.5
Finance, Land and Investment	1.8
Miscellaneous	3.3

It will be seen from this very instructive list that the process of British capitalist investment in India, or so-called

"export of capital," did not by any means imply a development of modern industry in India. 97 per cent of the British capital invested in India before the war of 1914 was devoted to purposes of Government, transport, plantations and finance—that is to say, to purposes auxiliary to the commercial penetration of India, its exploitation as a source of raw materials and markets for British goods, and in no way connected with industrial development.

The estimate of Sir George Paish was admittedly a conservative estimate, leaving certain unknowable elements out of account. Other estimates of British capital investments in India before 1914 placed the total at £450 million (H. E. Howard, in "India and the Gold Standard," in 1911), and at £475 million (the *Economist* of February 20, 1909, in an article on "Our Investments Abroad").

2. FINANCE-CAPITAL AND INDIA

While the basis for the finance-capitalist exploitation of India was thus in general laid before the first world war, its fuller working out was only to be reached in the subsequent period.

The new basis of exploitation of India by British finance-capital, growing out of the conditions of the already existing industrial capitalist and trading exploitation of India, was from the outset, as the analysis by Sir George Paish of the composition of the capital invested in India by 1909-10 showed, auxiliary to the trading process and not replacing it. Nevertheless, a change in proportions developed of decisive significance for the modern era.

The British nineteenth-century industrial monopoly and domination of the world market began to weaken in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century. In other parts of the world the decline before the new European and American rivals was marked. In India the decline was far slower, because the stranglehold was tenaciously held with the aid of political sovereignty. Even up to the war of 1914 Britain held fast nearly two-thirds of the Indian market against all the rest of the world. Yet also in India the decline slowly but steadily developed from the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

In the five years 1874-79 the British share of Indian imports was 82 per cent, in addition to 11 per cent for the rest of the Empire, leaving less than one-fourteenth of the Indian

market for the outside world. By 1884-89 the British 82 per cent had fallen to 79 per cent. By 1899-1904 it had fallen to 66 per cent By 1909-14 it had fallen to 63 per cent.

But at the same time the profits on invested capital and the volume of home charges were steadily rising. The total trade between Britain and India in 1913-14 amounted to £117 million; a rate of 5 per cent commercial profit on all goods handled, whether exported from Britain or India, would give £12 million. If to this is added an extra 10 per cent manufacturers' profits on all British goods exported to India (£8 million on £78 million), and £8 million shipping income (according to the Board of Trade investigation in 1913 estimating India's share of the total earnings of United Kingdom shipping, which amounted to £94 million in 1913, at 9 per cent), this would make a maximum total of £28 million for British trading, manufacturing and shipping profits from India in 1913.

But the total of British capital investments in India was estimated by 1911, according to H. E. Howard in "India and the Gold Standard," to have reached £450 million, and by the eve of the war of 1914 is believed to have stood at over £500 million If the average rate of interest on this is made as low as 5 per cent, this would yield £25 million, to which must be added a proportionate figure for the profits and earnings of all that section of the capital representing companies other than trading companies operating in India (plantations, coal-mines, jute, etc., often paying dividends as high as 50 per cent), as well as the income from financial commissions, exchange transactions, other banking operations and insurance, putting this at the lowest estimate at another £15 million, this would give a total of £40 million for the net return. At the same time home charges exclusive of interest on debt had risen to £9 million by 1913-14, bringing the total for the profits on capital investments and direct tribute to close on £50 million.

Any such estimates can only be of very limited value for purposes of comparison. But it is evident that by 1914 the interest and profits on invested capital and direct tribute considerably exceeded the total of trading, manufacturing and shipping profits out of India. *The finance-capitalist exploitation of India had become the dominant character in the twentieth century.*

The war of 1914-18 and the subsequent period enormously accelerated this process. The British share of the Indian

market fell from two-thirds to a little over one-third Japanese, American and eventually renewed German competition pressed forward, despite tariffs and imperial preference. Indian industrial production made advances, principally in light industry, despite very considerable obstacles, financial difficulties and the deadweight of official discouragement, which was open in the pre-1914 period and continued in more veiled forms in the period following the war

Between 1913 and 1931-32 the United Kingdom's share of Indian imports fell from 64 per cent to 35 per cent Subsequently the Ottawa preferential measures, imposed despite Indian protests, forced up the proportion to 40 6 per cent by 1934-35; but it sank again to 38.8 per cent by 1935-36 and to 38.5 per cent in 1936-37. Japan's proportion rose from 2 6 per cent in 1913-14 to 16 3 per cent in 1935-36; Germany's from 6.9 to 9.2 per cent in the same period; that of the United States from 2.6 to 6 7 per cent. (*Economist*, February 13, 1937.)

For the more recent years the administrative separation of Burma since 1937 affects the official statistics. The "Review of the Trade of India," issued annually by the Economic Adviser to the Government of India, shows the following proportion of the share of the Indian market (excluding Burma):

PROPORTIONS OF INDIAN IMPORTS

(per cent)

	1935-36	1937-38	1939-40
United Kingdom ..	31.7	29.9	25.2
Burma ..	17.5	14.9	19.0
Japan ..	13.0	12.8	11.7
Germany ..	7.9	8.8	4.0
United States ..	5.6	7.4	9.0

During the second world war, the trade of India underwent a big change. Trade with the enemy countries having come to a stop, the share of the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and Middle Eastern countries like Iran, Arabia, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, etc., in Indian trade rose considerably. The "Review of the Trade of India in 1942-43" gives the following figures: The share of United Kingdom in Indian imports was 26.8 per cent in 1942-43 (25.2 per cent in 1939-40), that of the U.S.A. 17.3 per cent (9.0 per cent in 1939-40), Canada 5.0 per cent (0.8 per cent in 1939-40), Australia 2.9 per cent (1.4 per cent in 1939-40) and Middle Eastern countries (excluding

Egypt) 20.2 per cent (2.9 per cent in 1939-40), the share of Egypt being 7.4 per cent in 1942-43.

Britain still holds the lion's share—more than the combined total of all its main competitors. But the lion's share is becoming increasingly restricted, and the lion has been having to use its claws more and more desperately, against both foreign and Indian competition, to maintain its share. Since 1936 India (even including Burma) is no longer Britain's principal customer, as it had been for a century past, but fell in 1937 to second place and in 1938 to third place.

This sharp decline, developing most rapidly in the post-1918 period, in Britain's share in the Indian market reflects above all the catastrophic collapse in what had been the main field of nineteenth-century industrial capitalist exploitation of India—the export of cotton goods. The Balfour Committee on Industry and Trade found that the export of British cotton piecegoods to India had declined by 57 per cent between 1913 and 1923. In 1913 it amounted to 3,057 million yards, or nearly half of Lancashire's total exports of 7,075 million. By 1928 it had fallen to 1,452 million, and by 1939-40 to 144 million yards. During 1942-43 the import was only 11 million yards.

But while the old basis was thus collapsing, the new basis of profits by finance-capitalist exploitation was steadily rising and extending in volume. By 1929 the total of British capital investments in India was estimated in the *Financial Times* by the former Secretary of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Sayer, at £573 million on the most conservative basis, and more probably £700 million. His calculation gave the following distribution:

	£ *million*
Government Sterling Debt	261
Guaranteed Railway Debt	120
5 per cent War Loan	17
Investments in Companies registered in India	75
Investments in Companies registered outside India	100

The figure of £175 million for companies operating in India was stated to be almost certainly an under-estimate, and a real total of £700 million for all investments "would probably not be very wide of the mark." He added:

> "The importance of our financial stake in India is fully recognised, probably, only by a limited number of experts. Most people have no real conception of either

its magnitude or diversity. Many merchants, bankers and manufacturers who are actually engaged in the trade, would probably find it hard to arrive at even an approximate computation of the actual amount of the capital and services which is represented. External capital enters India in such a number of forms that any calculation must be largely guesswork."

("Financial Times," January 9, 1930)

A later estimate, for 1933, put forward by the British Associated Chambers of Commerce in India, made the total £1,000 million, represented by £379 million Government Sterling Debt, £ 500 million for companies registered outside India and operating in India, and the balance for investments in companies registered in India and miscellaneous investments.[1]

This total of £1,000 million represented no less than one-quarter of the estimated total of £4,000 million of British foreign investments throughout the world. When Sir George Paish made his estimate in 1911, he found that British capital investments in India represented 11 per cent of the total of British capital investments throughout the world. *The advance from one-ninth to one-quarter, from 11 per cent to 25 per cent, is a measure of the increasing importance of India to British finance-capital in the modern period, and a key to modern imperialist policy with its special provisions for safeguarding British financial interests in India.*

What has been the value of the total tribute drawn from India to England each year by the modern imperialist methods

[1] No exact returns are available for the extent of British (and American) capital investment in India after the second world war and in the conditions of the new Dominions. While the British interests in many older enterprises were often sold (at highly inflated post-war prices) to Indian owners, a considerable extent of British and American capital penetration took place in new forms, especially through the new joint Indo-British and Indo-American companies. Nominally the sterling balances, which wiped out the public debt to India, made India a "creditor" of Britain; but the sterling balances were in reality the book-keeping account of the unpaid exactions from India during the war, and were in respect of the greater part of them frozen after the war, pending negotiations for scaling down (see pages 169-170). The Federal Reserve Bank economist, B. R. Shenoy, estimated in his book "The Sterling Assets of the Reserve Bank of India" (Oxford University Press, 1946) that the total value of British assets in India, calculated at 1945 price levels, amounted to £2,274 million. This is however an inflated estimate, based on multiplying older pre-war estimates to allow for the rise in prices, and does not represent the results of any new survey.

exploitation? An attempt to estimate this was made by the Indian economists, K. T. Shah and K. J. Khambata, in their "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India," published in 1924. Basing their calculations on the available statistics for the year 1921-22 they reached the following result (sterling equivalents at the average current exchange of 1s. 4d. in 1921-22 have been added to their estimates in rupees):

ANNUAL TRIBUTE FROM INDIA TO BRITAIN AND ABROAD (1921-22)

	Rs. millions	*£ millions*
Political deductions or Home Charges	500	33.3
Interest on Foreign capital registered in India	600	40.0
Freight and Passenger Carriage paid to Foreign Companies	416.3	27.7
Payments on account of Banking Commissions	150	10.0
Profits, etc., of Foreign Business and Professional men in India ..	532.5	35.5
	2,198.8	146.5

This total of roughly 2,200 million rupees or nearly £150 million, is equivalent to over £3 per head of the population in Britain, or nearly £1,700 a year for every supertax payer in Britain at the time of the estimate.

A later attempt to estimate the total tribute, after the fall in prices from the very high level of 1921-22, was made by Sir M. Visvesvaraya in his "Planned Economy for India," published in 1934. He reached the following result (sterling equivalents at the current exchange of 1s. 6d. have been added to his estimate in rupees):

	Rs. millions	*£ millions*
British and foreign shipping service	350	20
Exchange and other commission payable to foreign banks	210	16
Business gains, salaries, etc., of persons of British nationality engaged in Indian industries	400	30
Interest on British investments in India	650	49
	1,610	121

This estimate is "exclusive of official remittances to England for pensions and other home charges, and liabilities to non-Britishers who have trade relations with India." The figure for home charges, other than interest on debt, in 1933-34 would add another £14 million, and bring the total to £135 million. Since the Index of Indian Prices fell from 236 in 1921 to 121 in 1933, it would appear that this total, if correctly estimated, would represent a considerable increase on that of a decade earlier. In the absence of exact statistics of many items, however, these estimates can only afford a rough indication.

The latest estimates of India's annual tribute to Britain have been given by Mr. Lawrence K. Rosinger, in his report, "Independence for Colonial Asia—the Cost to the Western World," issued by the Foreign Policy Association of America and published in 1945. According to him the annual tribute is £135 million comprised of items as below:

Interest charges on £670 million investments at British rate of interest 6-7-8 per cent	£46 million
Home Charges	£33 million
Trade	£30 million
Shipping	£20 million
Remittances by Britishers serving in India	£ 6 million
Total	£135 million

("Hindustan Standard," Calcutta, July 5, 1945.)

After allowing the fullest margin of variation for the factors that cannot be exactly calculated, the broad conclusion is evident and inescapable that the exploitation of India in the modern period has been far more intensive than in the old. It was estimated that in the three-quarters of a century of British rule up to the taking over by the Crown, the total tribute withdrawn from India had amounted to £150 million. In the modern period, during the two decades before the war, it is estimated that the total *annual* tribute from India to England is in the neighbourhood of £135 million to £150 million. This intensified exploitation of India under the conditions of finance capitalism underlies the gathering crisis and intensified revolt against imperialism in India.

3. THE QUESTION OF INDUSTRIALISATION

The view is sometimes put forward that the development of the modern finance-capitalist era of British rule in India especially since the 1914-18 war, even though leading to intensified exploitation, has at any rate led to advancing industrialisation and economic development in place of the previous decay under the domination of free-trade industrial capitalism. Modern imperialist propaganda, which endeavours to present India as one of the "leading industrial nations" of the world (the British Government's bombastic claim at Geneva in 1922, based on highly dubious statistics,[1] in order to secure an additional seat on the Governing Body of the International Labour Office) encourages this view, and professes in principle to adopt a benevolent attitude to industrial development in India.

An examination of the facts will show that this view is far from justified. A measure of industrial development has taken place in India in the modern period, both before the war of 1914 and especially since, but in no sense comparable to other major extra-European countries in the same period. Such industrial development as has taken place has in fact had to fight its way against intense opposition from British finance-capital alike in the financial and in the political field. It has taken place in a lop-sided fashion, principally in light industry, with very weak development in the decisive heavy industries. As the preliminary examination in Chapter I has already indicated, it is impossible yet to speak of any general process of industrialisation having taken place in India.

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[1] Lord Chelmsford, on behalf of the Indian Government, declared at the session of the Council of the League of Nations in October, 1922:

> "It remains to justify India's specific claim to inclusion among the eight States of chief industrial importance. Her claim is based on broad general grounds and does not need elaborate statistical methods to justify it. She has an industrial wage-earning population which may be estimated at roughly twenty millions."

He omitted to explain that this figure of "twenty million industrial wage-earners" was composed mainly of hand-workers and domestic industry, that the total number of industrial wage-earners in establishments employing ten persons or over, as recorded by the Industrial Census of 1921, was 2.6 million, of whom nearly 1 million were plantation workers, and not industrial, and that the total number of workers coming under the Factories Act was 1.3 million.

Up to 1914, the opposition of imperialism to industrial development in India was open and unconcealed. The same attitude which had governed British relations to America before the War of Independence, and which had imposed an absolute prohibition on the erection of steel furnaces in the American colonies (Adam Smith, "Wealth of Nations," Vol. IV, vii, 2), governed British policy to India up to 1914. As Sir Valentine Chirol wrote in 1922 of the official "jealousy towards purely Indian enterprise" which was open until the 1914 war:

> "Our record in regard to Indian industrial development has not always been a very creditable one in the past, and it was only under the pressure of war necessities that Government was driven to abandon its former attitude of aloofness if not jealousy towards purely Indian enterprise."
>
> *(Sir Valentine Chirol, in the "Observer," April 2, 1922.)*

Similarly the Government annual report of 1921 wrote:

> "Some time prior to the war certain attempts to encourage Indian endustries by means of pioneer factories and Government subsidies were effectively discouraged from Whitehall."
>
> *("Moral and Material Progress of India," 1921, p. 144.)*

As Sir John Hewett declared in 1907:

> "The question of technical and industrial education has been before the Government and the public for over twenty years. There is probably no subject on which more has been written or said, while less has been accomplished."
>
> *(Sir John Hewett, Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, at the Indian Industrial Conference, 1907.)*

The incident referred to by the Government Report of 1921 with regard to the "effective discouragement from Whitehall" of Indian industrial development followed on the establishment of a Department of Commerce and Industries, on the initiative of Lord Curzon, in 1905, and the appointment by the Madras Government of a Director of Industries in 1908. The operations of the Madras Department of Industries "aroused the opposition of the local European commer-

cial community, who interpreted them as a serious menace to private enterprise and an unwarrantable intervention on the part of the State in matters beyond the sphere of Government" (Indian Industrial Commission Report, p. 70). In 1910 the embargo of Whitehall descended on the experiment in the shape of a damning dispatch signed by the Secretary of State, Lord Morley:

> "I have examined the account which the Madras Government have given of the attempts to create new industries in the province. The results represent considerable labour and ingenuity, but they are not of a character to remove my doubts as to the utility of State effort in this direction, unless it is strictly limited to industrial instruction and avoids the semblance of a commercial venture... My objections do not extend to the establishment of a bureau of industrial information, or to the dissemination from such a centre of intelligence and advice regarding new industries, processes or appliances, provided that nothing is done calculated to interfere with private enterprise." *(Lord Morley, Dispatch of July 29, 1910.)*

The "deadening effect" of this Dispatch was recorded by the Indian Industrial Commission Report (p. 4).

The discouragement of Indian industrial development was not confined to administrative action or inaction, but was supplemented by positive tariff policy. When the very weak Indian cotton industry began to develop in the eighteen sixties and eighteen seventies, agitation was immediately raised in England for the abolition of the revenue import duties which operated also on cotton goods. A memorial to this effect was presented by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce in 1874, and a resolution adopted by the House of Commons in 1877. Lord Salisbury, in forwarding this resolution to the Indian Government, made fully clear its purpose when he pointed with alarm to the fact that "five more mills were about to begin work; and that it was estimated that by the end of March, 1877, there would be 1,231,284 spindles employed in India" (letter of Lord Salisbury to the Governor-General, August 30, 1877). Accordingly, in 1879 the import duties on coarser cotton goods, where there was competition, were removed, and in 1882 all import duties, excepting on salt and liquors, were abolished. When in 1894 financial requirements led to the re-imposition of a general import duty, including on cotton goods, the new device was invented of imposing an

excise duty on all Indian mill-woven cloth, an impost without parallel in the economic history of any country. This excise duty, which was fixed at 3½ per cent in 1896, remained in full force till 1917, when its effect was partially diminished by the raising of the import duty from 3½ to 7½ per cent, and was only finally abolished in 1925 (in fact under pressure of a strike of the mill-workers).

Under these conditions industrial development up to 1914 was extremely slow and slight. By 1914 the number of industrial workers under the Factories Act was only 951,000. The development that took place was mainly confined to the cotton industry, where Indian capital was endeavouring to push its way forward, and the jute industry, where British capital sought to use cheap labour in India as a profitable weapon against the demands of the British jute-workers. Engineering was only represented by repair workshops, chiefly for the railways; the barest beginning with iron and steel was just being made on the eve of the 1914 war; there was no production of machinery.

With the first world war a complete reversal of policy was proclaimed by the Government. Industrialisation was officially set out as the aim in the economic field, just as responsible government was declared to be the aim in the political field. The first proclamation of the new policy was made by the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, in 1915:

> "It is becoming increasingly clear that a definite and self-conscious policy of improving the industrial capabilities of India will have to be pursued after the war, unless she is to become the dumping ground for the manufactures of foreign nations who will be competing the more keenly for markets, the more it becomes apparent that the political future of the larger nations depends on their economic position. The attitude of the Indian public towards this question is unanimous, and cannot be left out of account....
>
> "After the war India will consider herself entitled to demand the utmost help which her Government can afford to enable her to take her place, so far as circumstances permit, as a manufacturing country."
>
> *(Lord Hardinge, Dispatch to the Indian Secretary, November 26, 1915.)*

Following this, the Indian Industrial Commission was appointed in 1916, under the chairmanship of Sir Thomas Holland.

the President of the Institute of Mining Engineers, and reported in 1918. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms in 1918 equally set out the aim:

> "On all grounds a forward policy in industrial development is urgently called for, not merely to give India economic stability, but in order to satisfy the aspirations of her people....
>
> "Both on economic and military grounds Imperial interests also demand that the natural resources of India should henceforth be better utilised. We cannot measure the access of strength which an industrialised India will bring to the power of the Empire."
>
> *(Montagu-Chelmsford Report, p. 267.)*

The reasons for this proclaimed change of policy arose from the conditions of the war, and may be clearly discerned from the official statements. Three main groups of reasons may be distinguished.

First, military strategic reasons. The war conditions, the cutting down of communications and supplies, and not least the Mesopotamian scandals, laid bare the weakness of the old-style Indian Empire and of the whole British strategic position in the East, owing to the failure to develop the most elementary basis of modern industry in India and consequent dependence for vital military needs on long-distance overseas supplies. How strongly this consideration impressed itself on the British rulers was expressed in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, which calculated on the necessity to modernise India as the base for "Eastern theatres of war":

> "The possibility of sea communications being temporarily interrupted forces us to rely on India as an ordnance base for protective operations in Eastern theatres of war. Nowadays products of an industrially developed community coincide so nearly in kind though not in quality with the catalogue of munitions of war that the development of India's natural resources becomes a matter of almost military necessity."

Second, competitive economic reasons. Foreign competitors were beginning to break down the British monopoly in the Indian market and the weakening of the British industrial position through war needs threatened to open the way to a rapid further foreign advance after the war and the loss of the Indian market. The danger, as Lord Hardinge explained,

was that India would become "the dumping ground for the manufactures of foreign nations." A system of tariffs to prevent this would serve two purposes. In the first place, insofar as the foreign industrialist was replaced by the development of industry within India, the British financial and political domination could secure a more favourable possibility to extract the ultimate profit for British capital than if the market were lost to an independent foreign capitalist Power. In the second place, the establishment of a tariff system could prepare the way for imperial preference to assist Britain to win back the Indian market.

Third, inner political reasons. To maintain control of India during the war and in the disturbed period succeeding the war it was essential to secure the co-operation of the Indian bourgeoisie, and for this purpose it was necessary to make certain concessions and promises of concessions, economic and political, of a character to win their support. "The attitude of the Indian public," as Lord Hardinge was scrupulous to point out, "cannot be left out of account."

The method adopted to carry out the change of policy was the development of a protective tariff system. The first step to this was the raising of the duty on cotton piecegoods to 7½ per cent in 1917, and to 11 per cent in 1921, while the excise duty remained at 3½ per cent until its final removal in 1925. The general import duty was raised to 11 per cent in 1921 and 15 per cent in 1922. A Fiscal Commission was appointed in 1921 and reported in 1922 in favour of "discriminating protection" by a procedure of detailed enquiry in each case, while a Minute of Dissent by five Indian members favoured full protection. The Tariff Board recommended by the Report was set up in 1923. The first major issue to come before it was the key issue of the iron and steel industry. In 1924 the iron and steel industry secured protection at a rate of 33-1/3 per cent. as well as a system of bounties.

At this point the hopes of the Indian industrial capitalists in an assisting forward policy on the part of the Government were raised high. This was the period of the Swaraj Party, or party of Indian progressive capitalism which defeated the "non-co-operation" policies of the Gandhist leadership at the National Congress in 1923, and dominated the years 1923-26 with its policies, first of entering the Councils for the purpose of conducting the fight from within, and eventually of "honourable co-operation."

But these hopes were to receive heavy blows in the succeeding years.

4. SETBACKS TO INDUSTRIALISATION

The granting of protection and subsidies to the iron and steel industry in 1924 represented the high-water mark of Government assistance to industrial development after the war of 1914-18. Thereafter a recession can be increasingly traced.

The elaborate schemes of the Indian Industrial Commission for an Imperial Department of Industries, governing a network of provincial departments in each province, came to nothing. The central organisation was never set up, while the provincial departments were handed over, like education, to the "transferred" subjects—i.e., to be starved of funds and then made the responsibility of Indian Ministers for the consequent stagnation. The achievement reached by 1934 was described in the following terms by a competent outside observer:

> "Unfortunately, the central organisation has not yet been set up; and, with the constitutional reforms of 1919, the provincial organisation was made, along with education, one of the 'transferred' subjects, and thus put in the hands of local governments responsible to elected legislatures. Unfortunately also, since the funds available have been wholly inadequate, no very important policies could be initiated. Furthermore, the encouragement of industry requires a far-reaching unified government policy concerning not only raw materials and methods of production, but markets as well. In fact, it must be associated with educational policy and almost every other great national interest. It is doubtful whether the mere provincial offices set up in India will have any considerable effect."
>
> *(D. H. Buchanan, "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India," 1934, pp. 463-4.)*

A "Central Bureau of Industrial Intelligence and Research" was more recently established, with the munificent allocation of £37,500 for three years. It was announced that its main attention would be devoted to silk culture and hand-loom weaving!

"The practical results announced so far are that a Central Bureau of Industrial Intelligence and Research is about to be started on which 5 lakhs of rupees (£37,500) is to be expended within the next three years, and that sericulture and hand-loom weaving would engage the attention of the new Bureau. Heavy industries, the greatest need of the day, have been left severely alone, and long-range proposals, if they have any, for the economic development of the country are kept undefined and shrouded in mystery."

(Sir M. Visvesvaraya, "Planned Economy for India," 1936, p. 247.)

The Tariff Board received a series of further applications from other industries for protection after the granting of the protective duties to iron and steel in 1924. In the majority of the cases, the most important being cement and paper, the application was not endorsed. A notable exception was made in the case of the match industry which received a protective duty; the match industry represented foreign capital operating in India.

Even more significant was the treatment accorded to the iron and steel protective system when it came up for renewal in 1927. The basic duties were lowered. The subsidies were abolished. Most important of all, a new principle was introduced—the principle of imperial preference or favoured rates for the entry of British manufactured goods.

Imperial preference now became the keynote of the tariff system. By 1930 imperial preference was extended to cotton piecegoods. In 1932 the Ottwa Agreements were reached, and a general system of imperial preference was imposed on India in the face of universal Indian protests and a hostile vote of the Indian Legislative Assembly. The United Kingdom's share of Indian imports rose from 35.5 per cent in 1931-32 to 40.6 per cent in 1934-35. The duty on Japanese and other non-British cotton goods was raised as high as 50 per cent (for a period, during the intense trade war in 1933, even to 75 per cent), while that on British cotton goods was lowered to 20 per cent. Even the Tariff Board's Report in 1933 against imperial preference in the cotton industry was overridden.

Besides the direct help to the competitive power of British industry, the tariff system in its effects on the growth of industry in India has also mainly benefited foreign interests,

most of all British. As we shall see later, to take free advantage of the protective system, big foreign monopolies have opened their subsidiaries in India and become a menace to Indian industrial growth.

The tariff system of the early nineteen-twenties, originally proclaimed as a means for assisting Indian industry, was thus transformed in the succeeding period into a system of imperial preference for assisting British industry (while giving India in return the privilege of favoured rates for the export of raw materials and semi-manufactured goods—i.e., the attempt to move backwards towards the pre-1914 basis). It is evident that this transformed considerably the significance of the tariff system. Even the reactionary Curzon Government before the war of 1914 had opposed imperial preference for India as involving a net loss for India. It was against the British manufacturer as the biggest monopolist of the Indian market that the Indian industrialist desired protection, no less than against other foreign manufacturers. British capitalism, on the other hand, desired tariffs in India primarily against the invasion of the Indian market by non-British competitors. Hence the conflict of interests. This conflict found direct expression in the Indian Legislative Assembly, when the Trade Agreement of January, 1935, embodying and extending the Ottawa Agreements to a still wider system of imperial preference was defeated by a vote of 66 to 58. The vote was overridden by the British Government, which enforced the Agreement. The antagonism was in the open; the "benevolent" atmosphere of 1916-18 was far behind.[1]

The same process may be traced in the wider economic field. Immediately after the war of 1914-18 the short-lived boom was even more feverish in India than elsewhere. Colossal profits were made by the cotton and jute mills. The average dividend paid by the leading cotton mills in Bombay in 1920 was 120 per cent; in some cases it reached 200, 250 and even 365 per cent. (Arno Pearse, "The Cotton Industry of India.") The average dividend paid by the leading jute mills

[1] The conflict was still further shown in the negotiations of the new Trade Agreement of March, 1939, between India and the United Kingdom. This Agreement was rejected by the Indian Legislative Assembly in March, 1939, by 59 votes to 47; and the Committee of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce also declared its opposition. Once again the vote of the Legislative Assembly was overridden, and the British Government enforced the Trade Agreement in the face of the opposition of Indian representatives.

was 140 per cent, and even reached as high as 400 per cent, including bonus. The reports of forty-one jute mills, all under British control, with a total capital of £6.1 million, showed for the four years 1918-21 no less than £22.9 million profits, in addition to £19 million placed to reserves, or total earnings of £42 million in four years on a capital of £6 million.

British capital flowed into India in these immediate post-war years in the hope of sharing in these colossal profits. Previously Sir George Paish had estimated for the years 1908-10 the average British capital export to India and Ceylon at some £14 million to £15 million, or 9 per cent of the total British capital exports. In 1921 the figure rose to £29 million, or over a quarter of the total capital exports, in 1922 to £36 million, or again over a quarter, and in 1923 was still £25 million or one-fifth. During the two years 1920-21 and 1921-22 there was even a nominal excess of imports, the only time since 1856-62, the period of railway investment; but this in fact partly reflected the disastrous consequences of the Government's attempt to fix artificially the rupee at the high rate of 2*s.*, resulting in a premium on imports into India, ruin for Indian exporters, and the expenditure of no less than £55 million by the Government in the vain endeavour to maintain this exchange.

But the crash followed from the end of 1920 and 1921, accentuated by the Government's exchange policy when the abandonment of the 2*s.* rupee and the sudden drop to 1*s.* 4*d.* ruined the importers and led to defaults estimated at over £30 million. Many of the Indian firms which were formed in the post-war boom went bankrupt in the following years. As soon as it became clear that the abnormal profits of the post-war boom could not be expected to be continued, the flow of British capital dried up. The total fell to £2.6 million in 1924, or less than a fifteenth part of British capital exports that year; to £3.4 million in 1925, to £2 million in 1926, and below £1 million in 1927, or less than half of 1 per cent of British capital exports.

The following figures of the pre-war and post-war British capital exports to India and Ceylon are instructive (the pre-war figures are those of Sir George Paish, the post-war those of the Midland Bank returns):

BRITISH CAPITAL EXPORTS TO INDIA AND CEYLON

Annual Average	*To India and Ceylon* (£ million)	*Total Overseas Issues* (£ million)	*Per cent to India and Ceylon*
1908-10 . . .	14.7	172.3	8.5%
1921-23 . .	30.2	129.0	23.7%
1925-27 . .	2.1	120.9	1.7%
1932-34 . .	4.2	135.1	3.1%
1934-36 . .	1.0	30.2	3.3%

After the short post-war boom the proportion dropped below the pre-war level.

No less instructive is the total capital of companies registered in India, according to the official returns:

PAID-UP CAPITAL OF COMPANIES REGISTERED IN BRITISH INDIA

(Excluding Burma)

	1914-15	1924-25	1934-35	1939-40
In million rupees . .	744	2,398	2,666	2,885

In the decade between 1914 and 1924 the increase was 222 per cent, or an annual average of 22 per cent. But in the following decade between 1924 and 1934 the increase was only 11 per cent, or an annual average of 1 per cent. In the half decade between 1934 and 1939 also the annual average was only 1.5 per cent. Even after allowing for the change in the price level, which affects these figures, the contrast remains striking, and the setback after the short post-war boom is inescapable.

In 1927 the *Statist* issued an index figure of the capital of new companies registered in India, on the basis of 1914 as 100:

NEW CAPITAL ISSUES IN BRITISH INDIA

	1914	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Index of capital of companies registered each year	100	221	121	51	40	31	45	29

On this heavy decline below the 1914 level the London financial journal commented:

> "There can be little doubt but that the figures reflect a definite setback in the economic development of the country. For this setback the currency and exchange

policy pursued by the Government of India is not wholly without blame."

("Statist," August 6, 1927.)

It is thus evident that the setback to Indian industrial development was strongly marked already before the world crisis. Indian firms went through a very difficult period in the middle twenties. The Tata Iron and Steel Company, the leader of the Indian capitalist advance to industrial development outside cotton, found its 100-rupee shares fallen to 10 rupees in 1926, and was compelled to come to the London market for £2 million debentures. British finance-capital strengthened its grip over Indian enterprise during these years, after the temporary loosening of the reins in the early post-war years.

A powerful further blow was struck at Indian industry by the decision in 1927, following on the Report of the Hilton Young Commission on Indian Finance and Currency in 1926, to stabilise the rupee exchange at the high rate of 1*s.* 6*d.* in place of the pre-war rate of 1*s.* 4*d.* This policy of deflation was carried in the face of the universal protest of Indian capitalist opinion. "It will hit the Indian producer," declared Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, the leader of Indian capitalism, in his Minute of Dissent to the Currency Commission's Report, "to an extent beyond his capacity to bear. It will hit, and hit very hard, four-fifths of the population of the country that exists on agriculture." At the same time steps were taken to withdraw financial control still farther away from even the remote possibility of Indian influence by the decision to establish, in addition to the Imperial Bank of India set up in 1921, a new Indian Reserve Bank, recommended by the Hilton Young Commission, and finally set up, after a long struggle against Indian opposition, in 1934.

In this situation of already difficult conditions the world economic crisis fell on India with heavier force than on any other leading country, owing to India's extreme dependence on primary production. The value of Indian primary products, on which four-fifths of the population were in practice dependent (this value governed also the market for the weak industrial development) fell by one-half. Between 1928-29 and 1932-33 the value of Indian exports of goods fell from 3,390 million rupees to 1,350 million rupees; the value of Indian imports from 2,600 million rupees to 1,350 million rupees. Yet the heavy payment of tribute, interest on debt and home charges, now doubled in weight by the

fall of prices, had to be maintained and was ruthlessly exacted. For India there was no Hoover moratorium, as for Europe; no frozen credits scheme, as for Germany; no repudiation of debt payments as for Britain with the American debt. The tribute was paid by export of treasure. Between 1931 and 1935 no less than 32 million ounces of gold, valued at £203 million, were extracted from India (*Economist*, December 12, 1936), or more than the total British gold reserve before the crisis. During 1936 and 1937 further gold exports from India amounted to £38 million (*Economist*, April 2, 1938), or a total of £241 million for the seven years 1931-37. This gold represented the traditional form of savings of the peasantry and poorer people in a country where banking or other forms of savings are unknown among the masses of the people. By this gold drain of 1931-37 the slender savings of the impoverished Indian peasantry were scientifically extracted by British finance-capital to swell the British gold reserve, which rose, according to the Report of the Bank of International Settlements, from the equivalent of 3,021 million gold Swiss francs at the end of 1932 to 7,911 million by the end of 1936, or an increase of 162 per cent. Once again, in a new form, as in the days of the Industrial Revolution, the measure of recovery of British capitalism in 1933-37 was built up on the spoliation of India.

By the end of 1936 the *Economist, Indian Supplement* reported grimly on the progress of "industrialisation":

> "The proportion of the population dependent upon industry as a whole has tended to decline, and in some industries—in particular, the jute and cotton industries—there has in some years been an absolute decline in numbers employed....
>
> "Although India has begun to modernise her industries, it can hardly be said that she is as yet being 'industrialised.'"
>
> *(Economist, Indian Supplement, "A Survey of India To-day," December 12, 1936.)*

5. THE BALANCE-SHEET OF TWENTY YEARS BEFORE THE WAR

Let us now take stock of the outcome of Indian economic development during the twenty years between the two wars

—twenty years following the appointment of the Indian Industrial Commission, in the light of the original glowing promises of industrialisation.

During these two decades — two decades that saw the triumph of socialist industrialisation in the Soviet Union, outstripping every other country in Europe and Asia—undoubtedly a measure of industrial development took place in India, carrying forward a development which had already been proceeding before 1914 in the face of British official opposition. A series of industries paced towards approaching the level of the internal Indian market. The Indian cotton mills, which in 1914 produced one-quarter of the mill-produced cotton goods used in India, had by 1934-35 reached three-fourths The Indian steel industry, which before the war was only just coming into existence, by 1932-33, according to the Tariff Board's Report in 1934, was supplying nearly three-quarters of the Indian market for steel. This is, however, mainly a measure of the extreme limitation of the Indian market for steel owing to the low industrial development: the record steel output of 879,000 tons in 1935-36 was below the level of Poland in the same year (with a population less than one-tenth that of India), and less than one-sixth that of Japan in 1936, or one-nineteenth that of the Soviet Union.

Decisive, however, for industrialisation is not the development of the textile industry—which in any case had won its basis in India before 1914—but the development of heavy industry, of iron, steel and the production of machinery. And it is here that the weakness of India stood out before the war. India remained still wholly dependent on abroad for machinery.

> "Engineering and textiles partake of the nature of home industries even though people are massed in power-driven factories. In a cotton factory it is a question of adding loom to loom or spindle to spindle. Engineering in repairing shops is essentially an individual affair. The real change comes in any country when the iron and steel industries begin to be successful....The development of the metallurgical industries means the real industrial revolution. England, Germany and the United States of America all started their iron and steel industries on the modern scale before they started their textile factories."
>
> *(L.C.A. Knowles, "Economic Development of the Overseas Empire," p. 443.)*

This necessary order for real industrialisation has been still more powerfully shown in the great socialist industrial revolution in the Soviet Union, which concentrated in the first Five-Year Plan on heavy industry in order then, in the second Five-Year Plan, to carry forward the advance in light industry. *India shows the typical inverted economic development of a dependent colonial country.*

If we compare the proportion of the population in industry and agriculture during this period with pre-1914 figures, the low level of the industrial development becomes still more apparent. According to the census returns, the numbers dependent on industry actually decreased between 1911 and 1931 while the numbers dependent on agriculture increased. The proportion of the population returned as dependent upon industry fell from 11.2 per cent in 1911 to 10.49 per cent in 1921 and to 10.38 per cent in 1931.

Even more striking are the official returns of the actual number of workers engaged in industry. These show a marked absolute decline and a heavy relative decline proportionate to the total number of occupied workers.

PROPORTION OF WORKERS ENGAGED IN INDUSTRY (1911-31)

	1911	1921	1931	*% of variation* 1911-31
Population (in millions)	315	319	353	12.1
Working population (in millions)	149	146	154	4.0
Persons employed in industries (in millions) ..	17.5	15.7	15.3	— 12.6
Percentage of workers in industry to the working population	11.7	11.0	10.0	— 9.1
Percentage of industrial workers to the total population	5.5	4.9	4.3	— 21.8

Thus in the twenty years recorded the number of industrial workers fell by over 2 million. While the population increased by 12 per cent, the proportion of those employed in industry decreased by more than 12 per cent, and the percentage of industrial workers to the total population decreased by more than one-fifth.

The returns for the principal industries since 1911 show the same picture of decline:

DECLINING NUMBERS OF WORKERS IN PRINCIPAL INDUSTRIES

	1911	1921	1931
Textiles	4,449,449	4,030,674	4,102,136
Industries of dress and toilet	3,747,755	3,403,842	3,380.824
Wood	1,730,920	1,581,006	1,631,723
Food industries ..	2,134,045	1,653,464	1,476,995
Ceramics	1,159,168	1,085,335	1,024,830

Thus the real picture of India on the eve of the war was a picture of what has been aptly called *"de-industrialisation"* —that is, the decline of the old handicraft industry without the compensating advance of modern industry. The advance of factory industry had not overtaken the decay of handicraft. The process of decay characteristic of the nineteenth century was being carried forward in the twentieth century and in the post-1918 period.

The conclusion is inescapable. The picture of the "industrialisation" of India under imperialist rule is a myth. The overcrowding of agriculture has still further increased in the latest period of imperialist rule.

> "Large as are the few industrial centres, factories furnish direct support for a smaller group than was supported by handicraft before the factory appeared. The country is still annually importing far more manufactures than it exports. While the proportions are gradually changing, Indian economic life is still characterised by the export of raw materials and the import of manufactures. In spite of her factories and her low standard of living, India is less nearly self-sufficient in manufactured products than she was a century ago."
>
> *(D. H. Buchanan, "Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India," 1934, p. 451.)*

The total number of workers under the Factories Act in 1931 was 1.5 million, or less than 1 per cent of the working population; if we add to these the 260,000 miners and the 820,000 railwaymen, the resulting total of 2.6 million industrial workers in modern industry still comes to only 1½ per cent of the working population.

Not only that, but the rate of development since 1914, so far from being marked by rapid industrialisation was in some respects slower than before 1914. The following table shows the advance in the number of workers under the Factories Act (until 1922 the Act applied to concerns employing fifty or more workers, since then to those employing twenty or more, and in some cases ten or more; this alteration, insofar as it affects the figures, is more favourable to the post-war figures, and therefore strengthens the argument):

AVERAGE DAILY NUMBER OF WORKERS IN FACTORIES

1897	..	..	..	421,000
1907	..	..	..	729,000
1914	..	..	..	951,000
1922	..	..	..	1,361,000
1931	..	..	..	1,431,000

In the seventeen years between 1897 and 1914 the number of factory workers increased by 530,000.

In the seventeen years between 1914 and 1931 the number of factory workers increased by 480,000.

Thus not only was the rate of increase in the period since 1914 markedly slower than before 1914, but even the absolute increase was less.

Even in the cotton textile industry, where the advance has been most marked, the advance has been far less in India than in Japan or China. The following table shows the relative growth in the number of spindles in India, Japan and China between 1914 and 1930 (Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 220):

NUMBER OF SPINNING SPINDLES

		1914	1930	*Increase*
India	..	6,397,000	8,807,000	2,410,000
Japan	..	2,414,000	6,837,000	4,423,000
China	..	300,000	3,699,000	3,399,000

In India the advance has been 37 per cent. In Japan and China the advance in the same period has been 188 per cent. In 1914 India had more than twice as many spindles as Japan and China together. By 1930, Japan and China (and much of the Chinese advance has been under Japanese control) totally outstripped India.

What is the reason for this slow advance of industrialisation in India under imperialism? Many as are the reasons in the whole social structure in India for this arrested economic development, the main reason lies in the imperialist system itself, whose working is necessarily hostile to an independent industrial development, and therefore cramps by every means the forces within the Indian people which would otherwise be able to overcome the other obstacles. Therefore all the dreams and promises of industrialisation are continually brought up against overpowering contradictions. The colonial system of imperialism thwarts and retards the economic development of the people in its grip.

These contradictions not only lie in the direct hostility of opposing interests to Indian industrial development, and the determination to hold and increase by every means the dwindling British share in the Indian market; they also lie in the insoluble problems of the home market for Indian industry under the conditions of imperialist exploitation, with the extreme impoverishment of the agricultural population. The tariff system does not solve, but increases this contradiction by the additional burden it throws on the working peasantry. *The industrial question in India cannot be solved apart from the question of agriculture, which involves the foundations of imperialist rule.* Finally, the contradictions lie in the strategic hold of British finance-capital, which, by its command of all the decisive strategic points, is able to hold Indian enterprise at its mercy.

6. THE STRANGLEHOLD OF FINANCE-CAPITAL

While in discussion outside India attention has been widely fixed on the lavish talk of industrialisation, on the tariff concessions and on the weakening British hold in the Indian market, there has been less awareness of the real tightening grip of British finance-capital on Indian economy and its active measures to maintain that grip against Indian advance.

Despite the advance of Indian capital, British capital remains in effectively monopolist domination in banking, commerce, exchange and insurance, in shipping, in the railways, in the tea, coffee and rubber plantations, and in the jute industry (where the now numerically larger Indian capital has been British control). The whole political system works to maintain this domination. In iron and steel industry Indian capital

has been forced to come to terms with British capital. Even in the cotton textile industry, the home of Indian capital, the degree of control of British capital through the "managing-agency" system is considerably greater than is generally realised.

The managing-agency system is peculiar to India and to imperialist enterprise in other parts of Asia, and is one of the leading weapons for maintaining British control of Indian industrial development. By this system a relatively small number of managing-agency firms promote, control and to a considerable extent finance the various industrial companies and enterprises, govern their operations and output, and market their products, the boards of directors of the companies fulfilling only a subordinate or even nominal role. The cream of the profits passes, not to the shareholders, but to the managing agency. According to the evidence given before the Tariff Board Cotton Textile Enquiry in 1927, the commission paid to the managing agents by the Bombay cotton mills during the twenty years 1905-25 averaged 5.2 per cent annually on the paid-up capital. This would be additional to any dividend on shares held by the managing agency, and to commissions by the way on purchases and sales. Cases have been reported in which cotton mills were making a loss, at the same time as the managing agency was drawing a commission bigger than the total loss of the mill it was managing. For example, in 1927 whereas 75 cotton mills of Bombay made a net loss of Rs. 7,36,309, the total allowances and commissions drawn by managing agents were Rs. 30,87,477 (P. S. Lokanathan, "Industrial Organisation in India," 1935, p. 168).

There are both Indian and English managing-agency firms; but the most powerful and oldest established, as well as, naturally, those with the most effective connections with the Government and with London, are English. Firms like Andrew Yule and Co. or Jardine and Skinner are part of the history of British rule in India. In the case of the Bombay cotton industry, the "Report of the Tariff Board Cotton Textile Enquiry" in 1927 revealed a significant picture of the relation of forces on the basis of statistics covering 99 per cent of the Bombay cotton mills (Vol. I, p. 258, appendix xii; the present table was compiled from the information in this appendix and printed in *Labour Research* of June, 1928):

BOMBAY COTTON MILLS

	Mills	*Spindles*	*Looms*	*Capital* (in million rupees)
Companies with English managing agents (9)	27	1,112,114	22,121	98.9
Companies with Indian managing agents (32)	56	2,360,528	51,580	97.7

From this it will be seen that the English managing agents, while they controlled only 22 per cent of the companies, controlled 33 per cent of the mills, 32 per cent of the spindles, 30 per cent of the looms and 50.3 per cent or the actual majority of the capital. This is in the industry which has been the principal field of advance of Indian capital.

The subsequent economic crisis enabled the managing agencies to extend their grip on the mills, and even in some cases to expropriate the Indian shareholders, as was recorded by the Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee in 1931:

> "Although it is true that in times of crisis such as Bombay has been going through, Managing Agents have incurred extensive losses as a direct result of financing the mills under their control, there have been a few cases in which these Agents have turned their loans to the mills into debentures, with the result that the concerns have passed into their hands and the shareholders have lost all their capital invested in the undertaking."
>
> *(Report of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee, 1931, Vol. I. p. 279.)*

The hold of British capital on Indian industry still continues. Though no accurate figures of liquidation of British assets in India are available, as Mr. Hugh Dalton announced in the House of Commons in July 1946, not much transfer to Indian hands has taken place. On the other hand quite a contrary process—penetration of capital in India—has been visible. Foreign companies have opened their subsidiaries in India, registered in India. The giant concerns like Lever Brothers, Dunlop, Imperial Chemicals have their Indian subsidiaries. And the number of these "India Limiteds" is daily growing. The Commerce Member to the Government of India announced in the 1945 budget session of the Central Legislature that during the four years ending 1942-43, five companies registered outside British India with the words "India

Limited" at the end of their names established places of business in India. Moreover in the five years ending 1943-44, 108 "India Limiteds" were registered in India covering every kind of industry. As Professors Wadia and Merchant have remarked, the non-Indian factories backed up with a big capital have started colossal production of matches, cigarettes, soaps, boots and shoes, rubber, chemicals, etc., driving the Indian concerns to the wall. Not only do they compete with large-scale industries but they also threaten our (Indian) small-scale industries" (Wadia and Merchant, "Our Economic Problem," 1945, p. 466).

With regard to the growing menace of these "India Limiteds" to Indian industry, the Bombay Industrial and Economic Enquiry Committee, observed in their report published in 1940 :

> "If it is the objective of our industrial policy to encourage the establishment of small concerns, then the objective is defeated....if these large foreign concerns are permitted to establish themselves without reasonable and effective limitation." (Report, 1940, p. 168.)

Most important, however, for the controlling power of British finance-capital is the role of the foreign banking system working in conjunction with the Government's financial and exchange policy. To talk of independent Indian capitalist development, so long as financial power remains monopolised in British hands, is, and can only be, an empty illusion.

The modern banking system in India is organised through four types or groups of institutions.

(1) The Reserve Bank of India, established by the Act of 1934 and functioning since 1935, constitutes the apex of the pyramid. This bank, like the Bank of England, is privately owned and controlled, but holds in its hands the issue of currency, the regulation of exchange and the conduct of the Government's banking and remittance business, and thus controls credit in the same way as the Bank of England. The Governor, two Deputy Governors, and five Directors are nominated by the Government, but only six of these eight have voting power; as against these six votes of the Government's nominees, eight Directors are privately elected, with eight votes. Thus it is protected by law from political control. The object of setting up this new Central Bank in 1935, at the same time as the Government of India Act, was to ensure that,

even if the path of constitutional reform should eventually bring a partial expression of Indian opinion into the central government, the citadel of financial power should remain inaccessible, or, in the words of the London *Times* (February 11, 1928), protected from "political pressure from which credit and currency ought to be wholly free." That the majority of elected members on the Board of Directors is just a facade and the real control lies in the hands of the Government is clear from the manner in which the Reserve Bank of India succumbed to the will of the imperialist policy during the war and functioned merely as a Government Department. Reviewing the first ten years of the functioning of the Reserve Bank, the *Eastern Economist* writes:

> "The Reserve Bank has thus done its duty admirably as the technical executor of the decisions made for it by the Government....On all available evidence and reasonable inference from its doings, we are compelled to remark that the Central Board of the Reserve Bank has not got the full measure of its responsibility....The real truth is that the Government's intention was that the Bank should be free, not from political but from popular control."
>
> *("Eastern Economist" May 25, 1945.)*

(2) The Imperial Bank of India, established by the Act of 1920 by the amalgamation of three former Presidency Banks, and functioning since 1921. This is also privately owned and controlled, though statutorily established, with an authorised capital of £9 million. It was originally designed as the Central Bank, combining the issue of currency and the role of the Government's banker with commercial functions. By the amending Act of 1934 it acts now in unison with the Reserve Bank, while continuing commercial functions. With nearly four hundred branches and sub-agencies, and holding nearly one-third of all bank deposits in India, it dominates banking in India. Of the directorate in 1936 eleven were English and four Indian.[1]

[1]Of the total paid-up share capital of the Imperial Bank of India in 1930, amounting to 56.25 million rupees, according to the information supplied by the Managing Director of the Bank to the Central Banking Enquiry Committee, 28.4 million were held by "non-Indians" and 27.8 million by "Indians" (Report, Vol. II, p. 264). This gives an absolute majority to the "non-Indians"; in fact a much smaller proportion, held in the hands of a few controlling English holders in influential positions, would be sufficient to secure the full effective English control that exists.

(3) The Exchange Banks, or private British and foreign banks in India. These are banks having headquarters outside India, and are wholly non-Indian in character.[1] They control the financing of the export and import trade. There were sixteen in number in 1943, the most important being the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, the Mercantile Bank of India, the National Bank of India, the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, and Lloyds. They hold nearly one-fifth of bank deposits in India.

(4) The Indian Joint Stock Banks, or private banks registered in India, come at the bottom of the pyramid. Here alone Indian capital is able to play a part; but even here some, such as the Allahabad Bank, which is one of the largest and is now affiliated to the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, have fallen under foreign control, so that their total strength cannot be taken as a measure of Indian banking strength. They have had to face heavy difficulties, and have had a number of failures, including those of the People's Bank of India, the Indian Specie Bank and the Alliance Bank of Simla. Between 1922 and 1928 no less than 100 Indian banks failed (*Economist*, April 12, 1930).

The proportion of deposits held by the three groups of banks—the Imperial Bank of India (before 1921, the three Presidency Banks), the Exchange Banks and the Indian Joint Stock Banks—in 1913, 1920 and 1934 is seen in the following table:

BANK DEPOSITS

(in million rupees)

	Imperial Bank of India (or Presidency Banks)		Exchange Banks		Indian Joint Stock Banks	
	Amount	Per Cent	Amount	Per Cent	Amount	Per Cent
1913 ..	424	43.5	310	31.8	241	24.7
1920 ..	870	36.9	748	31.6	735	31.6
1934 ..	749	33.6	714	32.0	768	34.4

It will be seen that the English and foreign banks, the Imperial Bank of India and Exchange Banks, dominate the situation. Further, the main advance of the Indian Joint Stock Banks, from one-quarter to one-third of total deposits, took place between 1913 and 1920. Since then there has been a very slow advance of the Indian Joint Stock Banks; and when allowance

[1] In 1939 the establishment of the Central Exchange Bank of India by the Central Bank of India represented the first attempt of Indian banking to enter this field.

is made for a section of these falling under foreign control, during this period, there has more probably been an actual retrogression from the standpoint of Indian capital.

The position has not much changed even during the war years. Let us compare the deposits held by the three groups of banks after 1938.

DEPOSITS[1] (in million rupees)

	1938	1941	1942	1943
1. Imperial Bank of India	815.1	1089.2	1634.6	2145.3
2. Exchange Banks ..	672.0	1067.3	1168.5	1401.9
Total Foreign Banks ..	1487.1	2156.5	2803.1	3547.2
3. Scheduled Banks ..	918.7	1290.4	1893.4	3196.5
4. Non-Scheduled Banks	149.4	200.5	290.1	402.3
Total Indian Joint Stock Banks ..	1068.1	1490.9	2183.5	3598.8

The above table shows the dominating position of the Imperial and Exchange Banks over the entire Indian Joint Stock Banking, right up till 1943. Only in 1943, the Indian Banks catch up and their deposits are about 1½ per cent more than the deposits of the Imperial and Exchange Banks.

That the British control of banking in India has been used to the detriment of Indian industrial and independent economic development, and for the benefit of British interests, is the strongly voiced complaint of Indian industrialists. As typical may be taken the statement of T.C. Goswami appended to the External Capital Committee's Report:

> "I should like to express the common belief—for which I know there is a good foundation in actual facts—that racial and political discrimination is made in the matter of credit, and that Indians usually do not receive in matters of credit the treatment that their assets entitle them to, while on the other hand, British business men have frequently been allowed larger credit than what on ordinary business principles they ought to have got."
>
> *(T. C. Goswami, Minute appended to the External Capital Committee's Report, p. 24.)*

[1]The figures in this table are taken from the Reserve Bank of India's publication, "Statistical Tables relating to Banks in India and Burma for the years 1942 and 1943."

But, as Sir Badridas Goenka, President of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has remarked, whatever increase in production took place in India during the war arose "from the reckless over-working of existing plant and machinery, and more man-hour shifts, without, except to a minor extent, the setting up of additional productive capacity as in other belligerent countries" (*Eastern Economist*, March 5, 1946).

Before the war, Indian industry was suffering from surplus unutilized capacity. For example, there was three-fourths to two-thirds excess capacity in the jute industry. According to an estimate of the Bombay Millowners' Association, out of 389 equipped cotton mills in the country, 22 were partially or completely idle in the year ending 1939 (P. C. Jain, "India Builds Her War Economy," 1943, p. 4). During the war, in the first instance this excess capacity was utilized and later more and more strain was put on the existing machinery. Practically no import of capital goods were allowed, not only to start new industries, but even to re-equip the existing industries. The resulting strain is evident from a few instances. Take railway transport, for example. As compared to pre-war years a passenger train carried 32 per cent more load and a goods train 8½ per cent more; engines had to run more than double the pre-war distance before they went into the shed; approximately 29 per cent over-age engines and a large number of over-age wagons were kept in service without replacement (*Eastern Economist*, Feburary 15, 1946). Take the cotton textile industry. To-day fifty per cent of the weaving machinery stands in need of replacement. Of blow-room machinery, for instance, 11.5 per cent of the total now in use in the industry was installed prior to 1890, 11.1 per cent between 1906-10, 18.6 per cent between 1921-25 and 11.4 per cent between 1936-40; of the existing draw and speed frames, 35.5 per cent was laid down earlier than 1910 (*ibid*, July 7, 1944). And it was this old equipment which had to cope with the intensified war demand. Under the false plea of lack of shipping space, through control of capital issues, etc., the Government saw to it that practically no capital goods were allowed into India during the war.

Even at the risk of sabotaging the war effort no serious attempt was made at all to mobilize the vast resources[1] of the

[1] In this connection the remarks of the American Technical

country. Not only was the establishment of the motor car industry and the ship-building industry prevented by refusing facilities for import of machinery and guarantees of purchase for the military; even the recommendations of the American Technical Mission (which also expressed itself definitely and categorically against setting up of any basic industry like the hydro-electric projects, air-crafts, ship-building, broad-gauge locomotives, etc.,) were not accepted by the Government of India.

The American Technical Mission found "horse shoes, steel tips for army boots, and railroad switch gear being produced in a ship-repair plant at Bombay, while more than 100 ships waited in the harbour for major and minor repairs" (Report, page 3). The Mission recommended, besides improvements in almost all other industries, proper repairing of ships and planes in India, and production of meter-gauge locomotives and of freight cars and other essential rolling stocks. The Mission promised to secure from the U.S.A. all the required machinery and technical help. They observed:

> "The expansion of industrial production in India is to be based at least in part on Lend-Lease material from the United States and upon the advice of technicians from this country."
>
> *(Report of the American Technical Mission, p. 6.)*

The Government, however, not only refused to implement the basic recommendations of the Mission, even with the help of the American technicians and machinery, but put a stamp of close secrecy on the report itself.

Dominions like Canada and Australia were helped to set up basic industries and raise their level of economic development. But the character of Indian economy remained what it was; heavy industries remained undeveloped.

For this policy of checking India's growth, mainly the services of the Eastern Group Supply Council were utilized. This body, with its seat in India, was convened to pool and coordinate distribution of war supplies from various Empire

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Mission are worth noting. In the concluding paragraph of their Report, the Mission calls "attention to India's great potentialities for industrial production because of its vital natural and human resources. The Mission feels that the utilization of the natural resources can be greatly developed and expanded, provided adequate tools are made available for that purpose and it has seen evidence of the mechanical aptitude of Indian workmen who, given the proper incentives and working conditions, can become skilled craftsmen after a short period of training."

countries. And it was through this body itself that, under the plea of avoiding duplication among Empire countries, the Government ensured that the cause of Indian industries should not be furthered. The Eastern Group Supply Council, with a Government official as India's representative, made the greatest conscious discrimination in placing orders for war supplies with various countries. Sir M. Visvesvaraya, President, All-India Manufacturers' Organisation, has observed :

> "The orders for products required for the present war seem to have been distributed among the various belligerent countries within the Empire on the advice of the Roger Mission and the Eastern Group Supply Conference. According to the arrangements made, only a few products which required no superior technical skill or practice seem to have been assigned to factories and industrialists in India. Products requiring heavy industries or higher technical skill were allotted to the United States of America and the Dominions of Canada and Australia."
>
> *(M. Visvesvaraya, "Prosperity Through Industry," 1943, p. 15.)*

This retrograde aim and functioning of the Eastern Group Supply Council was duly taken account of with great relief by British vested interests as early as December 1940. The *Railway Gazette* of London wrote as follows about the visit of Mr. Guy Locock, representative of the British Board of Trade, to the session of the Eastern Group Supply Council held in October 1940 :

> "As the Board of Trade representative on the Mission he (Guy Locock) was entrusted with the task of appraising future effects on British industry of the war production expansion now being undertaken, always keeping in mind the necessity for giving priority to vital war needs ....At the same time Mr. Locock holds the view that no steps have been taken to expand production as a result of the Mission's visit which are not essential for war purposes and that on the whole post-war interests in India of British industry are not likely to suffer so greatly as was at one time expected."
>
> *(Quoted in Sir M. Visvesvaraya's "Reconstruction in Post-War India," 1944, p. 15.)*

The American Technical Mission also thought that on account of a change in the military situation, the "clearance

through the Council of purchases from the Government of India on behalf of overseas commands, therefore, would seem no longer to serve a useful purpose." Accordingly, the Mission recommended that "orders from overseas placed on India should be handled directly by the Supply Department of India without prior clearance through the Eastern Group Supply Council" and that the latter be continued merely "as an agency for assembling and co-ordinating information on production and supply." (Report, p. 7)

The Government of India, however, and, naturally enough, for reasons noted above, replied in the negative. In their memorandum on the Mission's Report the Government of India observed that under the constitution of the Eastern Group Supply Council, "the Council is *required* to allocate the demands, and cannot well divest itself of this duty."

Not only did the Government of India prevent development of basic industries in India, they even directly helped the foreign concerns through various other jobs. For instance, the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation, started during the war with a paid-up capital of £5 million, was given the sole monopoly of trade with the various countries. Moreover, the contracts for even the assemblage of motor vehicles in India were given almost in their entirety to the assembly plants of the two United States companies—General Motors and Ford.

Rather than have an industrial growth, during this whole period India has suffered exploitation on a scale unprecedented in the history of the British rule. Even more than in previous wars, a very heavy burden was placed on the shoulders of the Indian people. In November, 1939, His Majesty's Government in Britain concluded a financial agreement with their agents, the India Government, for sharing out the defence expenditure with India. According to the terms of this agreement, of the total defence expenditure incurred in India, India was to bear :

(i) a fixed annual sum representing India's normal peace-time defence expenditure, placed at 367.7 million rupees, plus,

(ii) an addition to this basic figure on account of rise in prices, plus,

(iii) the cost of such war measures as may have been undertaken by India in her own interests, and,

(iv) a lump sum payment of ten million rupees as India's share towards the cost of troops overseas engaged in the Imperial defence.

India was to pay for the raising, training, equipping and maintaining of all land forces raised in India so long as they stayed in India and were available for the local defence of India. When they left for overseas, the cost of raising and training them, and also of equipping them, would be recovered from His Majesty's Government who would assume all further liability for them.

Besides this, Britain also agreed to pay the cost of all goods and services supplied to the foreign troops stationed in India, expenses on account of which increased immensely after the entry of Japan into the war.

This agreement, apparently fair and just, and meant not to saddle India with financial burdens for the Empire's defence, was in fact, only a device which served in a less obvious fashion to pin the burden on to India.

The three members of the same family, His Majesty's Government in Britain, the India Government and the Reserve Bank of India, agreed together that the Reserve Bank should issue more and more paper notes in India in lieu of all such and other payments incurred on behalf of His Majesty's Government, and that the latter would go on crediting the sterling counterpart of the amount in the books of the Bank of England. Thus the entire agreement was reduced to a mere promise to pay and India was made to bear the brunt of the heavy cost incurred.

The strain on Indian economy can be seen by putting together the figures of India's defence expenditure and the expenditure incurred on behalf of His Majesty's Government.

Expenditure regarded under the agreement as India's defence expenditure rose to stupendous heights, in some years to nearly one-third of the total pre-war national income.

INDIA'S DEFENCE EXPENDITURE

(In million rupees)

Year	*On Capital Account*	*On Revenue Account*	*Total*
1939-40 ..	—	495.4	495.4
1940-41 ..	—	736.1	736.1
1941-42 ..	—	1039.3	1039.3
1942-43 ..	525.1	2146.2	2671.3

1943-44 ..	374.6	3584.0	3958.6
1944-45 ..	628.3	3954.9	4583 2*
1945-46* ..	149.3	3764.2	3913.5
Total ..	1677.3	15720.1	17397.4

* Revised Estimates.

(Reserve Bank of India: "Report on Currency and Finance, 1945-46".)

The war expenditure supposedly recoverable from His Majesty's Government also ran into a similar amount:

RECOVERABLE WAR EXPENDITURE[1]

Year	*(In million rupees)*
1939-40	40.0
1940-41	530.0
1941-42	1940.0
1942-43	3254.0
1943-44	3778.7
1944-45	4108.4
1945-46*	3470.7
Total	17,121.8

*Revised Estimates.

(ibid, p. 48.)

The entire amount of sterling balances was kept out of reach of the Indian people during the whole war period. The amount was not available to India for any transactions, in goods or gold. The balances went on piling up but not a fraction was available to India for import of necessary machinery, etc.

Britain made the best of her status as India's master. Unlike what happened to British investments in other contries, against these sterling balances even the liquidation of British and foreign investments in India was not permitted. Only the Public Debt (sterling) of India to the extent of £323.4 million was permitted to be repatriated, the remaining balance of £1,273.5 million or practically 4 times this age-old

[1]This bill of war expenditure was rendered enormous by the debacle of British imperialist policy in the Far East, a policy of denying political power to the colonial people, a policy of refusing to mobilize the entire resources of these countries by winning their active support and confidence.

debt still lay with the Bank of England. After the war proposals were put forward for partially repudiating or "scaling down" this debt under various pretexts. An Anglo-American understanding for this purpose was reached as one of the terms of the Anglo-American Financial Agreement in 1946.

In addition, the imperialist rulers pocketed India's dollar reserves as well. An arrangement called the "Dollar Pool Arrangement" was effected during the war, by which all countries of the "Sterling Area" were compelled to pool together the entire dollar reserves, which they might earn by selling goods to the United States. India and the other countries could not buy directly from the United States on the strength of these dollar reserves which could only be utilised by the United Kingdom Government to finance war purchases. Even the exact amount is not made known and there exists a wide disparity in regard to the estimates of India's dollar reserves.

The United States Department of Commerce reveals that during the four years 1942-45, India had an appreciable favourable balance of trade with the United States, to the extent of $421 million. Mr. Manu Subedar has stated that Rs. 1,140 million worth of dollars are still lying to the credit of India. The *Eastern Economist* of 8th March, 1946, estimated that uptil October, 1945, India had paid in at least $900 million to the Empire Dollar Pool. The Finance Member to the Government of India, however, put the figure of India's net contribution to the Empire Dollar Pool at Rs. 492 million only till March 1945.

Thus, till March 1945, India's dollar contributions amounted to anything between about Rs. 1,000 and 2,000 million and the balance has been growing ever since. But the reserves successfully kept away form being utilized for import of capital goods with a view to industrialise India, are not being released for use by India, even to-day. In his Budget speech in 1946, the Finance Member, still tried to show to the Indian people how it was in their interests to maintain the dollar pool!

This whole method of imperialist war finance, through the issue of more and more currency notes, had very serious repercussions on the Indian economy. India came out of the war heavily impoverished and economically weakened. The real incidence of the war burden has fallen on the already, starving masses of the people.

Let us first take the extent to which resort to currency inflation was taken.

NOTES IN CIRCULATION

	(In million rupees)
August 1939	1,788.9
1939-40	2,092.2
1940-41	2,414.1
1941-42	3,076.8
1942-43	5,134.4
1943-44	7,771.7
1944-45	9,686.9
1945-46	11,626.4
28th March 1947	12,420.3

The above table taken from the Reports of the Reserve Bank of India shows that the note issue increased by practically 600 per cent during the war years (and the process still continues); whereas, the index of industrial activity which stood at 114.0 in 1939-40 went to a maximum of 132.5 (Jan. 1945) during the war.

As a result of this inflation, the industrialists and war contractors made huge profits.

Let us take the profits of the Textile industry. Though all-India data for total profits of the industry as a whole are not available, the figures for Bombay mills are in general a good indication. The profits earned by Bombay cotton mills were 69.4 million rupees in 1941, showing an increase of 1,288 per cent over 1940. Profits earned by a few selected mills in Bombay showed an increase of 2,250 per cent over the 1940 figure (Wadia and Merchant, "Our Economic Problem," 1945, p. 270). Fifteen leading cotton mills of Bombay made a total of 9 million rupees of profits in 1940, 29.5 million in 1941, 80.5 million in 1942, 175.2 million in 1943 and 130.6 million rupees in 1944[1] (H. T. Parekh, *Commerce*, July 7, 1945).

According to calculations made by Prem Sagar Gupta, 61 cotton mills of Bombay island, with a total paid-up capital of 139.3 million rupees, made a net profit of 6½ times this amount in 5 war years. Annual average for these years came to more than 26 times the 1939 profits.[1]

The same picture is reflected by the following index of profits even though the figures relate to profits per concern and not to the industry as a whole.

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[1]Net profits here are taken after working expenses, agents' commissions and remunerations, and depreciation have been allowed for.

INDEX NUMBER OF AVERAGE NET PROFITS (Per Concern)

(Base 1939 equal to 100)

	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943
Jute ..	100	590	617	896	926
Cotton ..	100	73	205	313	645
Tea ..	100	118	214	252	392
Sugar ..	100	143	122	160	218
Coal ..	100	88	107	95	124
Engineering	100	115	180	36	225
Miscellaneous	100	104	326	394	401
All kinds ..	100	127	282	259	327

(M. H. Gopal, "Industrial Profits Since 1939," Eastern Economist, May 12, 1944, p. 730.)

Even the official index of profits (given by the Economic Adviser to the Government of India), obviously understated and available only up to 1942, the year of maximum inflation and hence profits being 1943, cannot conceal the real trend.

INDEX NUMBER OF PROFITS

(Base 1928 equal to 100)

	1939	1942
Cotton	154.6	760.7
Jute	13.6	49.2
Tea	96.2	219.5
Coal	139.1	110.3
Sugar	179.4	219.8
Iron and Steel ..	289.3	403.3
Paper	151.8	488.4
Total of all industries ..	72.4	169.4

This whole process brought untold miseries and sufferings to the mass of workers and peasants. For six long years people in India had to bear hardships of manifold wage cuts, food and cloth scarcities and countrywide famines and destitution.

The index of wholesale prices of food articles, as given by the Government of India, rose from 100.0 in August 1939 to 122.9 in August 1941, 163.2 in August 1942, 300.2 in July 1943. It fell to 233.0 in January 1944 but the fall was due mainly to control prices being fixed at rates lower than the ones in the market. After that the index fluctuated little, that for December 1945 being 238.8. The end of the war saw an even greater

rise, the index reaching its peak in January 1947 at 276.0. Actually the rise in prices was much greater, for goods were rarely available at controlled rates. The black market had become a countrywide normal phenomenon.

Retail prices rose even higher. For example, in Bombay the price of milk went up from 2 annas per *lb.* to one rupee to two rupees per *lb.*; tomatoes from 2 annas per *lb.* to 10 annas per *lb.*; potatoes from one anna per *lb.* to 4 annas per *lb.* Price of wheat in U.P., a major wheat producing area, rose from about Rs. 4 per maund in pre-war days to Rs. 18 per maund in July 1946. The price of bread rose from 1 anna for an 8-ounce loaf before the war to 2½ annas for a 6-ounce loaf.

Price of drill cloth which was 7 annas per *lb.* before the war reached 42 annas per lb. in June 1943. Prices of food grains rose from an index of 93 in September 1939 to 530 in September 1943.[1]

The working-class Cost of Living Index (calculated mostly at control rates), in the case of Bombay, for example, rose from 100 in August 1939 to 238 in August 1944, fell to 214 in March 1945, and rose again to 266 in December 1946. In the case of Ahmedabad, it went up as high as 329 in October 1943; December 1946 index being 296. In other centres, the rise was even greater. With the same base (August 1939—100), the December 1946 figure was 326 for Lahore, 308 for Jubbulpore, 345 for Cawnpore, 347 for Jalgaon and 314 for Sholapore.

As against this, the earnings of the workers went up very little. Employers in all the industries refused to pay dearness allowance in proportion to the rise in the cost of living. Figures given by the Government of India in their monthly publication, *Indian Labour Gazette,* although not very reliable, show that in 1945, the rise over 1939 in the total annual earnings (including all allowances) of the workers was 109.1 per cent in the case of textiles, under 147.9 per cent in the case of engineering, only 77.6 per cent in the case of Government ordnance factories, and as low as 31.6 per cent in the case of mining.

The cut in the real wages of the workers becomes even more alarming in view of their normal starvation wage.

As we shall see later, the condition of the mass of rural population was no better; the index of rural prices went up even higher than the prices in urban areas.

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[1]P. S. Lokanathan, "India's Post-War Reconstruction and its International Aspects," 1946, p. 31.

Thus, mainly because of the imperialist attitude towards Indian economy—an attitude of keeping India a backward colonial country, unlike the other Allied and Dominion countries—India came out of the war much poorer than she entered it. Not only was the opportunity of building Indian economy lost, but as a result of the wartime strain, the economic situation in India during the years following the second world war has been marked by increasingly critical conditions, soaring inflation, rising prices and mass distress.

8. ALLIANCE OF IMPERIALIST AND INDIAN MONOPOLIES

The maintenance, defence and strengthening of British vested interests in India has formed the consistent objective of imperialist policy in India. The successive constitutional plans and political manoeuvres have always been directed to this primary objective. Even with the latest Mountbatten settlement of 1947, and the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan, an examination of actual economic relations would show that, behind the formal facade of Indian independence, British imperialism has still sought to maintain its economic domination, and to control and limit Indian economic development in the interests of imperialism.

But in the critical years following the second world war this basic imperialist policy has had to seek new forms and methods not only in the political field, but also in the economic field. Changing economic conditions, especially the weakening of British capitalism, the aggressive advance of American capitalism, and the relative growth in strength on a very much lower level, of the Indian capitalist class, have compelled new developments. The legacy of controlling and restricting Indian economic development in the best interests of imperialism has been carried forward into the post-war period along new paths and through new forms. These new forms have found typical expression in the deals with Indian industrialists for the joint flotation of Indo-British and also Indo-American concerns.

Despite continuing contradictions, a measure of alliance has developed between the most powerful imperialist monopolies and leading Indian monopolies — an alliance, not of equals, but with the Indian monopolists in the junior position and not excluding antagonism, but expressing a degree of com-

promise in the business field and of political co-operation against the rising mass revolt. These Big Business deals, which developed from 1945 onwards, were the economic background of the new constitutional agreements which found expression in the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan.

Although the war brought great impoverishment and suffering to the people of India, it enriched enormously the top levels of Indian business men, merchants, contractors and big industrialists. As illustrated in the preceding section, gigantic war profits were piled up. As a result of these tremendous war profits, the Indian capitalist class emerged from the war in possession of huge capital resources seeking immediate development. On the other hand, this accumulation of capital had not been based on any serious productive economic development or industrial advance during the war. The contradiction between the inflated wealth of the Indian capitalist class and the low level of Indian economic development was glaring. As the organ of Indian Big Business wrote in the latter part of 1944:

> "Her (India's) industries are pigmies in a world of giants...Her economy has been particularly vulnerable to the onslaughts of powerful foreign combines. The dominating position which foreign corporations, such as the Swedish Match Company, Lever Brothers, the Burma-Shell group, the Dunlop Company, the Imperial Tobacco Company, and last but not least, the Imperial Chemical Industries, have established for themselves in important sections of Indian industry are too glaring to be missed."
> *("Eastern Economist," October 13, 1944.)*

Hence the demand of the Indian capitalist interests for industrialisation and for new openings for investment reached extreme intensity at the close of the war. By virtue of their increased accumulation of capital, and even buying out of many minor British interests, they felt on much stronger ground and it was not until later that the negotiations over the sterling balances revealed the real weakness of their position, and the flimsy basis of much of their wartime gains. Many unofficial programmes were put forward for large-scale industrial development, of which the best known was one put forward by representatives of the Tata combine and other top-rank industrialists — "A Plan of Economic Development for India," commonly known as the Bombay Plan—through the execution of which they proposed to double the national in-

come in fifteen years. The weaknesses of this plan lay in the under-estimation of the role of imperialism, the inability to tackle the basic agrarian problem, and the proposed methods of financing which would have laid crushing burdens on the people. Nevertheless, however reactionary, the Plan attracted countrywide attention because it reflected the strong irresistible urge for industrialisation. Moreover, the Indian industrialists felt themselves to be in a stronger position, because they believed they could look increasingly to American capital for aid, and thus enjoy a certain bargaining strength in relation to British capital.

British imperialism could not afford to ignore these changes. In the course of a debate in the House of Commons, Professor A. V. Hill, M.P., (Conservative) and Secretary of Royal Society, declared:

> "There is a chance of co-operating with Indian industry if we show courage, generosity and vision, but the alternative to our not showing those qualities is not that Indian industry will not develop, but that Indians will turn to America and not to us for help."
>
> *("Indian Annual Register," 1944, Vol. II, p. 302.)*

Hence, taking cognizance of these new developments, British imperialism was forced to change the form of its opposition to the growth of Indian industries. No less in the economic field than in the political, imperialism sought to adapt itself to the new era. British vested interests could now be preserved in India only through a compromise with the Indian bourgeoisie; the attack on Indian industrialisation needed to be planned only from within, rather than without; India could be maintained as a safe market for British manufactured goods only with the help of the Indian monopolists. Thus under the plea of giving India the much-needed technical help imperialism adopted new tactics to safeguard its financial interests, a tactics of entering into partnerships with the Indian industrialists. A new theory of mutual reliance, oneness of interests is advanced by imperialism. But as we shall see later, all the recent pronouncements and developments bring out the crystal-clear fact that through these joint partnerships imperialism has sought to strengthen its financial and economic hold on India rather than quit; through these agreements rather than permit an independent economic growth in India, an inner sabotage of Indian industrial development has been planned and brought about.

Explaining the new imperialist policy Sir Archibald Rowlands, ex-Finance Member to the Government of India, declared on the eve of his departure from India, that whatever the future political relationship between the two countries, it would be to their mutual benefit "to draw tighter than in the past the bonds in the fields of industry, commerce and culture" (*Commerce*, Bombay, June 8, 1946).

Quite a frank statement, however, came from Lord Wavell, who while trying to re-assure the British financial interests that the "commercial safeguards" provided in the India Act of 1935 will not be removed, expressed the desirability of Indo-British partnership as the best device for complete future safety. In his address to the Associated Chambers of Commerce, Calcutta on December 10, 1945, Lord Wavell declared :

> "I do not think that there is any likelihood of the complete removal of the safeguarding clauses of the Act until there is a general revision of the Constitution Act and a commercial treaty between Great Britain and India; but the Government of India is aware of the natural desire of Indians to develop and control the basic industries with their own capital and management as far as possible; and will not disregard it. To my mind, however, goodwill and cordial relations are of greater importance to both British and Indian business than clauses in an Act; and the establishment of such relations is at present and will in the future be the real safeguard for the interests of both. I firmly believe that co-operation between British and Indian enterprise in an atmosphere of goodwill provides the best means for the industrial development of India in the quickest and most-fruitful manner."
>
> *("Times of India," December 11, 1945.)*

Lest it be thought that this might only represent a benevolent plea for mutual co-operation, the more specific demands of British capitalism were voiced by a number of other spokesmen.

Capital, the organ of British finance in India, wrote on November 15, 1945 :

> "British business has no intention of being just run out of the country, either now or in the hereafter....even though in the eyes of some it may be cast for a subordinate

role in the future, it will not consent to be drummed out of a country into whose prosperity it has made an abiding contribution."

Sir Renwick Haddow, President of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, declared on the 10th December, 1945:

> "There were many industrialists in the United Kingdom who would be prepared to erect factories in India with lasting benefits to the country if they were assured of a fair deal but they were naturally not willing to supply the money for someone else to appropriate and spend. It could not be a one-sided arrangement with Britain providing the capital goods and experts, and the community being discouraged from bringing Britons out to India to launch new enterprises to manage them and the existing ones."
>
> *("Times of India," December 11, 1945.)*

Professor A. V. Hill, Secretary of the Royal Society, gave expression to British demands in more specific terms:

> "They (i.e. Indians) have to realise, however, that British industry is not going to do these things for love only. I do not think they can expect British industry to erect by its skill and its resources something which it is to have only a minor share in controlling. If they want to develop, they must go equal shares with the people here. Going halves seems a fair proposition."
>
> *("Bharat Jyoti," April 1, 1946.)*

Sir T. Ainscough, ex-British Trade Commissioner for India, Burma and Ceylon, speaking at a meeting of British capitalists, quite frankly enumerated the vantage points which British Big Business occupies *vis-a-vis* the Indian business:

> "....giving full weight to our unique experience of Indian trade and the peculiar needs of the country, our vested interests in the market, our unrivalled business contacts and the reputation to which must now be *added advantages from our debtor position,* it is surely not too much to hope India may once again become our greatest export market."
>
> *("Bombay Chronicle," March 5, 1945—italics added.)*

A number of deals between Indian and British monopolies, and also between Indian and American monopolies, took place from 1945 onwards.

In June 1945 an agreement was reached between Birla Brothers Ltd.—one of the largest Indian monopoly concerns.—and Nuffield Organization in England for the manufacture of motor cars in India. The Birla-Nuffield deal as reported in sections of the press (the actual terms have not been published) was to provide for the establishment of a joint company in India, Nuffields to have a share in the capital to the extent of 25 to 30 per cent, a fair share in the profits, royalties for patents, etc. Nuffield Organization is also to "manufacture and supply the technical parts which could not be economically made in India and Nuffields' technicians are apparently to decide which components should be made in Britain and which in India." (*"Capital," January 3, 1946.*)

In December 1945, a similar agreement was concluded between the Tatas, a big monopoly concern in India, and Imperial Chemical Industries (I.C.I.), Britain's largest monopoly, for the establishment of a heavy chemical industry in India. Reports in the press indicate that I.C.I. will subscribe 24 per cent of the capital, and the remainder will be largely taken up by the Tatas; moreover, "until such time as domestic manufacture is able to meet domestic requirements in full, the dye-stuffs marked indigenously and those imported by I.C.I. will be sold jointly." (*A.P.I.* message, December 22, 1945.) And this period is suggested to be fifteen to twenty years.

Similar Indo-American business joint arrangements were signalised by the Birla-Studebaker deal, the Walchand-Chrysler deal, the National Rayon Corporation, etc.

Besides these deals with Indian big and middle business, British imperialists planned to develop the autocratic Indian States as their main future base. They sought to send more and more British capital to the Indian States with or without the participation of the Princely administrations. The Government of India made a special provision for industrial development of States in their statement on industrial policy issued in April, 1945. The statement reads :

> "It is equally clear that the administration of the licensing system must be such as to assure Indian States that their legitimate desire for industrial development is not overlooked."
>
> (*"Hindustan Times," April 23, 1945.*)

Capital, organ of British financial interests in India, in an editorial on January 24, 1946, gave a very frank expression to British aims:

> "All (States) are anxious to attract industrial enterprise to within their borders, and the outlook in British India sometimes appears so unpromising that there must be occasions when the sponsors of new industrial projects are strongly tempted to escape from the political turmoil and the rising clamour of Party and Union demands to the comparative quietude of an Indian State, where by tradition and background the ruling authority may be expected to be sympathetic to the desire of the industrialist to run his concern without undue interference from outside."

And this assurance was given by the Princely India. Mr. H. S. Malik, Prime Minister of Patiala State and leader of the Indian States' Industrial Delegation to United Kingdom, which followed the Delegation of the Indian Industrialists, openly favoured collaboration with advanced foreign industrialists on a basis of partnership. Mr. Malik says:

> "What we feel is that when you get an industrialist from England or America and he has a stake in industry here—whatever it is 30 or 40 per cent—he will be definitely interested in the success of that industry. I don't see how you can expect the whole-hearted collaboration of skilled, experienced and advanced industrialists, unless you are prepared to trust them to that extent."
>
> *("Times of India," January 17, 1946.)*

Mir Maqbul Ahmed, Secretary to the Indian Chamber of Princes, declared in an article in *Asiatic Review*:

> "There is also much scope for Indo-British partnership in the industrial development of the States."

A number of Indian States came in the field, entering into partnerships with British financiers.

The Hyderabad trade delegation which visited the United Kingdom in the summer of 1946

> "placed orders for capital goods, largely machinery for textile and hydro-electric projects, to the extent of Rs. 82,000,000....

"One private concern in Hyderabad, negotiating through a member of the Mission, has successfully concluded an agreement by which the largest manufacturers of textile machinery undertake to install a full plant for the manufacture of textile machinery in Hyderabad. The firm in question is Lansil of Manchester, a group of ten other manufacturing firms.

"By this agreement, the Manchester firm has undertaken to provide equipments, blue-prints and drawings, supply high-grade key technicians and also arrange for the training of the Indian personnel. And in the erection of another cellulose acetate rayon factory in Hyderabad the Indian personnel will be taught the Lansil spinning process."

("Amrita Bazar Patrika," January 15, 1946.)

Hyderabad announced its Godavari Valley Project. It proposed to build up hydro-electric works, iron and steel works, textile factories, and 40 to 70 per cent of the capital was offered by the British.

The Travancore State, too, sold all rights for the development of its rich thorium sands to a British firm.

As is clear from the above, imperialism sought to make the future of British finance-capital in India secure by digging its ground deeper and deeper into the Indian soil. Through a compromise with Indian industrialists care was taken to see that British investments in India would always remain safe. The desired reactions were quickly visible. Speaking about the British capital in India, Mr. G. D. Birla, India's top-rank monopolist and a party to the Nuffield deal, declared:

"I don't believe this will ever be expropriated. The British firms will carry on."

("Hindustan Times," April 11, 1946.)

These deals could in no case lead to an industrialisation of India. As is evident from the terms of two important deals, the Birla-Nuffield and the Tata-I.C.I., as a result of these partnerships, basic heavy industries in India would never be established. Chemicals were to be manufactured in England for an indefinite period and sold to the Indian public under an Indian Trade Mark. Similarly, India was to be reduced merely to a workshop for assemblage of British manufactured tools and components. The character of the "Indian Manufacture" of cars proposed under the Birla-

Nuffield Deal was demonstrated in the production of the "Hindustan Ten" which was widely boosted as an "Indian made" car but whose components were in reality Morris-marked and merely assembled in India.

Thus these compromises were merely a cover for still checking and limiting as far as possible the establishment of heavy industry, the heavy chemicals, and engineering, and ensuring in India a really safe market for British manufactured goods. As the *Bombay Chronicle* editorially commented on December 27, 1945, the result of these deals meant that a "new type of vested interests will be created which would be a formidable obstacle in the way of intensive industrialisation of this country....which the National Government when it at last comes into being, will find it most difficult to counteract."

These economic agreements between Indian and British monopolists which began to develop on a large scale in 1945, constitute an important background to the constitutional negotiations for a corresponding political settlement in 1946, and the subsequent establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan in 1947. The further development of this measure of partial alliance between imperialist and Indian big monopoly interests could be traced in the economic policy of the new Dominion Governments and the increasing Anglo-American capitalist penetration under their aegis.

9. THE OUTCOME OF IMPERIALISM IN INDIA

When Marx spoke of British rule as "causing a social revolution" in India, and described England as "the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution," he had in mind, as his explanation made clear, a twofold process.

First, the destruction of the old social order.

Second, the laying of the material basis for a new social order.

These two factors still continue operating, although their significance is to-day overshadowed by the characteristics of the new stages of modern imperialism, which have grown out of the preceding process.

The destruction of the old hand industry is still reflected in the continuing diminution (temporarily interrupted by the war) of the total number of industrial workers, since that diminution is not yet balanced by the slow advance of modern

industry. The destruction of the old village economy has now reached a stage of contradictions which is driving to a general agrarian crisis.

At the same time the first beginnings of modern industry have developed, as Marx predicted, although with extreme slowness, out of the material basis laid by British rule; and thereby have brought into being the new class in Indian society, the industrial working class of wage-workers in modern machine industry, who represent the creative force of the new social order in the India of the future.

But to-day a new situation has come into being as a consequence of the further development of this process, which has brought into existence forces that were not present when Marx wrote. To-day the conditions within India have fully ripened for a large-scale new advance of the productive forces to a modern level; and the need for this becomes every year more urgent and inescapable. Modern imperialism, on the other hand, no longer performs the objectively revolutionising role of the earlier capitalist domination of India, clearing the way, by its destructive effects, for the new advance and laying down the initial material conditions for its realisation. On the contrary, modern imperialism in India stands out as the main obstacle to advance of the productive forces, thwarting and retarding their development by all the weapons of its financial and political domination. It is no longer possible to speak of the objectively revolutionising role of capitalist rule in India. The role of modern imperialism in India is fully and completely reactionary.

Therefore all the advancing forces of Indian society in the modern period unite in an ever more powerful national movement of revolt against imperialism as the main enemy and buttress of reaction; and at the same time against all those reactionary economic and social forces within India which are linked up with imperialism.

The rising productive forces in India are straining against the fetters of imperialism and of the obsolete economic structure which imperialism maintains and protects. This conflict finds expression in the agrarian crisis, which is the index of the bankruptcy of imperialist economy and the main driving force to decisive change. It is possible to discern the signs of the approaching agrarian revolution in India, in the same way as it was possible to discern its signs in the later years of Tsarist Russia or in late eighteenth-century France. In India the developing agrarian revolution is intertwined with the deve-

loping national democratic liberation movement against imperialist rule; and the union of these two is the key to the new period of Indian history now opening.

A study of the modern political situation in India, and of the problems of the national struggle, must therefore begin with a study of the agrarian problem.

Part III

THE BASIC PROBLEM OF INDIA --- THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM

Chapter VII THE CRISIS OF AGRICULTURE

1. The Over-pressure on Agriculture
2. Consequences of the Over-pressure on Agriculture
3. Stagnation and Deterioration of Agriculture

Chapter VIII: BURDENS ON THE PEASANTRY

1. The Land Monopoly
2. Transformation of the Land System
3. Creation of Landlordism
4. Impoverishment of the Peasantry
5. The Burden of Debt
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Chapter IX: TOWARDS AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

1. Growth of the Agrarian Crisis
2. The Necessity of the Agrarian Revolution
3. Failure of Government Reform Policies
4. Growth of the Peasant Movement

Chapter VII

THE CRISIS OF AGRICULTURE

> "The present deterioration in the position of the peasant forebodes an agrarian revolution." — PROFESSOR R. MUKERJEE, "LAND PROBLEMS OF INDIA," 1933.

THE POVERTY and suffering of the mass of the Indian peasantry are among the most terrible in the world. In one of the best-known recent works on the agrarian problem in India, "Land Problems of India," Professor Radhakamal Mukerjee describes the situation in the following terms:

> "The agricultural population of India now works on very meagre resources, which, if we consider the well-being of the peasants themselves, are very poorly distributed. Our examination of the changes in landownership and tenantry during the last fifty years will show that this maldistribution is growing worse. The economic position of the small holder has deteriorated, while the contrast between landlords and expropriated peasants, between the increasing class of rent-receivers and the toiling agricultural serfs, betokens a critical stage in our agricultural history....The faint rumblings of peasant class-consciousness, already audible in some parts of India, challenge the present agricultural regime" (P. 4).

He reaches the conclusion:

> "There is a growing recognition by men of varied political and economic predilections that changes in the Indian land system are imperative. The opinion has now spread to all classes of society. Under the pressure of an enormous population upon the land the holdings have

> come to be so small and fragmentary that they can neither utilise the full labour of a family nor can support it even under the existing low standard of subsistence. At the same time the landlord has become a rent-receiver rather than a wealth-producer, having ceased to play his old and honourable part in the agricultural combination. To-day he neither supplies agricultural capital nor controls farming operations. Below him has developed a class of intermediaries who have profited from the complexities of the present land system and make the difficult position of the actual cultivator still more precarious. This is no criticism, but a summary of the facts. The old system has broken down, and it is imperative that a new system be created in its stead which is adapted to the present conditions and requirements of agricultural and social life" (pp. 361-2).

This general conclusion is borne in upon all observers of the present agricultural situation in India. But the question of what changes are to be made, and how they are to be accomplished, raises at once all the questions of the present economic and social system in India under imperialist rule. For it is in the sphere of agrarian relations that are to be found the foundations of the existing social order maintained by imperialism and throttling the life of the people. Herein equally are arising the most powerful driving forces to change, which are accumulating to end the existing social order and open the way to a new system.

The agrarian problem in India cannot be considered in isolation from the general economy of the country under imperialism and from the existing structure of class relations maintained under imperialist rule.

When the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India was appointed in 1926, and subsequently reported in 1928 in a bulky Report of close on 800 pages, together with sixteen additional volumes of Evidence, it was instructed by its terms of reference "to make recommendations for the improvement of agriculture and to promote the welfare and prosperity of the rural population." But at the same time it was warned by the same terms of reference that

> "it will not be within the scope of the Commission's duties to make recommendations regarding the existing systems of land ownership and tenancy or of assessment of land revenue and irrigation charges."

This is indeed Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. It is impossible to deal with the problem of agriculture in India without dealing with the problem of the land system.

The elementary basic issues underlying the present agrarian crisis are :

(1) the over-pressure of the population on agriculture, through the blocking of other economic channels;

(2) the effects of the land monopoly and of the burdens on the peasantry;

(3) the old technique and obstacles to the development of technique;

(4) the stagnation and deterioration of agriculture under British rule;

(5) the increasing impoverishment of the peasantry, sub-division and fragmentation of holdings, and dispossession of wide sections;

(6) the consequent increasing differentiation of classes, leading to the reduction of a growing proportion of the peasantry, from one-third to one-half, to the position of a landless proletariat.

Only on the basis of a survey of these factors can the question of a solution be considered.

1. THE OVER-PRESSURE ON AGRICULTURE

India, as we are frequently reminded, specially by those who seem to see hopefully in this fact a supposed obstacle to rapid democratic or social development, is a "village continent."

The contrast between the dependence of the overwhelming majority of the population in India on agriculture and the highly industrialised communities of Western Europe is commonly presented as a kind of natural phenomenon, illustrating the backward character of Indian society and the consequent necessity of extreme caution in proposing changes.

Typical is the statement in the classic Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918 in its opening section on "Conditions in India":

> "Agriculture is the one great occupation of the people. In normal times a highly industrialised country like England gives 58 persons out of every 100 to industry, and only 8 to agriculture. But India gives out of every hundred 71 to agriculture or pasture....In the whole of India the

agriculture is concerned, would have been 75 per cent of the total population if not more" ("Our Economic Problem," p. 86). Even on the revised basis of classification the 1931 figure of 66.6 per cent shows an advance on the 1891 figure of 61.1 per cent.

The causes of this increasing dependence on agriculture through the workings of British capitalist policy have been already explained in Chapter V, Section 3. These causes were clearly recognised by the Census Commissioner for 1911 when he wrote:

> "The extensive importation of cheap European piece-goods and utensils, and the establishment in India itself of numerous factories of the Western type, have more or less destroyed many village industries. The high prices of agricultural produce have also led many village artisans to abandon their hereditary craft in favour of agriculture ....The extent to which this disintegration of the old village organisation is proceeding varies considerably in different parts. The change is most noticeable in the more advanced provinces."
>
> *("Census of India Report," 1911, Vol. I, p. 408.)*

Since 1911 this decline of industry, and consequent still further one-sided dependence on agriculture, has reached an even more extreme stage. Between 1911 and 1931 the absolute number of those engaged in industry declined by over 2 million, while the population increased by 38 million.

PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION DEPENDENT ON INDUSTRY

1911	..	..	..	5.5
1921	..	..	..	4.9
1931	..	..	..	4.3

While the population during these two decades increased by 12 per cent, the number of those employed in industry decreased by 12 per cent, and the percentage of industrial workers to the total population decreased by more than one-fifth, the latter showing a further fall to 4.2 per cent in 1941. This reflects the continuing havoc of "de-industrialisation"—that is, the destruction of the old hand industry, without compensating advance of modern industry, with consequent continuous increase of the overcrowding of agriculture.

At the same time the proportion of non-food crops has increased in relation to food crops. Between 1892-93 and 1919-20 the area under food crops increased from 187 million acres to 210 million, or by 7 per cent; the area under non-food crops increased from 30 million acres to 43 million, or by 43 per cent (Wadia and Joshi, "Wealth of India"). This process has gone still farther forward in the recent period. Between the average for the five years 1910-11 to 1914-15 and 1934-35 the area under food crops has increased 12.4 per cent; the area under non-food crops has increased 54 per cent (see the table in R. Mukerjee's "Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions," p. 16). As compared to an increase of 1.6 million acres under non-food crops during 1934-35 to 1939-40, the area under food crops has actually registered a fall of 1.5 million acres. The export of raw cotton has increased from 178,000 tons in 1900-01 to 762,133 tons in 1936-37 or an increase of 328 per cent (in 1939-40 it stood at 526,411 tons), the export of tea increased from 190 million pounds weight in 1900-01 to 359 million pounds in 1939-40; of oil-seeds from 549,000 tons in 1900-01 to 1,172,802 tons in 1938-39.

Thus the heavier and heavier overcrowding of agriculture, with the increasing emphasis on non-food crops for export (alongside starvation of the Indian masses), is the direct consequence of British capitalist policy, which has required India as a market and source of raw materials.

But this overcrowding of agriculture, alongside the social conditions of exploitation of the peasantry, is at the root of Indian poverty. The continually intensified over-pressure on primitive small agriculture, which is the direct consequence of British capitalist policy in India, is the basic condition of the poverty of the Indian masses. This was recognised already by the Famine Commission of 1880, when it reported, in the extract previously quoted:

> "At the root of much of the poverty of the people of India and of the risks to which they are exposed in seasons of scarcity lies the unfortunate circumstance that agriculture forms almost the sole-occupation of the masses of the people."

A century ago Sir Charles Trevelyan reported to the House of Commons Select Committee in 1840:

> "We have swept away their manufactures; they have nothing to depend on but the produce of their land."

A century later the Royal Commission on Agriculture repeated the same melancholy tale in 1928 (Report, p. 433):

> "The overcrowding of the people on the land, the lack of alternative means of securing a living, the difficulty of finding any avenue of escape and the early age with which a man is burdened with dependants, combine to force the cultivator to grow food wherever he can and on whatever terms he can."

2. CONSEQUENCES OF THE OVER-PRESSURE ON AGRICULTURE

The overcrowding of agriculture means that a continuously heavier demand is made on the existing backward agriculture in India to supply a livelihood for an increasingly heavy proportion of a growing population.

On the other hand, the crippling limits of agricultural development under the existing system, owing to the effects of the land monopoly and the paralysing burdens of exploitation placed on the peasantry, make the existing agriculture increasingly incapable of fulfilling this demand.

This is the vicious circle which holds Indian agriculture in its grip and underlies the growing crisis. Its outcome is reflected in stagnation of agricultural development, signs even of deterioration of the existing level of production owing to the excessive burdens placed upon it, and catastrophic worsening of the conditions of the cultivators.

The increasing over-pressure on agriculture means that the proportion of the available cultivated land to each cultivator is continuously diminishing.

In 1911 Sir Thomas Holderness wrote:

> "The total population of India, including that of the protected native States, is 315 millions. Three-fourths of this vast population is supported by agriculture. The area under cultivation is not accurately known, as the returns from the native States are incomplete. But we shall not be far wrong if we assume that there is less than one acre and a quarter per head for that portion of the population which is directly supported by agriculture....
>
> "Not only does the land of India provide food for this great population, but a very considerable portion of it is set apart for growing produce which is exported.... In fact it pays its bill for imports and discharges its other

international debts mainly by the sale of agricultural produce. Subtracting the land thus utilised for supplying foreign markets from the total area under cultivation we shall find that what is left over does not represent more than 2/3 acre per head of the total Indian population. India therefore feeds and to some extent clothes its population from what 2/3 acre per head can produce. There is probably no country in the world where the land is required to do so much."

(Sir Thomas Holderness, "Peoples and Problems of India," 1911, p. 139.)

In 1917 the Bombay Director of Agriculture, Dr. Harold H. Mann, published the results of an enquiry in a typical Poona village. He found that the average holding in 1771 was 40 acres. In 1818 it was 17½ acres. In 1820-40 it had fallen to 14 acres, by 1914-15 it was 7 acres. He found that 81 per cent of the holdings "could not under the most favourable circumstances maintain their owners." And he drew the conclusion:

"It is evident from this that in the last sixty or seventy years the character of the landholdings has changed. In the pre-British days and in the early days of British rule the holdings were usually of a fair size, most frequently more than 9 or 10 acres, while individual holdings of less than 2 acres were hardly known. Now the number of holdings is more than doubled, and 81 per cent of these holdings are under 10 acres in size, while no less than 60 per cent are less than five acres."

(Dr. H. H. Mann, "Land and Labour in a Deccan Village," Vol. I, 1917, p. 46.)

Similar results have been obtained for other provinces, "Mr. Keatinge has expressed the opinion that 'the agricultural holdings of the Bombay Presidency have to a large extent been reduced to a condition in which their effective cultivation is impossible,' and Dr. Slater found that similar conditions prevailed in parts of Madras. In other provinces conditions are much the same" (Agricultural Commission Report, p. 132).

The 1921 Census recorded the number of cultivated acres per cultivator as follows:

Madras	..	..	4.9
Bengal	..	..	3.1
Bihar and Orissa	..	..	3.1
Assam	..	..	3.0

United Provinces	..	..	2.5
Burma	..	..	5.6
Punjab	..	..	9.2
Central Provinces and Berar	..	..	8.5
Bombay	..	..	12.2

These are average figures in which the extreme shortage of the majority is partially concealed by the larger holdings of the minority.

The results of a "Social and Economic Survey of a Konkan Village" (published by the Provincial Co-operative Institute, Bombay, Rural Economics Series, No. 3) revealed that of a cultivable area in the village of 192 acres, 24 non-agriculturists owned 113 acres, or an average of 4.71 acres, while 28 agriculturists owned 78 acres, or an average of 2.85 acres.

A survey of "Economic Life in a Malabar Village" (published by the University of Madras Economics Series No. 2) found that 34 per cent of the holdings in the village investigated were under 1 acre.

The Agricultural Commission Report recorded, with regard to cultivators without permanent rights—that is, the majority of cultivators (p. 133):

> "The Punjab figures, which are the only ones available for a province, indicate that 22.5 per cent of the cultivators cultivate one acre or less; a further 15.4 per cent cultivate between one and two and a half acres; 17.9 per cent between two and a half and five acres, and 20.5 per cent between five and ten acres. Except for Bombay, which would probably show a very similar result, and Burma which would give higher averages, all other provinces have much smaller average areas per cultivator."

Thus even in the relatively more "prosperous" Punjab (which has been less long under British rule) over one-third cultivate less than 2½ acres, and over one-half less than 5 acres.

In Bengal the Census Report for 1921 recorded that the cultivated area worked out at 2.2 acres per working cultivator. "It is in such figures as these," wrote the Bengal Census Report for 1921, "that the explanation of the poverty of the cultivator lies."

These are facts whose significance cannot be escaped. They reveal a desperate, chronic and growing land hunger. They point only in one direction, as similiar facts in the agrarian history of Russia pointed.

3. STAGNATION AND DETERIORATION OF AGRICULTURE

Does this chronic and growing land-hunger mean that we are here faced with an inevitable nature-imposed problem of absolute land shortage in relation to population?

On the contrary. Despite the widespread current conceptions to this effect, examination of the facts will show that this is not the case (see Chapter II, 3, for the evidence).

The problem is not one of absolute land shortage. It arises, first, from the failure to use the existing cultivable area, owing to restrictions and neglect of development; and, second, from the extremely low level of production in the cultivated area, owing to the paralysing burdens of the existing social system and barriers to technical improvement and large-scale organisation.

It has been estimated that, even on the existing basis of small-scale technique, the available land area for cultivation in India, given necessary measures of land reclamation and irrigation, could maintain a population of 447 million, or 70 million in excess of the existing population. (R. Mukerjee, "Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions," p. 26).

The Indian economist, R. K. Das, has estimated that 70 per cent of the available area for cultivation is wasted, and only 30 per cent is used for productive purposes:

> "The net area actually sown with crops amounts to 228 million acres or 53 per cent of the total arable land. But if the areas sown more than once are taken as separate areas for each crop, the total gross area sown would amount to 262 million acres. Thanks to the climatic conditions, a considerable proportion of the arable land is adaptable to more than two crops a year; but on the other hand, a part of this area is not cultivable more than once, and some may not be available for cultivation even for once for some time to come. It may therefore be assumed that on the average all the arable land is fit for two crops a year. The potential area of arable land would thus amount to about 864 million acres, of which only 262 million acres or about 30 per cent are utilised for productive purposes, and 602 million acres or 76 per cent are wasted."
>
> *R. K. Das, "The Industrial Efficiency of India," 1930, p. 13.)*

In point of fact, even the existing cultivated area has in the past quarter of a century, until the effects of the last depression brought a check increased more rapidly than population, as the following table indicates:

INDEX NUMBERS OF POPULATION AND CULTIVATED AREA

	Population	*Total Cropped Area*	*Area under Food Grains*
Pre-war average (1910-11 to 1914-15)	100	100	100
1930-31	107	118.6	113.9
1934-35	120	117.2	112.4

(R. Mukerjee, "Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions," pp. 16-17.)

Thus between 1910-14 and 1930-31 the population increased 7 per cent, but the cultivated area increased 18.6 per cent. Only in the latest years, since the depression, has there appeared the ominous sign of an absolute diminution in the cultivated area, with a still heavier diminution of the area under food-grains. *(See pages 52-3.)*

More important, however, is the very large proportion of the cultivable land area which is at present not cultivated. The current statistics show the following picture:

AGRICULTURAL AREA OF BRITISH INDIA, 1939-40
(excluding Burma)

	Millions of Acres
Net area by professional survey	512.7
Area under forest	68.1
Not available for cultivation	89.3
Cultivable waste other than fallow ..	97.2
Fallow land	47.3
Net area sown with crops	209.9

(Statistical Abstract for British India)

Thus of a cultivable area of 355 million acres, only 59 per cent is sown with crops, 13.2 is fallow, and no less than 27.3 per cent is cultivable land left waste. It is further worth noting that, in respect of the over one-sixth of the total land area officially returned as "not available for cultivation," the Agricultural Commission Report was compelled to admit

(p. 605) that "it is difficult to believe that the whole of the vast area now classed as 'not available for cultivation'. .. is either not available or not suitable for cultivation." There is, therefore, reason to believe that the proportion of cultivable land which is not cultivated is higher than the 27.3 per cent officially returned, and may be nearer one-third.

What is the character of this gigantic area of "cultivable waste other than fallow," and why is it not brought into cultivation? It is necessary to recognise that the proportion of it varies in different provinces, even, in the most populous and developed provinces, such as Bengal, Madras or the United Provinces, the proportion of the arable area returned as "cultivable waste other than fallow" is as high as 18 per cent in Bengal, 21 per cent in Madras and 20.3 per cent in the United Provinces.

The answer was provided already in 1879 by the Report of Sir James Caird (on the Famine Commission) presented to the Secretary of State for India:

> "The available good land in India is nearly all occupied. There are extensive areas of good waste land covered with jungle in various parts of the country, which might be reclaimed and rendered suitable for cultivation; but for that object capital must be employed, and the people have little to spare."
>
> *(Report of Sir James Caird to the Secretary of State for India, October 31, 1879.)*

It is not that this land could not be brought into cultivation. But the extreme poverty of the cultivators, from whom every ounce of surplus and more is extracted,bringing the majority below subsistence level, leaves them completely without resources to accomplish this task. This task can only be accomplished by collective organisation with government aid, utilising the surplus resources of the community for this urgently necessary extension of production. But this responsibility has never been recognised by the Government; and it is here that is expressed the signal failure of the existing governmental and social system, which in its earlier period even let fall into complete neglect the public works and irrigation system maintained by previous governments before British rule, and by its extreme exactions has even driven land out of cultivation, while in the more recent period the beginnings of land reclamation and irrigation works have been fractional in relation to the possibilities and the needs.

The original neglect is notorious, and was noted long ago by Marx in a classic statement:

> "There have been in Asia, generally from immemorial times, but three departments of Government: that of Finance, or the plunder of the interior; that of war, or the plunder of the exterior; and finally, the department of Public Works....The British in East India accepted from their predecessors the departments of finance and of war, but they have neglected entirely that of public works. Hence the deterioration of an agriculture which is not capable of being conducted on the British principle of free competition, of *laissez-faire* and *laissez-aller*."
>
> *(Marx, "The British Rule in India, "New York Daily Tribune," June 25, 1853.)*

"The roads and tanks and canals," noted an observer in 1838 (G. Thompson, "India and the Colonies," 1838), "which Hindu or Mussulman Governments constructed for the service of the nations and the good of the country have been suffered to fall into dilapidation; and now the want of the means of irrigation causes famines."

The verdict of Sir Arthur Cotton, the pioneer of modern irrigation work in India, 1854, in his "Public Works in India," was even more overwhelming than that of Marx:

> "Public works have been almost entirely neglected throughout India....The motto hitherto has been: 'Do nothing, have nothing done, let nobody do anything. Bear any loss, let the people die of famine, let hundreds of lakhs be lost in revenue for want of water, or roads, rather than do anything.'"
>
> *(Lt.-Col. Cotton, "Public Works in India," 1854, p. 272.)*

Montgomery Martin, in his standard work "The Indian Empire," in 1858, noted that the old East India Company "omitted not only to initiate improvements, but even to keep in repair the old works upon which the revenue depended." This neglect, indeed, went considerably farther than the contemporary British *laissez-faire* inside Britain; for, as John Bright remarked in the House of Commons on June 24, 1858, "The single city of Manchester, in the supply of its inhabitants with the single article of water, has spent a larger sum of money than the East India Company has spent in the fourteen years from 1834 to 1848 in public works of every kind throughout the whole of its vast dominions."

Even by 1900, when the total out of Government revenues that had been spent on railways, which facilitated British trade penetration, amounted to £225 million, the total that had been spent on canals, which were of vital importance for agriculture, was only £25 million, or one-ninth of the amount spent on railways.

Lest it should be thought that this neglect applies only to the past, and does not reach into the present period, it is worth quoting a recent Report of the Bengal Irrigation Department Committee in 1930:

> "In every district the Khals (canals) which carry the internal boat traffic become from time to time blocked up with silt. Its Khals and rivers are the roads and highways of Eastern Bengal, and it is impossible to overestimate the importance to the economic life of this part of the province of maintaining these in proper navigable order (p. 6).
>
> "Central Bengal is at present a decadent tract; it is highly malarious, the population is steadily decreasing, and the land is going out of cultivation. It may, of course, be the case that deterioration has already proceeded so far that it cannot now be checked, and that the tract in question is doomed to revert gradually into swamp and jungle" (p. 11).
>
> "As regards the revival or maintenance of minor routes....practically nothing has been done, with the result that, in some parts of the Province at least, channels have been silted up, navigation has become limited to a few months in the year, and crops can only be marketed when the Khals rise high enough in the monsoon to make transport possible" (p. 11).
>
> *(Report of the Irrigation Department Committee of Bengal, 1930.)*

The judgment of Sir William Willcocks, the leading hydraulic engineer, on the decay of the irrigation system in Bengal, is no less striking:

> "Sir William Willcocks, the distinguished hydraulic engineer, whose name is associated with gigantic irrigation enterprises in Egypt and Mesopotamia, has recently made an investigation of conditions in Bengal. He has discovered that innumerable small destructive rivers of the delta region, constantly changing their course, were originally canals which under the English regime were allowed to escape from their channels and run wild. Formerly these

canals distributed the flood waters of the Ganges and provided for proper drainage of the land, undoubtedly accounting for that prosperity of Bengal which lured the rapacious East India merchants there in the early days of the eighteenth century... Not only was nothing done to utilise and improve the original canal system, but railway embankments were subsequently thrown up, entirely destroying it. Some areas, cut off from the supply of loam-bearing Ganges water, have gradually become sterile and non-productive; others, improperly drained, show an advanced degree of water-logging, with the inevitable accompaniment of malaria. Nor has any attempt been made to construct proper embankments for the Ganges in its low course, to prevent the enormous erosion by which villages and groves and cultivated fields are swallowed up each year.

"Sir William Willcocks severely criticises the modern administrators and officials, who, with every opportunity to call in expert technical assistance, have hitherto done nothing to remedy this disastrous situation, growing worse from decade to decade."

(G. Emerson, "Voiceless Millions," 1931, pp. 140-41.)

The full statement of the views of Sir William Willcocks may be found in his "Lectures on the Ancient System of Irrigation in Bengal and its Application to Modern Problems" (Calcutta University Readership Lectures, University of Calcutta, 1930), together with the subsequent controversy in the "Note by Mr. C. Addams-Williams, C.I.E., late Chief Engineer, Irrigation Department, Bengal, on the lectures of Sir William Willcocks, K.C.M.G., on irrigation in Bengal, together with a reply by Sir William Willcocks" (Bengal Secretariat Book Department, 1931).

Thus the neglect and deterioration are by no means only a question of the past history of the previous century and a half of British rule, but continues into the present period. In the terms of an official report in 1930, "land is going out of cultivation"—in the midst of the most desperate land shortage and overcrowding on the existing cultivated land. In 1789, Lord Cornwallis reported that a large proportion of the Company's territory was reverting to "a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts." In 1930, a Government Committee reports of Central Bengal that "it may, of course, be the case that deterioration has already proceeded so far that it cannot be check-

ed, and that the tract in question is doomed to revert gradually into swamp and jungle."

But the overcrowded cultivators of India have not only to raise their crops on only 59 per cent of the cultivable area: even within this limited cultivated area the social conditions, the paralysing burdens placed on the cultivators, their extreme poverty and primitive technique, which they are not left with the resources possibly to develop, mean that, while the demands on the land are heavier than in any country, owing to the disproportion of the whole economy, the level of production is lower than in any country.

If we compare the yield of rice and wheat in India with that of China, Japan or the United States, we find the following instructive contrast:

CROP YIELDS PER ACRE IN QUINTALS

	India	*China*	*Japan*	*U.S.A.*
Wheat ..	8.1	9.7	13.5	9.9
Rice ..	16.5	25.6	30.7	16.8

("Problems of the Pacific" 1931, p. 70)

A further comparison is available on the basis of the League of Nations' figures:

CROP YIELDS PER ACRE IN POUNDS AVOIRDUPOIS

	Rice	*Wheat*
India	1,357	652
Japan	2,767	1,508
Egypt	2,356	1,688
U.S.A.	2,112	973
Italy	4,601	1,241
Germany ..	—	1,740
United Kingdom ..	—	1,812

("Statistical Yearbook of the League of Nations," 1932-33.)

This contrast is still more marked if taken in relation with the number of workers employed on the land. In India there is one person employed in cultivation for every 2.6 acres of land, as against 17.3 acres in the United Kingdom, and 5.4 acres in Germany. This colossal waste of labour is the reflection of the overcrowding of agriculture and of the low technique.

This lower yield is not due to natural disadvantages of lower productivity of the soil.

> "It has been stated that the soil of India is naturally poor. This is not correct. It has become poor. The great river valleys must at one time have been among the most fertile in the world. In Denmark and Germany the greater part of the land in its original state consisted of barren wastes of sand growing nothing but gorse and heather."
>
> *(Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee Report, Enclosure XIII, p. 700: Memorandum of A. P. MacDougall, March 19, 1931.)*

The same memorandum goes on to note :

> "If the output per acre were raised to that of France, the wealth of the country would be increased by £669,000,000. If the output were in terms of English production, it would be raised by £1,000,000,000 per year. Yet England is by no means highly cultivated. This does not make any allowance for part of the land in India producing two crops per year. In the other countries referred to only one can be grown. This advantage should equal any loss from drought...In terms of Danish wheat production the increased wealth production would be £1,500,000,000 per year. It is not therefore the soil that is responsible for the poverty of rural India."

Not only is the existing yield low, but there is evidence of deterioration of productivity. The MacDougall Memorandum quoted above refers to the impoverishment of the soil through "continuous cropping without manure" owing to the "deplorable waste of manure by its use as fuel" (a reflection of the consequences of the stringent forest laws), and notes that "in Western countries fertility is maintained by using straw and the residue of crops as manure; in India all the straw is used for cattle fodder" (a reflection of the restriction of grazing facilities). The use of cow-dung for fuel is often treated as if it were a peculiar and wasteful habit of the Indian cultivator; on this point the conclusion of the Agricultural Commission Report is worth noting that, owing to the limitations on the use of forest fuel or charcoal and the "excessive" rates charged for transport by rail, "apart from preference, cow-dung is at present the only certain supply of fuel which the great majority of cultivators can obtain" (p.

264). No solution is offered for this situation, which leads to inevitable deterioration of the soil.

In Bengal it is reported:

> "The fertility of the agricultural land is deteriorating steadily on account of the absence of manure. The yield of the different crops has become less and less."
>
> *(Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Report, 1930, p. 21.)*

Statistics in support of this assertion are given:

AVERAGE YIELD IN LBS. PER ACRE IN BENGAL

Quinquennium ending—	*Wheat*	*Winter Rice*	*Gram*	*Rape and Mustard*
1906-07 ..	801	1,234	881	492
1911-12 ..	861	983	881	492
1916-17 ..	698	1,036	867	460
1921-22 ..	688	1,029	826	485
1926-27 ..	721	1,022	811	483
Decrease in twenty years ..	80	212	70	9

W. Burns, C.I.E., Government of India official on special duty, also gives similar figures for the whole of India:

AVERAGE YIELD OF RICE

(per acre in lbs.)

Average of 1914-15 to 1918-19	982
Average of 1926-27 to 1930-31	851
Average of 1931-32 to 1935-36	829
1938-39	728

("Technological Possibilities of Agricultural Development in India," 1944, p. 55.)

About wheat yield also a deteriorating position is revealed, the average yield per acre having declined from 724 lbs in the years 1909-13 to 636 lbs. in 1924-33. *(Ibid, p. 57.)*

Thus from every standpoint, if we examine only the present conditions and tendencies of agricultural production in India in relation to the total economy without yet coming to the growing social contradictions, it is evident that we are faced with a growing crisis of Indian agriculture.

The causes of the growing crisis are to be found, not in natural conditions, but in the sphere of social relations. The experience especially of the most recent period has shown the vanity of well-meant and short-sighted attempts to preach to the cultivators on their backwardness, while leaving their exploitation untouched, or exhortations to them to improve their technique, while they have neither the resources, nor the possibilities within the existing conditions of land tenure, to adopt improved technical methods.

Indeed, within the existing conditions and limitations, the skill and resourcefulness of the Indian cultivators have been testified by experts. In 1889, the Government deputed Dr. J. A. Voelcker, Consulting Chemist to the Royal Agricultural Society, to conduct an investigation into Indian agricultural technique and to suggest improvements. In his report, published two years later, which remains one of the standard works on Indian agriculture, he wrote:

> "On one point there can be no question, viz, that the ideas generally entertained in England, and often given expression to even in India, that Indian agriculture is, as a whole, primitive and backward, and that little has been done to try and remedy it, are altogether erroneous...At his best the Indian Ryot, or cultivator, is quite as good as and in some respects the superior of, the average British farmer; whilst at his worst, it can only be said that this state is brought about largely by an absence of facilities for improvement which is probably unequalled in any other country, and that the Ryot will struggle on patiently and uncomplainingly in the face of difficulties in a way that no one else would.
>
> "Nor need our British farmers be surprised at what I say, for it must be remembered that the natives of India were cultivators of wheat centuries before we in England were. It is not likely, therefore, that their *practice* should be capable of much improvement. What does, however, prevent them from growing larger crops is the limited facilities to which they have access, such as the supply of water or manure.
>
> "But, to take the ordinary acts of husbandry, nowhere would one find better instances of keeping land scrupulously clean from weeds, of ingenuity in device of water-raising appliances, of knowledge of soils and their capabilities, as well as the exact time to sow and to reap, as

one would in Indian agriculture, and this not at its best alone, but at its ordinary level. It is wonderful, too, how much is known of rotation, the system of mixed crops and of fallowing. Certain it is that I, at least, have never seen a more perfect picture of careful cultivation, combined with hard labour, perseverance and fertility of resource, than I have seen in many of the halting-places in my tour."

(Dr. J. A. Voelcker, "Report on the Improvement of Indian Agriculture," 1891.)

The secret of the growing crisis of Indian agriculture does not lie in any natural disadvantages, nor in any lack of skill and resourcefulness, within the limitations under which they have to work, or supposed innate backwardness of the cultivators, who are thwarted from development, but in the effects of imperialism and the social relation maintained by it, which compel the overburdening, stagnation and deterioration of agriculture, condemn the mass of the cultivators to lives of increasing harassment and semi-starvation, and are thus preparing the conditions for a far-reaching revolution as the only outcome and solution. It is to these social relations in agriculture that it is now necessary to turn in order to lay bare the driving forces of the agrarian crisis.

Chapter VIII

BURDENS ON THE PEASANTRY

"The agrarian system has already collapsed, and the new organisation of society is already inevitable."—Jawaharlal Nehru in 1933.

THE CRISIS of agricultural production, shown in the overcrowding, low levels, stagnation and deterioration of agriculture under the present regime, is only the outer expression of an inner crisis of the social relations in agriculture. Under the conditions of imperialism a system of intensive exploitation of the peasantry has developed without parallel in any other country. Within the protective shell of imperialist domination and exploitation has grown up a host of subsidiary parasitism dependent on and integral to the whole system. The resulting process reveals, not only the increasing burdens on the peasantry, their poverty and indebtedness, but the increasing differentiation of classes and the spreading dispossession of the mass of the cultivators from their holdings. The dispossessed cultivators are reduced to a situation close to serfdom or brought down into the ranks of the swelling army of the landless proletariat. This is the process which heralds the approach of future storm.

1. THE LAND MONOPOLY

In the traditional land system of India before British rule the land belonged to the peasantry, and the Government received a proportion of the produce. "The soil in India belonged to the tribe or its sub-division—the village community, the clan

of the brotherhood settled in the village—and never was considered as the property of the king" (R. Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India," 1933, p. 16). "Either in feudal or in imperial scheme there never was any notion of the ownership of the soil vesting in anybody except the peasantry" (*ibid*, p. 36).

The "king's share" or proportion payable to the king was traditionally fixed under the Hindu kings at one-sixth to one-twelfth of the produce, though this might be raised in times of war to one-fourth. The Code of Manu laid down :

> "As leech, calf and bee take their food, so must a King draw from his kingdom moderate taxes. A fifth part of the increment of cattle and gold is to be taken by the King, and one-eighth, one-sixth or one-twelfth part of the crops, though a Kshatriya King who in time of war takes even one-fourth part of the crops is free from blame if he protects his subjects to the best of his ability."

The Mogul Emperors, when they established their dominion, raised this to one-third. The statute of Akbar laid down:

> "In former times the Monarchs of Hindustan exacted the sixth of the produce of the land as tribute and tax. One-third part of the produce of medium cultivated land is the revenue settled by His Majesty."

In the period of the break-up of the Mogul Empire, the collectors, to whom the raising of the revenue was farmed out, and who were already elevating themselves to the level of semi-feudal chiefs, and the independent chieftains frequently increased this level of tribute to even as high as one-half.

When the British established their dominion on the ruins of the Mogul Empire, they took over the traditional land basis of revenue; but they transformed its character, and they thereby transformed the land system of India.

At the time when they took over, the ruling regime was in decay and disorder; the exactions from the peasantry were extreme and extortionate; but the village community system and its traditional relationship to the land were still in the main unbroken, and the tribute was still a proportion (normally in kind, optionally in cash) of the year's produce, not a fixed payment on the basis of land-holding irrespective of the fluctuations of production.

The extortionate tribute of a period of disorder appeared as the starting-point and customary level to the new conquerors. The evidence of contemporary writers indicate that

the assessments of the new rulers tended initially to show an increase, or that more efficient collection made the weight of exactions in practice heavier. Dr. Buchanan noted in his "Statistical Survey," conducted on behalf of the Company in the early years of the nineteenth century, and constituting the first careful official enquiry, the extremely onerous and even increased character of the new exactions, both in Southern India, surveyed in 1800 and the following years, and in Northern India surveyed in 1807-14. Thus he wrote with reference to the district of Dinagepore in Bengal:

> "The natives allege that, although they were often squeezed by the Mogul officers, and on all occasion were treated with the utmost contempt, they preferred suffering these evils to the mode that has been adopted of selling their lands when they fall in arrears, which is a practice they cannot endure. Besides, bribery went a great way on most occasions, and they allege that, bribes included, they did not actually pay one-half of what they do now."
>
> *(Dr. Francis Buchanan, "Statistical Survey," Vol. IV, vii, quoted in the Fifth Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 1872.)*

Bishop Heber wrote in 1826:

> "Neither Native nor European agriculturist, I think, can thrive at the present rate of taxation. Half the gross produce of the soil is demanded by Government.... In Hindustan (Northern India) I found a general feeling among the King's officers, and I myself was led from some circumstances to agree with them, that the peasantry in the Company's Provinces are on the whole worse off, poorer and more dispirited than the subjects of the Native Princes; and here in Madras, where the soil is, generally speaking, poor, the difference is said to be still more marked. The fact is, no Native Prince demands the rent which we do."
>
> *(Bishop Heber, "Memoirs and Correspondence," 1830, Vol. II, p. 413.)*

The historians, Thompson and Garratt, record:

> "The history of the pre-Mutiny assessments is a series of unsuccessful efforts to extract an 'economic rent' which was frequently identified with the 'net produce.'

The original auctioning of the Bengal revenue farms was an attempt to get as large a share as possible of the 'net produce.' The failure of this system led to the Permanent settlement. In Madras and Bombay the original assessments were usually based on four-fifths of the estimated 'net produce.' This proved far too high. The first attempt to assess the North West Provinces failed in the same way, and was abandoned in 1842.... There is no doubt that much suffering was caused, both in Madras and Bombay, by the heavy assessments imposed during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.... Even in the Punjab, where the British assessments reduced the former Sikh demands, 'it would seem that cash payments and rigidity of collection largely set off the advantage to the cultivator' (H. Calvert, 'Wealth and Welfare of the Punjab,' p. 122)."

(Thompson and Garratt, "Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India," p. 427.)

Dr. Harold Mann, in his second survey of a Deccan village in 1921, found a striking contrast between the land revenue in pre-British days and after British rule:

"A complete change came after the British conquest, when in 1823 an almost unheard of revenue of Rs. 2,121 was collected and village expenses went down to half what they had been in 1817."

(Mann and Kanitkar, "Land and Labour in a Deccan Village," Vol. II, 1921, p. 38.)

For the thirty years 1844-74 the amount of land assessment for the whole village was Rs. 1,161, or 9 annas 8 pies per acre; for the thirty years 1874-1904 it was Rs. 1,467, or 11 annas 4 pies per acre; in 1915 a new assessment raised it to Rs. 1,581, or 12 annas 2 pice per acre.[1] In his first survey of a Deccan vil-

[1]Their table of the land revenue assessments, going back to the seventeenth century, is of interest:

INCREASE OF LAND REVENUE IN AN INDIAN VILLAGE

Year	Land Revenue Rs.	Assessed Area Acres
1698	301	1,963
1727	620	2,000
1730	1,173	2,000
1770	1,632	2,008
1785	552	1,954
1790	66	1,954

lage, in 1917, Dr. Mann found that the total revenue rose from Rs. 889 in 1829-30 to Rs. 1,115 in 1849-50 and Rs. 1,600 in 1914-15.

In Bengal the land revenue in the last year of the administration of the Mogul's agents, in 1764-65, totalled £818,000. In the first year of the East India Company's taking over the financial administration, in 1765-66, it was raised to £1,470-000. When the Permanent Settlement was established for Bengal in 1793, the figure was £3,091,000.

The total land revenue raised by the Company stood at £4.2 million in 1800-1, and had risen (mainly by increase of territories, but also by increased assessments) to £15.3 million in 1857-58, when the Crown took over. Under the Crown the total rose to £17.5 million by 1900-1, and £20 million by 1911-12. In 1936-37 the figure was £23.9 million.

The later figures of land assessment in modern times show a smaller proportion to total produce (the normal basis of calculation being one-half of net produce or rent—Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India," p. 202) than the earlier figures of the first period of British rule and of the period immediately preceding the extreme violence of which exactions could not be maintained. But by this time other forms of exploitation had come to play a correspondingly greater part, outweighing the role of direct government land revenue, through the development of landlordism and enhanced rents, commercial penetration, additional taxation on articles of consumption and rising indebtedness. The simple direct tribute of the earlier period, buttressed mainly on land revenue, has given place to the network of forms of exploitation of modern finance-capital, with its host of subsidiary parasites in Indian Economy.

Even so, the level of the assessments for land revenue have shown a continuous tendency also in the modern period to be raised at each revision, with corresponding increased burdens on the peasantry after each revision, leading to movements of revolt. In Bardoli in 1928 a united movement of 87,000 peasants, led by the Congress, successfully resisted an increased assessment and compelled the Government to admit

1803	1,009	1,981
1808	818	1,954
1817	792	1,954
1823 (after British rule)	2,121	2,089
1844-74	1,161	2,089
1871-1904	1,467	2,271
1915	1,581	2,271

that the revision was unjust and to scale it down.[1] "In Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces, in particular, assessments have gone up by leaps and bounds," writes R. Mukerjee in his "Land Problems of India" (p. 206). He notes that between 1890-91 and 1918-19 land revenue rose from 240 million rupees to 330 million rupees, and adds:

> "While the agricultural income during three decades increased roughly by 30, 60 and 23 per cent, the land revenue increased by 57, 22.6 and 15.5 per cent in the United Provinces, Madras and Bombay respectively. Such a large increase of land revenue coupled with its communication in cash and its collection at harvest time has worked very unfavourably on the economic position of cultivators of uneconomic holdings, who form the majority in these Provinces" (p. 345).

2. TRANSFORMATION OF THE LAND SYSTEM

Even more important than the actual increase in the burden of the assessments in the initial period was the revolution in the land system effected by the British conquest. The first step in this revolution was in the system of assessments and the registration of the ownership of land, in which English economic and legal conceptions were made to replace, or superimposed on, the entirely different conceptions and institutions of the traditional Indian economy. The previous traditional "king's share" was a proportion of the year's produce, fluctuating with the year's production, and surrendered as tribute or tax by the peasant joint owners or self-governing village community to the ruler. This was now replaced by

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[1] The angry comment of officialdom on the success of the Bardoli tax strike is significant: the justice of the grievance is not questioned, but the complaint is made that a "precedent" has thereby been set for questioning the justice of all assessments:

> "The assessment of this tract (Bardoli) was revised in ordinary course; protests against the new revenue-demand were voiced by politicians; and eventually a further official enquiry established, to the satisfaction of the Government of Bombay, the fact that the assessment was altogether excessive. In this case the agitation was justified by the result, but its real significance lies in the establishment of a new precedent. Future re-assessments are likely to become increasingly the subject of political debate."
>
> (W. H. Moreland, C.S.I., C.I.E., "Peasants, Landholders and the State" in "Modern India," 1929, p. 166.)

the system of fixed money payments, assessed on land, regularly due in cash irrespective of the year's production, in good or bad harvests, and whether more or less of the land was cultivated or not, and in the overwhelming majority of settlements fixed on individual land-holders, whether directly cultivators or landlords appointed by the State. This payment was commonly spoken of by the early official administrators and in the early official documents, as "rent," thus revealing that the peasantry had become in fact tenants, whether directly of the State or of the State-appointed landlords, even though at the same time possessing certain proprietary and traditional rights. The introduction of the English landlord system (for which there was no previous equivalent in India, the new class being built up on the basis of the previous tax-farmers), of individual landholding, of mortgage and sale of lands, and of a whole apparatus of English bourgeois legal conceptions alien to Indian economy and administered by an alien bureaucracy which combined in itself, legislative, executive and judicial functions, completed the process. By this transformation the British conquerors' State assumed in practice the ultimate possession of the land, making the peasantry the equivalent of tenants, who could be ejected for failure of payment, or alienating the lands to its own nominees as landlords, who held their titles from the State and could equally be ejected for failure of payment. The previous self-governing village community was robbed of its economic functions, as of its administrative role; the great part of the common lands were assigned to individual holders.

In this way the characteristic process of the colonial system was in fact carried out with ruthless completeness in India—the expropriation of the Indian people from their land, even though this process was partially concealed under an ever-more-complicated maze of legal forms, which after a century and a half has grown into an impenetrable thicket of intermixed systems, tenures, customs and rights. From being owners of the soil, the peasants have become tenants, while simultaneously enjoying the woes of ownership in respect of mortgages and debts, which have now descended on the majority of their holdings; and with the further development of the process, an increasing proportion have in the past century, and especially in the past half-century, become landless labourers or the new class of the agricultural proletariat, now constituting from one-third to one-half of the agricultural population.

It is to the initial stages of this transformation that Marx makes reference when he stresses the fact that in India the destruction of the ancient village communities was effected, not only by the indirect action of bourgeois commercial penetration and the inroads of manufactured goods, but by the "direct political and economic power" of the English conquerors "as rulers and landlords," and contrasts the much slower process of dissolution in China "where it is not backed up by any direct political power on the part of the English":

> "The obstacles presented by the internal solidity and articulation of pre-capitalistic national modes of production to the corrosive influence of commerce is strikingly shown in the intercourse of the English with India and China. The broad basis of the mode of production is here formed by the unity of small agriculture and domestic industry, to which is added in India the form of communes resting upon common ownership of the land, which, by the way, was likewise the original form for China. In India the English exerted simultaneously their direct political and economic power as rulers and landholders for the purpose of disrupting these small economic organisations."

To which he adds the footnote :

> "If any nation's history, then it is the history of the English management of India which is a string of unsuccessful and really absurd (and in practice infamous) experiments in economics. In Bengal they created a caricature of English landed property on a large scale; in south-eastern India a caricature of small allotment property; in the North West they transformed to the utmost of their ability the Indian commune with common ownership of the soil into a caricature of itself."
>
> *(Marx, "Capital," Vol. III, xx, pp. 392-3.)*

3. CREATION OF LANDLORDISM

The introduction of the English landlord system in a modified form was the first type of land settlement attempted by the Western conquerors. This was the character of the famous Permanent Land Settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1793 for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, and later extended to parts of North Madras. The existing Zemindars, who were in reality tax-far-

mers, or officials appointed by the previous rulers to collect land revenue on commission (the authorised commission being 2½ per cent, though in practice exactions exceeded this), were constituted landlords in perpetuity, subject to a permanent fixed payment to the Government, which was calculated at the time at the rate of ten-elevenths of the existing total payments of the cultivators, the remaining one-eleventh being left for the share of the landlord

At the time these terms of settlement were very onerous for the Zemindars and the cultivators, and very profitable for the Government The figure of £3 million in Bengal to be raised by the Zemindars for the Government represented a staggering increase on what had been raised under preceding rulers *Many of the old traditional Zemindar families who* carried on the old methods of showing some consideration and relaxation for the peasants in times of difficulty, broke down under the burden and were at once ruthlessly sold out, their estates being put to auction; there are many pathetic stories of the ruin of this better type of the old Zemindars, who regarded themselves as under some degree of honourable obligation to the peasantry under their care, and found themselves driven out without mercy by the new rulers for failing to raise their quota A new type of sharks and rapacious business men came forward to take over the estates, who were ready to stick at nothing to extract the last anna from the peasantry in order to pay their quota and fill their own pockets. This was the character of the new "class of gentleman proprietors" which, according to the conceptions of the time, it was the object of the Permanent Settlement to create. In the words of the Report of the Collector of Midnapur in 1802 :

> "The system of sales and attachments has in the course of a very few years reduced most of the great Zemindars in Bengal to distress and beggary, and produced a greater change in the landed property of Bengal than has, perhaps, ever happened in the same space of time in any age or country by the mere effect of internal regulation"

Subsequently the system worked the other way, in a direction not originally foreseen by the Government. With the fall in the value of money, and the increase in the amount rack-rented from the peasantry, the Government's share in the spoils, which was permanently fixed at £3 million, became relatively smaller and smaller; while the Zemin-

dars' share became larger and larger. To-day the total rents in Bengal under the Permanent Settlement are estimated at about £12 million, of which, one quarter goes to the Government and three-quarters to the Zemindars.[1]

Since this has become clear, the Permanent Settlement is to-day universally attacked and condemned, not only by the peasantry and the whole Indian people, except the Zemindars, but also by the imperialists; and there is a strong movement for its revision (an example of the violence of the contemporary imperialist attack on the Permanent Settlement can be seen in the downright condemnation in the "Oxford History of India," pp. 561-70). The modern apologists of imperialism attempt to offer the explanation that the whole Settlement was an innocent mistake, made through simple ingenuous ignorance of the fact that the Zemindars were not landlords. So Anstey writes in the standard "Economic Development of India" (p. 98):

> "At first the complicated Indian system was a closed book to the servants of the Company. They began the 'search for the landlord'...It subsequently appeared that in most cases these 'zemindars' had not previously been owners of the land at all...At the time they were mistaken for 'landlords' in the English sense."

This fairy tale is plain nonsense. A consultation of the documents of the time makes abundantly clear that Lord Cornwallis and the statesmen concerned were perfectly conscious that they were creating a new class of landlords, and of their purpose in doing it.

The purpose of the permanent Zemindari settlement was to create a new class of landlords after the English model as the social buttress of English rule. It was recognised that, with the small numbers of English holding down a vast population, it was absolutely necessary to establish a social basis for their power through the creation of a new class whose interests, through receiving a subsidiary share in the spoils (one-eleventh, in the original intention), would be bound

[1] The total of rents extracted is increased by illegal exactions. During the Second Session of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, 1937, when the Tenancy Act was under discussion, the total rental of Bengal was assessed by three different speakers at 29 crores (17 crores legal and 12 illegal), 30 crores (20 legal and 10 illegal) and 26 crores (20 legal and 6 illegal). These estimates would represent an aggregate total, including illegal exactions, of some £20 million.

up with the maintenance of English rule. Lord Cornwallis, in the memorandum in which he defended his policy, made clear that he was explicitly conscious that he was creating a new class, and establishing rights which bore no relation to the previous rights of the Zemindars: he was, he stated, "convinced that, failing the claim of right of the Zemindars, it would be necessary for the public good to grant a right of property in the soil to them, or to persons of other descriptions." Sir Richard Temple, in his "Men and Events of My Time in India" (p. 30), records that Lord Cornwallis's Permanent Settlement was "a measure which was effected to naturalise the landed institutions of England among the natives of Bengal." Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1835, in an official speech during his term of office described with exemplary clearness the purpose of the Permanent Settlement as a bulwark against revolution:

> "If security was wanting against extensive popular tumult or revolution, I should say that the Permanent Settlement, though a failure in many other respects and in most important essentials, has this great advantage at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British Dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people."
>
> *(Lord William Bentinck, speech on November 8, 1829, reprinted in A. B. Keith, "Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy 1750-1921," Vol. I, p. 215.)*

This alliance of British rule with landlordism in India, created largely by its own acts, as its main social basis, continues to-day, and is to-day involving British rule in inextricable contradictions which are preparing its downfall along with the downfall of landlordism. While the people of India move forward in the struggle for their independence, in every province the Landholders' Federation, Landowners' Association or the like meets to proclaim its undying devotion to British rule. As typical may be taken the Address of the President of the Bengal Landowners' Association to the Viceroy in 1925:

> "Your Excellency can rely on the ungrudging support and sincere assistance of the landlords."

In 1938 the first All-India Landholders' Conference was held, preparatory to the setting up of an inclusive organisation;

and the keynote of the Presidential Address, delivered by the Maharaja of Mymensingh, was to declare that "if we are to exist as a class" then "it is our duty to strengthen the hands of the Government." In the 1935 Constitution special provision was made for the representation of Landholders alike in the Provincial Legislative Assemblies and in the Federal Assembly.

But the mistake of the Permanent Settlement was not repeated. The subsequent Zemindari settlements were made "temporary"—that is, subject to periodical revision to permit of successive raising of the Government's demand.

In the period after the Permanent Settlement an alternative method was attempted in a number of other districts, beginning in Madras. The conception was put forward that the Government should make a direct settlement with the cultivators, not permanent, but temporary or subject to periodical re-assessment, and thus avoid both the disadvantages of the Permanent Settlement, securing the entire spoils itself without needing to share them with intermediaries. This was the *Ryotwari system, associated in its institution* with the name of Sir Thomas Munro in Madras, who saw in it a closer approach to Indian institutions. This system was advocated by Sir Thomas Munro (at first in a permanent form) in opposition to the Zemindari system already in 1807, and it was put into force by him as a Governor of Madras in 1820 as a general settlement for the greater part of Madras. Its model was subsequently followed in a number of other provinces, and it now covers just over half the area of British India.

The Ryotwari system, although it was advocated as a closer approach to Indian institutions, in point of fact, by its making the settlement with individual cultivators, and by its assessment on the basis of land, not on the proportion of the actual produce, broke right across Indian institutions no less than the Zemindari system. Indeed, the Madras Board of Revenue at the time fought a long and losing battle against it, and urged instead a collective settlement with the village communities, known as a Mauzawari settlement. Their Memorandum of 1818, in which they criticised the Ryotwari method, is worth quoting:

> "Ignorant of the true resources of the newly acquired countries, as of the precise nature of their landed tenures, we find a small band of foreign conquerors no sooner obtaining possession of a vast extent of territory, peopled by various nations, differing from each other in language,

customs and habits, than they attempt what would be called a Herculean task, or rather a visionary project even in the most civilised countries of Europe, of which every statistical information is possessed, and of which the Government are one with the people, viz., to fix a land-rent, not on each province, district or country, nor on each estate or farm, but on every separate field within their dominions.

"In pursuit of this supposed improvement, we find them unintentionally dissolving the ancient ties, the ancient usages which united the republic of each Hindu village, and by a kind of agrarian law newly assessing and parcelling out the lands which from time immemorial had belonged to the Village Community collectively... professing to limit their demand to each field, but in fact, by establishing such limit, an unattainable maximum, assessing the Ryot at discretion, and, like the Musalman Government which preceded them, binding the Ryot by force to the plough, compelling him to till land acknowledged to be over-assessed, dragging him back to it if he absconded, deferring their demand upon him until his crop came to maturity, then taking from him all that could be obtained, and leaving him nothing but his bullocks and seed grain, nay, perhaps obliged to supply him even with these, in order to renew his melancholy task of cultivating, not for himself, but for them."

(Minute of the Madras Board of Revenue, January 5, 1818.)

This plea of the officers on the spot for a collective settlement and for recognition of "the lands which from time immemorial had belonged to the Village Community collectively" was overborne. The London Court of Directors decided for the Ryotwari system, or, in the terms of a document of the time, to "confer the boon of private property" upon the peasantry; and armed with their instructions, Sir Thomas Munro returned from London to impose this system as a general settlement.

To-day the forms of land tenure in British India are, in consequence, traditionally classified under these three main groupings, all deriving from the British Government, and reflecting in fact its claim to be paramount landlord.

First, the Permanent Zemindari settlements, in Bengal Bihar and parts of North Madras, cover 19 per cent of the total area of British India.

Second, the Temporary Zemindari settlements, extending over most of the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, parts of Bengal and Bombay, and the Punjab (either with individual or group owners, as in the case of the so-called Joint Village settlements tried in the Punjab), cover 30 per cent of the area.

Third, the Ryotwari settlements, prevalent in Bombay, in most of Madras, in Berar, Sind, Assam and other parts, cover 51 per cent of the area.

It should not be supposed from this that landlordism prevails only in the 49 per cent of the area of British India covered by the Zemindari settlements. In practice, through the process of sub-letting, and through the dispossession of the original cultivators by moneylenders and others securing possession of their land, landlordism has spread extensively and at an increasing pace in the Ryotwari areas; the original intention may have been to make the settlements directly with the actual cultivators, but the relations have by now greatly changed. It is estimated that "over 30 per cent of the lands are not cultivated by the tenants themselves in Madras and Bombay" (Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India," p. 329). In Madras between 1901 and 1921 the number of non-cultivating landowners increased from 19 to 49 per thousand; the number of cultivating landowners decreased from 484 to 381 per thousand; the number of cultivating tenants increased from 151 to 225 per thousand. The Punjab Census Report for 1921 recorded an increase in the number of persons living from rent of agricultural lands from 626,000 in 1911 to 1,008,000 in 1921. In the United Provinces between 1891 and 1921 the number of persons returned as deriving their main income from agricultural rents increased by 46 per cent. In Central Provinces and Berar in the same period the rent-receivers increased by 52 per cent.

This extending chain of landlordism in India, increasing most rapidly in the modern period, is the reflection of the growing dis-possession of the peasantry and the invasion of moneyed interests, big and small, which seek investment in this direction, having failed to find effective outlets for investment in productive industry. Over wide areas a fantastic chain of sub-letting has grown up, even to the fiftieth degree. ("In some districts the sub-infeudation has grown to astonishing proportions as many as fifty or more intermediary interests having been created between the Zemindar at the top and the actual cultivator at the bottom."—Simon Report, Vol. I, p. 340.)

In consequence, much of the tenancy legislation, designed to protect the cultivators, reaches only to inferior landlords, while the majority of the real cultivators, if not already reduced to the position of landless labourers, are unprotected tenants, mercilessly squeezed to maintain a horde of functionless intermediaries above them in addition to the big parasites and the final claims of the Government. This process, carrying the whole system of landlordism to its final absurdity, is one of the sharpest expressions of the developing agrarian crisis in India.

4. IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE PEASANTRY

The consequent picture of agrarian relations in India is thus one of sharp and growing differentiation of classes.

The census of 1931 presents the following picture of the division of classes in Indian agriculture:

Non-cultivating proprietors taking rent	..	4,150,000
Cultivating owners, tenant cultivators	..	65,495,000
Agricultural labourers	.. ..	33,523,000

This classification is of only limited value, since the general grouping of "cultivating owners, tenant cultivators" throws no light on the size of holdings, and in consequence makes no distinction between big peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants. In particular, it gives no indication of the size of the majority group of cultivators with uneconomic holdings, whose conditions approximate to those of the labourers, and who commonly have to eke out their living as labourers. In practice the margin between the small sub-tenant and the labourer is a shadowy one. To get a truer picture it is therefore necessary to supplement the general census returns with the results of regional local enquiries, official and unofficial.

Changes in the system of classification also prevent comparison with previous census returns. The 1921 census, by the inclusion of dependants, gave a total for those drawing their living from agricultural cultivation as 221 million, against 103 million in the 1931 census. It is therefore necessary to take the figure of "actual workers" returned in the previous census, totalling 100 million, alongside the 103 million of the 1931 census, to make even a rough comparison. Even this comparison is vitiated by further changes in the system of classification, through the removal of all those whose agricultural occupations is treated as subsidiary to other occupations, and

in particular, through the removal of 7 million women, female relatives of agriculturists assisting in the work of the farm, to the category of "domestic service," thus giving an illusory apparent effect of a decline in the relative proportion of the population engaged in agriculture (as already explained on pp. 168-69). This latter change, however, only reinforces the general effect of the conclusions to be drawn. A comparison on this basis would show the following results:

	1921	1931
	millions	*millions*
Non-cultivating landlords ..	3.7	4.1
Cultivators (owners or tenants)	74.6	65.5
Agricultural labourers ..	21.7	33.5

These figures are in detail not comparable, for the reasons explained, especially in relation to the second group. But there is no doubt of the general tendency here revealed, of the growth in the number of non-cultivating landlords (the 1911 figure showed 2.8 million), and the enormous growth in the number of landless labourers.

More detailed figures can be taken for Madras:

CLASS DIFFERENTIATION IN AGRICULTURE IN MADRAS

(per thousand of the agricultural population)

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Non-working landowners ..	19	23	49	34
Non-working tenants ..	1	4	28	16
Working landowners ..	481	426	381	390
Working tenants	151	207	225	120
Labourers	345	340	317	429

(The figures for 1901-21, based on the census reports, are given in P. P. Pillai, "Economic Conditions in India," p. 114; the 1931 figures are taken from the 1931 Census Report for Madras.)

In the three decades from 1901 to 1931 the number of non-working rent-receivers has increased two and a half times (from 20 to 50 per thousand); the number of cultivating owners or tenants has decreased by one-quarter (from 635 to 510 per thousand); the number of landless labourers has increased from one-third to nearly one-half (345 to 429 per thousand).

In Bengal we find the following (based on the census returns):

	1921	1931	change
Non-cultivating landlords or rent-receivers ..	390,562	633,834	plus 61%
Cultivating owners and tenants	9,274,924	6,079,717	minus 50%
Labourers	1,805,502	2,718,939	plus 34%

Again the detail figures are not comparable, owing to the change in classification, resulting in an illusory apparent decline of the total agricultural population by 2 million. But this proves only the more overwhelmingly, the actually greater reality of the increase in the proportions of non-cultivating rent-receivers and of landless labourers.

The startling growth in the numbers of non-cultivating rent-receivers has been already noted in the previous section, and is confirmed by all evidence from all parts. This is the reflection of the extending expropriation of the cultivators.

The growth, at the other end of the scale, of the landless agricultural labourers is even more significant. In 1842 Sir Thomas Munro, as Census Commissioner, reported that there were no landless peasants in India (an undoubtedly incorrect picture, but indicating that the numbers were not considered to require statistical measurements). In 1882 the census estimated 7½ million "landless day labourers" in agriculture. The 1921 census returned a total of 21 million, or one-fifth of those engaged in agriculture. The 1931 census returned a total of 33 million or one-third of those engaged in agriculture. Since then it has been estimated (as in the debates in the Bengal Legislative Assembly on the amendments to the Tenancy Act in 1938; the Madras figures given above also indicate the same) that the real present proportion is nearer one-half.[1]

With regard to the wages of these agricultural labourers the following table is instructive:

	1842	1852	1862	1872	1911	1922
Field labour without food (day wage in annas) ..	1	1½	2	3	4	4 to 6
Price of rice (seers per rupee) ..	40	30	27	23	15	5

(R. Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India," p. 22)

[1] An enquiry into the conditions of the village of Khirhar in North Bihar in 1939 found that 'the most numerous class is that

Thus, while the cash wage has increased four to six times in this period, the price of rice has increased eight times—that is to say, the real wage has fallen by one-quarter to one-half during these eighty years of "progress". In the United Provinces the Report of the Quinquennial Wage Survey in 1934 recorded the average wage as 3 annas or 3*d.* a day. In 326 villages it was 1½ anna or 1½*d.* a day.

Descending still farther in the scale, if that were possible, we reach the dark realms of serfdom, forced labour and debt slavery, of landless labourers without wages, existing in all parts of India, about which the statistical returns are silent.

> "On the lowest rung of the economic ladder in India stand those permanent agricultural labourers who rarely receive cash and whose conditions vary from absolute to mitigated slavery. Such is the custom of the country in many parts of India that the Zemindar, Malguzar or ordinary cultivator nearly always contrives to get his servant into his debt, thus obtaining a hold over him which extends even to his posterity.
>
> "In the Bombay Presidency there are the Dublas and Kolis, who to a greater or less extent are bond slaves. Most of their families have been serving for several generations practically as slaves to their masters' households....
>
> "In the south-west of Madras there are the Izhavas, Cherumas, Puleyas and Holiyas, all virtually slaves. On the East Coast, the Brahman's hold on the land is strongest and a large proportion of the agricultural labourers are pariahs, who are often Padials. The Padial is a species of serfs, who has fallen into hereditary dependence on a landowner through debt...Such a loan is never repaid, but descends from one generation to another, and the Padials themselves are transferred with the creditor's land when he sells it or dies...
>
> "The lowest depth of serfdom is touched by the Kamias of Bihar, bond servants, who, in return for a loan received, bind themselves to perform whatever menial services are required of them by their masters in lieu of the interest due on the loan."
>
> *(R. Mukerjee, "Land Problems of India," pp. 225-9.)*

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of the landless labourers, consisting of 760 families, numbering 5,023 people, forming 72 per cent of the population of the village". (S. Sarkar, "Economic Conditions of a Village in North Bihar", *Indian Journal of Economics*, July, 1939.)

In many parts these agricultural serfs and debt slaves are representatives of the aboriginal races. But the position of the former free peasant, who has lost his land and become virtually enslaved to his creditor through debt, or who has been reduced to the bondage of share-cropping, is not far removed from legal serfdom.

Akin to these in many respects is the condition of the plantation slaves, or over 1 million labourers on the great tea, coffee and rubber plantations, owned as to 90 per cent by European companies, which pay high dividends. The labour for these is recruited from all over India; the workers with their families live on the estates under the complete control of the companies, without the most elementary civil rights; the labour of men, women and children is exploited at low rates; and, although the penal contracts have been formally abolished in recent years and various regulations introduced since the Whitley Report in 1930, the workers remain effectively tied to their masters for prolonged periods, and even in practice in many cases for life.

The pauperisation of the peasantry is shown in the growth of the proportion of landless labourers to one-third or even one-half of the agricultural population. But in fact the situation of the majority of small cultivators on uneconomic holdings, of the sub-let tenants and unprotected tenants, is not far removed from that of the agricultural labourers, and the line of distinction between the two is an extremely shadowy one. Thus the Report of the Madras Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930 noted:

> "We find it difficult to draw a clear line between cultivation by farm servants and sub-letting. Sub-letting is rarely on a money rental. It is commonly on a sharing system, the landlord getting 40 to 60 or even 80 per cent of the yield and the tenant the rest. The tenant commonly goes on from year to year eking out a precarious living on such terms, borrowing from the landlord, being supplied by him with seed, cattle and implements. The farm servant, on the other hand, uses the landlord's seed, cattle and implements, gets advance in cash from time to time for petty requirements, and is paid from the harvest either a lump sum of grain or proportion of the yield. The farm servant may in some cases be paid a little cash as well as a fixed amount of grain. The tenant may cultivate with his own stock and implements, but there

is in practice no very clear line between the two; and when the landlord is an absentee, it is not always obvious whether the actual cultivator is a farm labourer or a sub-tenant."

In 1927 N. M. Joshi, before the All-India Trade Union Congress, estimated 25 millions to be the number of agricultural wage-earners, and 50 millions more to be partly working wage-earners on the land. Thus the position of the overwhelming majority of Indian cultivators already approximates to that of a rural proletariat rather than of small peasant farmers.

In 1930 the Simon Report, that monument of imperialist complacency, declared (echoing the Agricultural Commission Report of two years earlier):

> "The typical agriculturist is still the man who possesses a pair of bullocks and cultivates a few acres, with the assistance of his family and of occasional hired labour."
>
> *(Simon Report, Vol. I, p. 18.)*

How fantastic is this picture in relation to the present realities can already be seen from the facts that have been given. In the evidence before the Agricultural Commission in 1927 an analysis was given of a district of one million acres in Bombay, which was declared to be "infinitely better off than many others". The changes in the proportions of holdings in only five years between 1917 and 1922 were as follows (Vol. II, Part I of Evidence, p. 292):

	Number of holdings in—		
Acreage of Holdings	1917	1922	*Decrease or Increase (per cent)*
Under 5 ..	6,272	6,446	plus 2.6
5 to 15 ..	17,909	19,130	plus 6.8
15 to 25 ..	11,908	12,018	plus 0.9
25 to 100 ..	15,532	15,020	minus 3.3
100 to 500 ..	1,234	1,117	minus 9.5
Over 500 ..	20	19	minus 5.0

The witness, a Government official, added in comment:

> "These figures referring only to a period of five years appear to me to show a very marked increase in the number of agriculturists cultivating holdings upto 15 acres, which except in a very few soils is not an area

> which can economically employ a pair of bullocks.... There is also a drop in the holdings of 25-100 acres, which means a decrease in the comparatively substantial agriculturist class who can with luck lay by a little capital."

Thus by 1922 one-half of the peasant holders (leaving out of account the army of landless labourers) no longer occupied a holding which could economically employ a pair of bullocks; and this proportion was rapidly increasing.

Any survey of the real situation of the peasantry thus turns on the crucial question of the size of holdings, with regard to which information has been given in the second section of this chapter. The distinction between the "ordinary cultivators", in the old Census phraseology, whether owners or tenants, and the landless labourers, is far less indicative of the real situation than the distinction between the overwhelming majority, constituted by the landless labourers and the cultivators with uneconomic holdings, and the small minority with even economic holdings, let alone the still smaller minority who could be classed as "comparatively substantial agriculturists" and the non-cultivating rent-receivers.

Evidence before the Bengal Land Revenue Commission (Floud Commission) generally held the view that 5 acres would be the minimum area required to enable an average family to meet all their expenses. But according to the findings of the Commission, about three-fourths of the peasant families in Bengal had less than 5 acres of land, as much as 57.2 per cent holdings less than three acres.

The classic survey of Dr. Harold H. Mann on "Life and Labour in a Deccan Village" helps to throw more light on the situation. In 1914-15 Dr. Mann, who was Director of Agriculture in Bombay, made an exhaustive enquiry into the conditions of a typical village in the Deccan. This enquiry was a purely scientific enquiry into actual conditions, cultivation, crops, land-holdings, debts and family income and expenditure in a typical "dry" village; but it was the first time that such an enquiry had been fully and exhaustively made. The results were so startling (in the words of the author, so "unexpected" and "depressing") that it was declared in criticism—no other criticism was possible in view of the scientific exactness of the facts—that the conditions of the village in question could not be accepted as typical. Dr. Mann thereupon turned his enquiry to another and different village, and in the ensuing study, published in 1921, reached precisely the same results, even

more heavily emphasised. Since then, similar surveys in many parts of he country have confirmed the general correctness of these results.

In the first village he found that 81 per cent of the holdings "could not under the most favourable circumstances maintain their owners." The division of the 156 holdings revealed the following picture:

More than 30 acres	2
20-30 acres	9
10-20 acres	18
5-10 acres	34
1-5 acres	71
Less than 1 acre	22

Following Keatinge's estimate that "an economic holding of good dry land such as is most in this village in the Western Deccan, and with an Indian ryot's standard of life, would be about 10 to 15 acres," he reached the conclusion that "even if each holding were held in one block, it is evident that a large proportion (81 per cent) are below this size". This conclusion is reached on the basis of an estimate of the economic minimum for the ryot's standard of life, which touches the lowest level of scanty food and clothing, with no allowance for such a luxury as artificial light. Taking the total of 103 families, he found that those families which were in a "sound economic position" on the basis of their land-holdings numbered 8 out of the 103; those which could maintain their position on the basis of their land by the addition of working outside numbered 28; but those which were in an "unsound" economic position, even on the basis of the fullest earnings from their holding of land and working outside, numbered 67, or 65 per cent. In the case of this first village, however, there was in the neighbourhood a large ammunition factory which provided outside employment for 30 per cent of the population; and to this extent the conditions were not typical.

In the second village, which was far removed from any manufacturing or industrial centre, 85 per cent of the families were in this "unsound" economic position. In this village, where the minimum economic holding would be about 20 acres, 77 per cent of the holdings were below this level. Of the 147 families, 10 were in the first group of being able to maintain a "sound economic position" on the basis of their land-holdings; 12 were in the second group of being able to maintain

their position on the combined basis of their land and working outside; and 125, or 85 per cent, were in an "unsound" economic position, even on the basis of the fullest earnings from their land and from working outside. This last group included 664 persons out of the total population of 732—that is, 91 per cent of the population were in this "unsound" economic position.

How do this preponderant majority below the lowest minimum standard eke out a living? They cannot do it. Inevitably they fall deeper and deeper into debt; they lose their land, they pass into the army of landless labourers. The investigation revealed the ever-tightening grip of debt on the villages. In the first village surveyed the annual debt charges amounted to 2,515 rupees, against a total net return of 8,338 rupees. "The debts now form a crushing load amounting to nearly 12 per cent of the capital value of the village and the actual charges for them amount to 24.5 per cent of the total profits from land" (p. 152). The second survey revealed a total of charges on debt amounting to 6,755 rupees, against a net return from the land of 15,807 rupees, or more than two-fifths of the return from the land went to the money-lender.

At the end of his survey Dr. Mann reached the general conclusion:

> "An average year seems (if our investigations and calculations give anything like a true picture of the village life) to leave the village under-fed, more in debt than ever, and apparently less capable than ever of obtaining with the present population and the present methods of cultivation a real economic independence."

5. THE BURDEN OF DEBT

As the difficulties of the peasant increase, the burden of debt descends more and more heavily upon him, and in turn increases his difficulties. This is the final vicious circle, which is only broken by the last stage—expropriation. Thus the growth of indebtedness, and of the accompanying processes of mortgaging of lands and of sale and transfer of lands to non-agriculturists, is one of the sharpest measures of the growth of the agrarian crisis.

"The vast majority of peasants," noted the Simon Report (Vol. I, 16) "live in debt to the money-lender."

That the burden of indebtedness has grown concomitantly with British rule, and has become an urgent and ever more widespread problem in the most recent period is universally admitted. Writing in 1911, Sir Edward Maclagan observed:

> "It has long been recognised that indebtedness is no new thing in India. The writings of Munro, Elphinstone and others make it clear that there was much debt even at the beginning of our rule. But it is also acknowledged that the indebtedness has risen considerably during our rule, and more especially during the last half century. The reports received from time to time and the evidence of annual sale and mortgage data show clearly there has been a very considerable increase of debt during the last half century."
>
> *(Sir Edward Maclagan in 1911, quoted in the Report of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee, 1931. p. 55.)*

Already in 1880 the Famine Commission reported:

> "One-third of the landholding classes are deeply and inextricably in debt, and at least an equal proportion are in debt, though not beyond the power of recovering themselves."

Since then this burden of debt has steeply increased. In 1928 the Agricultural Commission reported:

> "It is more than probable that the total rural debt has increased in the present century; whether the proportion it bears to the growing assets of the people has remained at the same level, and whether it is a heavier or lighter burden on the more prosperous cultivator than of old, are questions to which the evidence we have received does not provide an answer."
>
> *(Report of the Agricultural Commission, 1928, p. 441.)*

This fact of the increase was confirmed by the Central Banking Enquiry Committee in 1931:

> "On the question whether the volume of agricultural indebtedness is increasing or decreasing, there is a general consensus of opinion that the volume has been increasing in the course of the last century."
>
> *(Report of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee, 1931, p. 55.)*

The total volume of rural debt at that time (1931) was estimated by the Committee at 900 crores of rupees, or £675 million. Since then, following the economic crisis and the collapse of agricultural prices, a very steep further increase has taken place, and recent estimates place the total at double the figure (see page 216).

What lies behind this heavy increase of indebtedness under British rule, and especially in the modern period? The lighter type of writers, and conventional apologetic treatment, still endeavour to ascribe the indebtedness to the "improvidence" and "extravagance" of the peasantry, and to find the origin of the debts in social habits of spending large sums beyond their means on marriages, funerals and similar conventional social ceremonies, or on litigation. Cold facts do not bear out this analysis. Already in 1875 the Deccan Ryots Commission reported:

> "Undue importance has been given to the expenditure on marriage and other festivals. . . . The expenditure forms an item of some importance in the debit side of his (the ryot's) account, but it rarely appears as the nucleus of his indebtedness."

The Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee found that, as a result of "intensive village enquiries," the above charge could not be maintained. For example, in the village of Karimpur in the Bogra district, where fifty-two families were indebted, the purposes for which loans were incurred during one year, 1928-29, were as follows:

	Rupees
For repayment of old debts	389
For capital and permanent improvements, including purchase of cattle	1,087
For land revenue and rent	573
For cultivation	435
For social and religious purposes	150
For litigation	15
For other purposes	66
Total	2,715

Thus debts *incurred for social and religious purposes, or for* litigation, only comprise one-sixteenth of the whole. Only the second item, covering two-fifths of the whole, could be regarded as in any sense productive debt, representing the lack

of capital of the peasant. The remainder, comprising over half, was incurred to meet urgent current needs of land revenue, rent, repayment of debt and current cultivation.

Similar results were obtained in an enquiry in South-West Birbhum, Bengal, in 1933-34. Here, out of a total of 426 families in six villages, 234, or 55 per cent, were found to be in debt, to a total of 53,799 rupees, or an average of 230 rupees (£17 5s.) per family. The causes of indebtedness showed the following proportions:

	Rupees	*per cent*
For payment of rent	13,007	24 2
For capital improvement	12,736	23.7
For social and religious purposes ..	12,021	22.3
For repayment of old debts	4,503	8.4
For cultivation expenses	2,423	4.5
For litigation	708	1.3
For miscellaneous purposes	8,401	15.6

(S. Bose, "A Survey of Rural Indebtedness in South-West Birbhum, Bengal, in 1933-34," Indian Journal of Statistics, *September, 1937.)*

The principal item of debt—roughly one-quarter—was incurred for payment of rent; rent and debt together accounted for one-third; rather than less than one-quarter went for capital improvement; the proportion for social and religious purposes was higher than in the other example, but still only slightly over one-fifth. The main body of debt was incurred for economic needs, only a minority proportion of this being productive debt.

The causes of the indebtedness of the Indian peasantry are thus economic, and are closely linked up with their exploitation through the burdens of land revenue and rent. "The chief cause of indebtedness," in the words of the enquiry quoted above, "is the general poverty of the cultivating class." It was Sir T. Hope, a Bombay revenue officer, who declared, in the speech in which he introduced the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Bill in 1879, that "to our revenue system must in candour be ascribed some share in the indebtedness of the ryot." "There can be no question," wrote the Report of the Commission of 1892 into the working of the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act, "that the rigidity of the present system is one of the main causes which lead the ryots of the Deccan into fresh debt." A system which establishes fixed revenue assessments in cash, at a uniform figure for thirty-year periods at a time,

irrespective of harvests or economic changes, may appear convenient to the revenue collector or to the Government statesmen computing their budget; but to the countrymen, who has to pay the uniform figure from a wildly fluctuating income, it spells ruin in bad years, and inevitably drives him into the hands of the moneylender. Tardy suspensions or remission in extreme conditions may strive to mitigate, but cannot prevent this process. The Commission above quoted collected evidence from a series of villages in the Poona district on how the land revenue is paid. The following table, summarising the answers from the villages, is illuminating:

Village	*How the Land Revenue is paid*
Waiwand	Ryots are obliged to borrow to pay revenue.
Pimpalgaon	Borrow a little even in good years.
Deulgaon	Borrow in some cases.
Kanagaon	Crops seldom ripen in time for assessment, so ryots have to borrow.
Nandgaon	If rain bad, borrow on security of standing jowar.
Dhond	Borrow on security of standing crops.
Girim	Must borrow on account, or, if no credit, sell standing crops.
Sonwari	Have to borrow to pay revenue, if cannot pay out of savings, or by sale of cattle.
Wadhana	Pay first instalment by borrowing on standing crops. If no crops, mortgage land or sell.
Morgaon	Same.
Ambi	Same.
Tardoli	Pay first instalment by borrowing on standing crops, or, if no crops, borrow on interest.
Kusigaon	Same.

"I was perfectly satisfied during my visit to Bombay," writes Vaughan Nash in "The Great Famine," published in 1900, who summarises the above table from the Commission's Report, "that the authorities regarded the moneylender as their mainstay for the payment of revenue."

The moneylender and debt are not new phenomena in Indian society. But the role of the moneylender has taken on new proportions and a new significance under capitalist exploitation, and especially in the period of imperialism. Previously, the peasant could only borrow from the moneylender on his personal security, and the trade of the moneylender was hazardous and uncertain; his transactions were in practice subject to the judgment of the village. Under the old laws the creditor could not seize the land of his debtor. All this was changed under British rule. The British legal system, with

the right of distraint on the debtor and the transferability of lands, created a happy hunting-ground for the moneylender, and placed behind him all the power of the police and the law, making him an indispensable pivot in the whole system of capitalist exploitation. For the moneylender not only provides the indispensable medium for the collection of land revenue; he commonly combines in his person the role of grain merchant with that of usurer; he holds the monopolist position for purchasing the crops at harvest-time; he often advances the seeds and implements; and the peasants, usually unable to check his accounts of what they have paid and what is due to them, fall more and more under his sway; he becomes the despot of the village. As the lands fall into his hands, the process is carried farther: the peasants become labourers or share-croppers completely working for him, paying over to him as combined rent and interest the greater part of what they produce; he becomes more and more the small capitalist of Indian village economy, employing the peasants as his workers. The anger of the peasants may in the first place turn against the moneylender as their visible tyrant and the apparent author of their woes; the sporadic cases of the murder of moneylenders even by the peaceful and long-suffering Indian peasants illustrate this process; but they soon find that behind the moneylender stands the whole power of imperialism. The moneylender is the indispensable lower cog, at the point of production, of the entire mechanism of finance-capital exploitation.

As the ravages of the moneylender extend, attempts are made with increasing urgency by the Government, in the interests of exploitation in general, to check him from killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Volumes of special legislation have been passed for restriction of usurious interest and against the alienation of lands. But the failure of this legislation has had to be admitted (see the section of the Aricultural Commission's Report on "Failure of Legislation," pp. 436-7, with reference to the experience of this legislation intended to check rural indebtedness), and is further testified by the unchecked and even accelerating growth of indebtedness.

The most detailed investigation of the whole problem of indebtedness and its growth under British rule is to be found in M. L. Darling's "The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt," originally published in 1925, and in his subsequent books "Rusticus Loquitur" (1930) and "Wisdom and Waste in a Punjab Village" (1934). Despite the generally apologetic

outlook of the writer, the facts stand out. In his first work he showed how since the British conquest indebtedness spread in the Punjab:

> "The mortgage that was rare in the days of the Sikh appeared in every village, and by 1878 seven per cent of the Province was pledged....
>
> "By 1880 the unequal fight between the peasant proprietor and the moneylender had ended in a crushing victory for the latter...For the next thirty years the moneylender was at his zenith, and multiplied and prospered exceedingly, to such good effect that the number of bankers and moneylenders (including their dependents) increased from 53,263 in 1868 to 193,890 in 1911."
>
> *(M. L. Darling, "The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt," p. 208)*

Mr. Darling was of opinion that the moneylender had reached his "zenith" by 1911, and in his evidence to the Agricultural Commission in 1927 he indicated hopefully that "in the Punjab the village moneylender is gradually reducing his business everywhere, except in two districts, and that the main causes of this reduction are the rapid growth of the co-operative movement, the legal protection given to the peasant borrower and the rise of the agriculturist moneylender" (Report, p. 442). But by the time of his next book, "Rusticus Loquitur," published in 1930, despite a general optimistic tone, he had once again to raise the alarm:

> "There is a danger that, despite the Land Alienation Act, the expropriation of the peasant may begin again on a large scale. There are already indications of the possibility in the Western Punjab, where the large landlord is taking advantage of the Act to add to his acres at the expense of the peasantry" (p. 326).

By 1935 the Punjab Land Revenue authorities were reporting:

> "The agriculturist moneylender is apparently gaining strength in the rural areas."
>
> *(Report of the Punjab Land Revenue Administration, 1935, p. 6.)*

In his investigation, made in 1919, Mr. Darling found that only 17 per cent of the proprietors were free of debt, and that the average debt was no less than 463 rupees, or twelve times the amount of the land revenue.

A striking demonstration of the growth of indebtedness is available from the district of Faridpur in Bengal. In 1906

an enquiry was conducted in this district by J. C. Jack, subsequently a Judge of the Calcutta High Court, and its results were afterwards published in his "Economic Life in a Bengal District" (1916); these results showed at that time 55 per cent of the families in Faridpur still free from debt. A quarter of a century later, in 1933-34, a new investigation was conducted in the same district by the Bengal Board of Economic Enquiry, and it was found that by this date only 16.9 per cent of the families in Faridpur were free from debt.

6. THE TRIPLE BURDEN

The peasant cultivator, if he has not yet fallen into the ranks of the landless proletariat, thus lives to-day under a triple burden. Three devourers of surplus press upon him to extract their shares from the meagre returns he is able to obtain with inadequate instruments from his restricted plot or strips of land, even though those returns are already all too small for the barest subsistence needs of himself and his family.

The claims of the Government for land revenue fall upon all, as also for such indirect taxation as is able to reach his scanty purchases ("the self-sufficiency of the Indian villages," laments the Simon Report, "has limited the scope of internal excises to a few articles such as salt, kerosene oil and alcoholic liquors, for which the rural areas are dependent on extraneous supply"; even so the revenue raised from the duty on salt, the barest need of the poorest, reached no less than £8.1 million in 1939-40, or two-fifths of the land revenue).

The claims of the landlord for rent, additional to the Government land revenue, fall on the majority; since, in addition to the half of the total area of British India under the zemindari system, at least one-third of the holdings in the ryotwari area are sub-let.

The claims of the moneylender for interest fall on the overwhelming majority, possibly, if the figures of Darling and the Faridpur example given above are indicative, as high as four-fifths.

What proportion of the produce of the peasant is thus taken from him? What is left him for his subsistence? No returns are available on this basic question of Indian agriculture. No attempt has even been made to ascertain the total of rent payments additional to land revenue, still less the volume of interest on debt. Failing exact information, the

Central Banking Enquiry Committee Minority Report attempted an estimate in the most general terms (pp. 36-7). Starting from the basis of land revenue at 350 million rupees, this estimate computed the interest on debt as probably, on the most conservative calculation, three times this, or 1,000 million rupees, and the total of rent, additional to land revenue, as one and a half times land revenue. This would make a total burden of close on five times the amount of land revenue. Yet this is almost certainly an under-estimate, as the Report indicates. The computation of rent taken by intermediaries as one and a half times land revenue is based on a Bill which was introduced in Madras, and not adopted, to improve conditions by making this a maximum; the real proportion, certainly in Bengal (where gross rental is at least four times and possibly six times land revenue), and probably elsewhere, even though not as disproportionately as in Bengal, is likely to be higher. The Report inclines to the view that "wherever there are intermediaries, though the conditions would vary enormously from place to place and from man to man in view of different kinds of tenure and productivity, the burden on the cultivators would be much greater than is indicated by the proportion 1 : 1½." The rate of interest on debt, calculated at 1,000 million rupees on a total of 9,000 million rupees, or 11 per cent, is certainly too low; a customary rate with the village moneylender is often 1 anna per rupee per month (sometimes 1¼ anna) or 75 per cent. The growth of debt since then to an estimated double of the previous total will have correspondingly increased the burden. The real burden is therefore certainly much heavier than even indicated by this estimate. Yet this estimate would reach a total, if the incidence of the salt tax is included, in the neighbourhood, of 2,000 million rupees a year, or 20 rupees per agriculturist. Against this we have the estimate of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee Majority Report that "the average income of an agriculturist in British India does not work out at a higher figure than about 42 rupees or a little over £3 a year" (p. 39).

A closer picture of the rate of exploitation is available from the detailed "Study of a South Indian Village" by N. S. Subramanian (Congress Political and Economic Studies, No. 2, 1936). The village of Nerur is in the district of Trichinopoly, and has a population of 6,200. In this study of the economics of this village the exact budget is presented of the total income of its population from all sources, the total outgoings and the balance available for consumption. The degree of exploitation

can here be seen with exceptional clarity, because the land is mainly held by owners outside the village, and the debts are mainly owing to creditors outside the village, so that the bulk of rent and interest passes out of the village, and represents a clear deduction from the net income of the village.

What are the results that this investigation revealed? The gross income from agriculture, valuing all products at market prices, amounted to Rs. 344,000. The net income from agriculture, after deducting expenses of cultivation (not labour, and excluding wages paid within the village), came to Rs. 212,000. Net income from non-agricultural sources (wages earned outside, salaries of government servants and pensions, interest on capital lent out) came to Rs. 24,000, making a total income from all sources of Rs. 236,000.

Against this, the following outgoings from the village were noted: land revenue, irrigation and allied cesses, Rs. 30,000; rent to owners of land outside the village, Rs. 70,000; interest on debt (calculated at the lowest rate of 8 per cent), Rs. 40,000; rentals to Government for toddy and arrack shops, tree taxes, rent to tree owners, Rs. 12,000. This makes a total of Rs. 152,000 for Government revenue, taxation, rent and interest. Together with minor outgoings of Rs. 4,000, the total payments from the village of Rs. 156,000 leave a balance for the village of Rs. 80,000 or under Rs. 13 a head.

It will be seen that each inhabitant of this village earns an average of 38 rupees or £2 17s. for the year. After the tax-collector, landlord and moneylender have taken their share, he is left with under 13 *rupees or* 19s. *to live on for the year. He is left with one-third; two-thirds are taken.*

"Of the net total income more than two-thirds goes out of the village by way of land revenue and excise taxes, interest charges and rents to non-resident owners." This is the conclusion reached in this detailed study, which has only been summarised in the above round figures.

Carlyle described the situation of the French peasantry on the eve of the Great Revolution in a famous passage:

> "The widow is gathering nettles for her children's dinner: a perfumed seigneur, delicately lounging in the *Oeil de Boeuf*, has an alchemy whereby he will extract from her the third nettle, and name it Rent and Law."

A more mysterious alchemy has been achieved to-day in British India. One nettle is left for the peasant; two nettles are gathered for the seigneur.

Chapter IX

TOWARDS AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

"Now awake, brave peasants awake, follow in Krishna's[1] wake
Thieves and robber have entered our house. Do not sleep.
Now awake, brave peasants awake, follow in Krishna's wake.
In the month of Baisakh[2] when the peasants reap the crops,
The Bohray[3] confiscate the land and landlords rob the crops
There is no peace for a day.
They take the fruit of your labour right in front of your eyes,
And leave you not a grain to eat.
Now awake, brave peasants awake, follow in Krishna's wake."

—SATOKI SHARMA, LANDLESS PEASANT POET OF MUTHRA DISTRICT, PRESIDENT OF THE VILLAGE POETS' CONFERENCE, FARIDABAD, MAY 1938.

ON THE BASIS of the foregoing analysis it is possible to summarise the main features of the growth of the agrarian crisis, whose causes and preceding conditions have been developing through the whole process of British rule and are to-day gathering to a climax.

1. GROWTH OF THE AGRARIAN CRISIS

The first feature is the increasingly lop-sided and unbalanced situation of agriculture in the national economy, the simulta-

[1] Krishna drove Arjun's chariot into the battlefield when Mahabharat was going to be fought. Arjun was diffident to kill his own uncles and relations, but Krishna explained to him the philosophy of war and prepared him for battle.

[2] Month in the Hindu calendar.

[3] Village capitalists.

neous overcrowding and under-development, with still continuing "de-industrialisation," consequent on the colonial position of India. This general situation affects and aggravates all the remaining factors.

The second is the stagnation and deterioration of agriculture, the low yields, the waste of labour, the failure to bring into cultivation the culturable area, the lack of development of the existing cultivated area, and even signs of deterioration of yield, of land passing out of cultivation and of net decrease of the cultivated area.

The third is the increasing land-hunger of the peasantry, the constant diminution in the size of holdings, spreading of sub-division and fragmentation, and the growth in the proportion of uneconomic holdings until these to-day constitute the majority of holdings.

The fourth is the extension of landlordism, the multiplication of letting and sub-letting, the rapid growth in the number of functionless non-cultivating rent-receivers, and the increasing transfer of land into the hands of these non-cultivating owners.

The fifth is the increasing indebtedness of the cultivators still in possession of their holdings, and the astronomic rise of the total of rural debt in the most recent period.

The sixth is the extension of expropriation of the cultivators, consequent on the growth of indebtedness, and the resulting transfer of land to the moneylenders and speculators, the outcome of which is reflected in the growth of landlordism and of the landless proletariat.

The seventh is the consequent ever more rapid growth of the agricultural proletariat, increasing in the single decade 1921-31 from one-fifth to one-third of the total number of cultivators, and since then developing further to becoming probably one-half of the total number of cultivators.

That expropriation follows on indebtednes is universally admitted. Already in 1892 the Deccan Commission on the working of the Agriculturists' Relief Act recorded with bitterness "the transfer of the land in an agricultural country to a body of rack-renting aliens, who do nothing for the improvement of the land," and pronounced the new class of landowner to be "probably the least fitted in the world to use the powers of an irresponsible landlord.... As a landlord he follows the instincts of the usurer, making the hardest terms possible with his tenant, who is also his debtor, and often little better than his slave." In 1928 the Agricultural Commission admitted

that "the inevitability of indebtedness, as it seems to the people, gives the moneylender enormous power. It produces an almost fatalistic acceptance of the steady transfer of land into his possession and leaves his paramount position unchallenged" (p. 435). Incidentally, the virtuous indignation of these Government Commissions against the wickedness of the moneylender land-grabber omits to mention that his power is based on his legal support by the State, including the enforcement of these transfers of land just as the exactions of Government revenue and taxation first drove the cultivators into his hands. In 1931 the Central Banking Enquiry Committee registered the general conviction that

> "the indebtedness leads ultimately to the transfer of land from the agricultural class to the non-agricultural moneylender, leading to the creation of a landless proletariat with a reduced economic status. The result is said to be loss of agricultural efficiency, as the moneylender sub-lets at a rate which leaves the cultivator with a reduced incentive to raise a good crop."
>
> *(Report of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee, p. 59.)*

The 1931 Census Report reached the conclusion that "it is likely that a concentration of land in the hands of non-cultivating owners is taking place." (Census of India, 1931, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 288.)

But this whole process of deterioration, expropriation and increasing class differentiation has been carried very much farther, and very much more rapidly, forward as a consequence of the world economic crisis, the collapse of agricultural prices and later the impact of the second world war and the ensuing wave of countrywide famines.

The extent of the collapse may be seen from the statistics published by the Director-General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics. In 1928-29, the year before the onset of depression, the value of agricultural crops, taken at an average harvest price, was about Rs. 10,340 million. In 1933-34 it was only Rs. 4,730 million—a fall of 55 per cent.

The effects of this sudden halving of his income on the plight of the already impoverished cultivator may be imagined. For the money payments he was required to make he received no corresponding reduction. On the contrary, land revenue, which stood at Rs. 331 million in 1928-29, was actually maintained at Rs. 330 million in 1931-32, and had only fallen,

largely through sheer inability to pay and surrender of lands in many cases, to Rs. 300 million in 1933-34, or a drop of slightly over 9 per cent.

The desperate position of the cultivators in Bengal can be measured from the estimates given in the Bengal Jute Enquiry Committee Report of 1934, with regard to the variations in purchasing power between 1920-21 and 1932-33. According to these the total value of marketable crops in Bengal fell from an annual average of Rs. 724 million for the decade 1920-21 to 1929-30, to Rs. 327 million in 1932-33, whereas monetary liabilities actually rose, from Rs. 279 to Rs. 283 million. This meant that the "free purchasing power" of the cultivators fell from Rs. 445 to Rs. 44 million. The Calcutta Index of Prices fell from an average of 223 to 126 for the same periods, a fall of 44 per cent, whereas "free purchasing power" fell 90 per cent.

It was in this period that the last gold ornaments, the traditional form of savings, were drained from the peasantry to stave off bankruptcy, and served to maintain the annual tribute from India when the exports of goods could no longer cover it. Between 1931 and 1937 no less than £241 million of gold was drained from India. But this "distress" gold could only avail a section, and could not serve to put off the evil day for more than a limited period.

In the United Provinces the number of abandonments of land by tenants who could not pay rent reached as high as 71,430 in 1931; the number of orders for the forced collection of land revenue was 256,284. We have already seen how in Bengal in 1930 the Committee on Irrigation reported that "land is going out of cultivation."

By 1934-35 the agricultural returns revealed *an absolute drop in the area of cultivated land by over 5 million* acres. In 1933-34 the net area sown with crops was 233.2 million acres. In 1934-35 it was 226.9 million or a drop of 5,266,000 acres. The drop in the area under food grains was 5,589,000 acres.

The very slight recovery in prices since 1934 was not able to mitigate the depression or overcome the still continuing effects of the collapse. "Since 1934," writes Anstey ("Economic Development of India," 488 xxvii), "the sufferings of the people may have become more severe."

The burden of debt was doubled by the halving of the cultivators' income. This inevitably meant an increase of debt, which is now estimated to represent a total double the level of 1931.

In 1921 the total of agricultural debt was estimated at £400 million (see M. L. Darling, "The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt").

In 1931 the Central Banking Enquiry Committee Report estimated the total at Rs. 900 crores or £675 million.

In 1937 the first Report of the Agricultural Credit Department of the Reserve Bank of India estimated the total at Rs. 1,800 crores or £1,350 million.

From £400 million to £675 million in the ten years 1921-31. From £675 to £1,350 million in the six years 1931-37. These figures of the mounting total of the peasants' debts during this period give a very sharp expression of the deepening agrarian crisis.

The bankruptcy of the Indian agricultural economy was revealed in all its nakedness when after the entry of Japan into the war, the imports of rice from Burma were stopped. It immediately created a situation of scarcity of foodgrains and rising prices in India, which could have been met firstly, by an intensive drive to increase the production of foodgrains, by relieving the burden on the tenant and by supplying him the necessary irrigation and other facilities; secondly, by control of prices and overall rationing; and lastly, by effectively checking the hoarding and blackmarketing by landlords and traders. Instead of this the imperialist Government, intent on financing the war by exploitation of the common people, relied upon inflation, high prices, and used hoarders themselves to obtain its food supplies for the military without caring to organize equitable distribution of food for the people. The result was that though the total deficit of foodgrains in the year 1943 was only 1,400,000 tons, a minor fraction of India's needs, vast parts of the country were plunged into a famine which resulted in mass deaths.

In Bengal alone, according to a survey conducted by Prof. K. P. Chattopadhyaya, 3½ million people died as a result of the famine. Even the official Famine Inquiry Commission placed the total number of deaths at 1½ million.

Epidemics followed in the wake of famine, and by September 1944, 1,200,000 people in Bengal had died of various diseases (Bhowani Sen, "Rural Bengal in Ruins", p. 18).

The famine was a 'man-made' famine. The shortage in Bengal was only a shortage of six weeks' supplies and could have been made up by imports and equitable distribution. But over one-third of the population of Bengal was hit by the

famine. The entire stocks had been cornered by the big zemindars and traders, and the corrupt bureaucracy rather than force stocks out of their hands helped them to shoot up prices and play havoc with the lives of millions of people The price of rice in Calcutta which was Rs. 6 per maund in January 1942 rose to Rs. 11 in November 1942, Rs. 24 in February-April 1943, Rs. 30 in May, Rs. 35 in July, Rs. 38 in August, Rs. 40 in October 1943. The price rose to as high as Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 per maund in the mofussil districts. Rice was available all through the famine and in unlimited quantities but at Rs. 100 per maund.

The big merchants as a result made a huge surplus black-market profit of Rs. 1,500 million in the course of this famine (*ibid*, p. 1).

The first to be hit were the 75 per cent of the peasant families of Bengal, who own less than 5 acres of land and hence cannot meet their own needs of foodgrains. By May 1943, these 75 per cent had no stocks of rice left with them and "food stock was in the hands of jotedars and merchants, and of government agents and factory owners" (*ibid*, p. 4). The famine first hit the poorest sections and then gradually its impact extended to the middle peasant. The poorer a peasant, the earlier was he forced to sell his belongings, become a destitute and meet his death. As a survey conducted by Prof. P. C. Mahalanobis and others of the Indian Statistical Institute, states:

> "In fact, classification of sub-divisions by amount of paddy land owned per family before the famine was found to be roughly parallel to the degree of incidence of famine conditions.
>
> (*"A Sample survey of After-Effects of the Bengal Famine of 1943," p. iii, "Sankhya," Vol. 7, Part 4, 1946.*)

The result of this famine was a further impoverishment of the peasantry and an increased concentration of land into the hands of the richer landlords and moneylenders.

According to this survey, nearly 1,590,000 families (about one-fourth of the number who had owned paddy land before the famine) had either sold in full or in part or mortgaged their paddy land during the course of one year of famine, from April, 1943, to April 1944. Out of these 260,000 families had totally lost their holdings and were thus reduced to the rank

of landless labourers; 660,000 had sold their land in part; and 670,000 had mortgaged their paddy land.

Not more than one per cent of the kisans who have thus lost their land, have got it back, not even by means of the legal restitution ("Rural Bengal in Ruins," p. 6).

Out of 710,000 acres of paddy land sold during the famine, only 20,000 acres had been purchased back in the villages. Roughly 420,000 acres of paddy land thus passed to outsiders, possibly non-cultivating owners residing in urban areas ("Sample Survey," p. iv).

The process of sale was not confined to land this time. The whole life of the people was disrupted. Parents were forced to throw their children and babies on the roadside in the hope that somebody may pick them up and feed them. Husbands were forced to leave their wives and the whole family at the mercy of events. Women were forced to sell themselves and enter brothels. Out of the 125,000 destitutes who came to Calcutta, it is estimated that quite about 30,000 young women joined brothels to be able to just continue their breathing.

Many hundreds of thousands of people have become destitutes. According to the "Sample Survey," 1,080,000 was the number of destitutes in Bengal in May 1944, out of which 480,000 persons had been rendered destitute specifically under war and famine conditions (*ibid*, p. v). The number of impoverished but not totally destituted comes to six million ("Rural Bengal in Ruins," p. 16).

The whole village economy was disorganised. The village artisans and craftsmen, like the fisherman, the leather worker, the blacksmith, the potter and the weaver, were the worst sufferers during the famine. They were, in fact, among the first to be hit and were reduced to mere paupers.

Even those who still survived the impact are themselves heading towards destitution. The village artisans are finding rehabilitation very difficult. All articles of their need—yarn, iron, net, leather, etc., have gone into the blackmarket. The peasants have no cattle to plough the land, about 300,000 or 8.5 per cent of the families of rural Bengal having lost all the cattle they had before the famine. During this one year, 20 per cent of the bullocks either perished or passed into the hands of the non-tillers.

The proportion of families in debt has immensely increased. The following data collected by the Kisan Samiti workers shows the increase in indebtedness of the families still living

in the worst of the famine-affected areas:

	Percentage of families in debt	
	1943	1944
Kisan families	43	66
Various craftsmen	27	56
Miscellaneous	17	46

(Ibid, p. 12.)

Vast masses of peasants to-day have no land, no seed, no cattle, no cash to buy their requirements and many able-bodied persons have become completely incapacitated through repeated attacks of disease. In fact, "the propertied peasant is today dependent upon the prosperous peasant in the village or upon the jotedar for his land, his cattle, for oil-cake, and even for seed. He has to sell himself at any terms to secure land, cattle and seed, or he would be reduced to a day labourer" (*ibid*, p. 10).

What happened in Bengal was a most accentuated form of crisis overtaking the entire country. Nowhere did the mass of the peasantry gain from high wartime prices. Only a thin stratum of the middle peasants were able to wipe off part of their debts—the masses sank deeper and deeper into debt and thus lost their lands. Recently an enquiry was conducted by the Madras Government under Dr. B. V. Naidu into the rural debt during the war. The various statistics given by the enquiry do not give a correct picture at all; they are very much biassed, tremendous weightage during sampling having been given in favour of the landlords. But even this enquiry could not conceal the real trend, namely, that the debt of the petty landholders, tenants and agricultural labourers has immensely increased as a result of the war.

A process of expropriation of cultivators has been going on all through the war years at a terrible pace, leading India into a state of chronic scarcity, starvation and famine. In 1946, within three years of the great famine, India is once again faced with a situation when the total deficit of food grains is estimated to be 6 million tons and lives of one-fourth of the population are threatened with extinction.

2. THE NECESSITY OF THE AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

The Indian peasantry are thus faced with very urgent problems of existence, to which they must imperatively find their solution.

Can a solution be found within the conditions of the existing regime, within the existing land system and the rule of imperialism based upon it?

It is evident and universally admitted that far-reaching changes are essential, reaching to the whole basis of land tenure and the existing distribution of land, no less than to the technique of agricultural production.

The Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha in their memorandum to the *Floud Commission* stated:

> "The Permanent Settlement has conferred unrestricted right on the zemindars and this in turn has rendered this system just as a fabric of monopoly and tyranny under its grinding pressure.... Our experience tells us that the Permanent Settlement provides an iron frame-work within which little in the way of practical reform can be effected. A legislative reform may be placed in the statute book, but it can be rendered nugatory by the power that rests with the landholding class.... In the minds of the oppressed cultivator it is this system which perpetually strives through its various agents, the landlord, the money-lender and the police to drive him off the land. Under these conditions, the demand for the abolition of Permanent Settlement is not the outcome of confused thinking, but has arisen out of a deep-rooted understanding of the impossibility of tinkering with the present system of land tenure."
>
> *(Memorandum, pp. 4-5.)*

Landlordism must go. In India, as we have seen, landlordism is an artificial creation of foreign rule, seeking to transplant Western institutions, and has no roots in the traditions of the people. In consequence, landlordism is here more completely functionless than in any other country, making no pretence even of fulfilling any necessary role of conservation or development of the land, but, on the contrary, intensifying its misuse and deterioration by short-sighted excessive demands. It is a purely parasitic claim on the peasantry, and most commonly takes the form of absentee landlordism in the case of the bigger estates, with the further burden of additional parasitic intermediaries in the case of the sub-landlords. There is no room for these parasitic claims on the already scant produce of the peasantry. Whatever is produced is required, first, for subsistence, second, for social needs, and third, for the development of agriculture.

The same applies to the moneylender and the mountain of debt. Drastic scaling down and eventual cancellation are inevitable. But this alone would be useless, or only a temporary palliative, unless accompanied by alternative forms of organisation to prevent the causes of indebtedness and replace the role of the moneylender. This means, in the first place, the removal of excessive demands on the cultivator and the organisation of economic holdings, and, in the second place, the provision of cheap credit, pending collective organisation which would finally replace the need of credit.

It must be recognised that, while temporary partial measures of remission and reduction of rent, and reduction of debt and of the rate of interest, could afford some temporary relief, and have been in some cases attempted in varying degrees, a more basic approach involves a complete reorganisation of the whole land system. The existence of a large class of some 3 million petty landlords or sub-landlords, very poor themselves, and whose holdings often represent the savings of "old age pension" of low-income urban dwellers, complicates the whole problem of landlordism. In consequence, any temporary measures for the reduction of rent need to be so framed as to ensure that the main incidence falls on the larger landlords. It has been suggested that the method of a graded agricultural income tax (the present income tax does not fall on agricultural income and thus leaves the landlords immune, while increasing the burden on industry) could effect this object by placing the heaviest rates on the large landlord incomes, while leaving the petty landlords exempt. This, however, while increasing the income of the State, and to that extent, if in the hands of a popular government, facilitating the release of potential funds for agricultural development, would not meet the main immediate needs of lightening at once the burdens on the peasantry, unless the funds so obtained were used to reduce land revenue with an accompanying obligatory equivalent reduction of rent. Any more systematic tackling of the evil of landlordism would accordingly require to be part of a wider economic reorganisation, which would provide alternative means of livelihood for the displaced petty holders, as indeed for the millions who must inevitably be displaced from the existing overcrowded agriculture. Hence the unity of the tasks of agricultural and industrial development.

The essential problem is not only a problem of landlordism, but one of a reorganisation of the whole existing land system

and distribution of holdings. A redistribution of holdings is long overdue, both to combat the evil of uneconomic holdings and of fragmentation. When it is recalled that in the Presidency of Bombay, for example, 48 per cent of the farms comprise less than five acres, and yet total not more than 2.4 per cent of the entire area (Evidence of the Agricultural Commission, Vol. II, part I, p. 76), it will be seen how urgent is the need for redistribution. Such redistribution, however, inevitably cutting across a thicket of individual vested interests on behalf of the claims of the majority, could not be accomplished by the bureaucratic action of a foreign government, even if it had the will, but could only be accomplished by the initiative and action of the mass of the peasantry themselves, under the leadership of a government representing them and fighting for their interests.

Redistribution alone, however, can only be the preliminary to tackling the whole problem of agricultural development, raising the technique of agriculture to modern levels, bringing in the use of agricultural machinery, and reclaiming the vast areas of uncultivated culturable land. In this connection it is worth recalling the estimate quoted by the Central Banking Enquiry Committee (Enclosure XIII, p. 700) that, if the output per acre were raised to the level of English production, it would mean an immediate increase of wealth by £1,000 million a year, while, if it were raised to the level of Danish wheat production, it would mean an increase of £1,500 million a year (or five times the gross value of agricultural crops in 1933-34, and equivalent to something like doubling the probable actual income of the Indian people). Such an advance, however, would require a decisive break with the traditions of small-scale technique and governmental neglect, and a development, under the conditions of India, towards collective large-scale farming.

The necessity of large-scale farming in order to make possible the use of large-scale machinery is recognised *in theory* by the experts of imperialism:

> "To begin with prime movers, of which the largest are steam ploughing tackle and the gyro-tiller, the position of such large-scale machinery is clear. They can be employed only on large estates, and even then only where the necessary capital is available. Their work is uniformly good and their use is limited solely by the above conditions. The only possible hope of an expansion in the

demand for them rests in co-operative use, which is at present far to seek."

(Wynne Sayer, of the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, "Use of Machinery in Agriculture" in the "Times Trade & Engineering Supplement," April, 1939.)

From the point of view of the expert of imperialism such a development is "far to seek." But the rising social forces of the ruined peasantry and landless agricultural labourers in India are capable of showing in the future period that such a development is not so "far to seek" as these experts imagine. Here the example of the Soviet Union, with its rapid development in two decades, from the poverty-stricken peasantry of Tsarism, through the abolition of landlordism, and after the preliminary stage of redistribution, to the present prosperous collective farms, is of special importance for India.

3. FAILURE OF GOVERNMENT REFORM POLICIES

Is there any prospect of such a development, or basic tackling of the agrarian problem taking place under the conditions of imperialism? To ask the question is to answer it. Such a supposition would be admittedly fantastic. Quite apart from any question of the will of those responsible for the administration of imperialist rule, the interests of imperialism, which are bound up, on the one hand, with the maintenance of landlordism and pseudo-feudal institutions as the indispensable social basis of its rule against the masses, and on the other hand, with the finance-capitalist exploitation of the Indian people as a backward agricultural colony, prevent any tackling of the agrarian problem.

The impotence of imperialism to tackle the ever more urgent agrarian problem is admitted by the imperialists themselves. Symbolic of this were the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India in 1927, which was the first Commission appointed, after 170 years of British rule, to consider the problems of "agriculture and rural economy in British India," but was forbidden to touch the land system. Hence the complete practical ineffectiveness of its inevitably limited and minor recommendations, entombed in seventeen volumes of Report and Evidence, which moulder on the

shelves, a mine of evidence on agricultural conditions, to arrest in any degree the growth of the agrarian crisis, which has reached its sharpest intensification since the Report.

The practical record of bankruptcy proves the impotence of imperialism in relation to the agrarian problem. The miserly provision during the most recent period of a very limited range of agricultural research institutes and stations (the establishment of the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute was only made possible by the donation of a Chicago millionaire; the total expenditure, Central and Provincial, on the Agricultural Departments in 1936-37, was £2½ million, or 1.4 per cent of the total budget) cannot practically assist the mass of the peasantry, so long as they have not the resources for technical improvement, and so long as the exploitation which holds them down in the most backward conditions of semi-starvation, subjection and ignorance is untouched.

The failure of the various measures of agriculturists' relief legislation to check the growth of indebtedness has already been recorded in the Agricultural Commission's Report (pp. 436-7); and in the same way the numerous attempts to tenancy legislation for the protection of tenants have been unable to check the rapid extension of landlordism, sub-letting and rack-renting, the privileged "protected tenants" themselves very often becoming petty landlords, exploiting unprotected tenants.

After the complete neglect and surrender to decay of the previous irrigation system, as already recorded (see pages 176-8), the subsequent irrigation works from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards are commonly held up as a great achievement for agriculture. But the total irrigated area is still only 23 per cent of the total sown area of British India (55 out of 345 million acres in 1939-40), Government irrigation works covering 10 per cent (25 million acres in 1939-40). Besides this, nearly 10½ million acres were irrigated in Indian States, bringing the total irrigated area to 65.5 million acres. The heavy charges for irrigation (in the majority of cases charged separately) place it beyond the reach of the poor peasants, and add to the burdens on the peasantry; Government irrigation works yielded a net profit of 7.8 per cent in 1918-21, and even 5.7 per cent in 1935-36.

Agricultural co-operation, almost entirely on the basis of co-operative credit societies, instituted and fostered under a Government Department, is the final Government panacea for the ills of agriculture. The aims and hopes underlying the Government's special interest in co-operation, as supposed

magic safeguard to burke land agitation on the issues of rent and revenue, are naively explained by Darling in his latest book. Referring to the Congress agitation for non-payment of rent and land revenue, he notes that a district in the Punjab "became infected with the foolish propaganda," and comments: "It is significant that only one of these villages had a co-operative society." He continues:

> "Co-operation is the best antidote to agitation of this kind; and it cannot be doubted that last year the 20,000 societies of the Province had a sedative effect upon the village ,and helped to prevent any general spread of the lawlessness which troubled many towns."
>
> *(M. L. Darling, "Wealth and Waste in the Punjab Village," 1934, pp. 83-4.)*

Unfortunately for these hopes, agricultural credit co-operation cannot reach the mass of poor peasants who have no adequate basis of resources for the requirements of membership. It reaches essentially to the middle peasants who are already better off and less in need of being rendered immune to agitation.

> "At one end of the scale, there are people who are so well off that they do not desire to incur the risk of unlimited liability by enlisting themselves as members. At the other end, there are persons who are so poor that they are refused membership. It is therefore not unfair to assume that the Co-operative population represents the medium agricultural population."
>
> *(Report of the Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, p. 69.)*
>
> "Another great difficulty is that credit societies are of no use in the poorest districts, where the cultivators are most in need of aid. It is worse than useless to give loans to cultivators who are permanently incapable—owing to fragmentation, climatic or other difficulties — of making their holdings pay. Thus it is chiefly in the most prosperous areas that credit societies are successful."
>
> *(Anstey, "Economic Development of India," p. 202.)*

This is borne out by the very limited range of agricultural co-operation under the existing conditions. The total number of members of agricultural co-operative societies in British India in 1939-40 was 4,098,426 or 1.6 per cent of the rural population. The proportion to families in the rural areas is

given by the Report of the Agricultural Commission as follows: (p. 447):

PROPORTION OF MEMBERS OF AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES TO FAMILIES IN RURAL AREAS

Bengal	..	..	..	3.8
Bombay	..	..	..	8.7
Central Provinces	..	..	..	2.3
Madras	..	..	..	7.9
Punjab	..	..	..	10.2
United Provinces	..	..	..	1.8

"It will be seen," comments the Report, "that except in the Punjab, Bombay and Madras, the movement in the major provinces has so far reached only a small part of the rural population." The proportions indicate the stratum reached (the low figures are especially noticeable in the most hard-hit provinces, where poverty is greatest, such as Bengal and the United Provinces), and show that, so long as the existing disabilities and burdens continue, agricultural co-operation cannot hope to solve the problems of the mass of the peasantry.

The recognition that a basic reorganisation, reaching to the foundations of the land system, is necessary to solve the problem of Indian agriculture—that is, the urgent life-problem of the mass of the Indian people—and that such a reorganisation cannot be attempted by imperialism, but can only be accomplished by the Indian people themselves under their own responsible Government, is beginning to be widespread also in the writings of the apologists of imperialism:

> "*The urgent need for reforming village life is accepted by politicians and officials, but specific remedies have often proved inadequate or else involve revolutionary changes which must certainly wait until India is autonomous.*"
>
> *(Thompson and Garratt, "Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India," 1934, p. 648.)*

> "It has been suggested that the best way would be to attack particular areas, one by one, and make a 'clean sweep' of the whole system, including family and legal rights of every kind ('The Consolidation of Agricultural Holdings in the United Provinces,' by H. Stanley Jevons, 1918, Bulletin No. 9 of the Economics Department of the University of Allahabad). This, however, appears entirely

impracticable until fully responsible government has been granted."

(Anstey, "The Economic Development of India," 1936, p. 101.)

"Although it is true that the extensive adoption of known improvements would suffice to effect a revolution in agricultural production, it is doubtful whether the fundamental difficulties preventing more rapid progress in the past can be removed in the near future, as the necessary reforms would entail a degree of interference with religious and social institutions and customs which would be beyond the competence of any Government that did not possess the wholehearted confidence and support of the governed." *(Ibid, p. 177.)*

The principle underlying this approach is undoubtedly correct, even though the argument is put forward by these exponents as an argument for delaying and refusing any fundamental reform in the immediate present ("must certainly wait," "entirely impracticable until....," "doubtful.... in the near future").

The vast changes now urgently necessary, and admitted on all sides to be necessary, in Indian agriculture—that is, in the basis of the economy and life of India — can only be achieved by the masses of the people of India themselves under the leadership of a Government of their own choice and making in which they have confidence and which can enlist the free activity and co-operation of the people themselves.[1]

That is why the achievement of the agricultural reorganisation which is now necessary is linked up with the achievement of national liberation and democratic freedom.

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[1] In the Report of the Agricultural Commission occurs an interesting statement, whose significance undoubtedly reaches further than its authors may have intended:

"Where the problem of half a million villages are in question, it becomes at once evident that no official organisation can hope to reach every individual in those villages. To do this, the people must be organised to help themselves, and their local organisations must be grouped into larger unions, until a machinery has been built up to convey to every village whatever the different expert departments have to send it" (p. 468).

This shrewd remark—all the more, because its authors did not intend it, but were only concerned with the plain facts of the case—already contains implicit within it an essential element of principle of the future Village Soviets.

The truth of this was further demonstrated by the experience under the Dominion Governments of India and Pakistan, and the complete failure of these Governments, representing the rule of a satellite bourgeoisie in alliance with imperialism, to solve the agrarian problem. The numerous bills and projects for "land nationalisation" promulgated by the various Provincial Ministries failed to touch the basis of landlordism, not only because vast areas of land were in practice left in the hands of the landlords under various pretexts, but above all because the lavish compensation proposed meant in reality the enhancement of the burden on the peasantry and in some cases led to the abandonment of the schemes as financially impracticable. The agrarian problem in India thus still awaits solution by a victorious popular revolution.

4. GROWTH OF THE PEASANT MOVEMENT

It is in this situation that the growth of the peasants' movement in recent years is one of the most significant developments in India.

Peasant unrest and peasant risings can be traced with increasing frequency during the period of British rule in India. In their first primitive ad spontaneous forms the anger and unrest of the peasants found expression in isolated actions of revenge and violence against individual moneylenders and landlords. A Report to the Bombay Government in 1852 recorded:

> "These two cases of village moneylenders, murdered by their debtors almost at opposite extremities of our Presidency must, I apprehend, be viewed not as the results of isolated instances of oppression on the part of creditors, but as examples in an aggrevated form the general relations subsisting between the class of moneylenders and our agricultural population. And if so, what an amount of dire oppression on the one hand, and of suffering on the other, do they reveal to us? What must be the state of things which can compel cultivators, proverbially patient and long-suffering, accustomed to more or less of ill-usage and injustice, all the time, to redress their wrongs by murder and in defiance of an ignominious death to themselves? How must their sense of justice been violated? How must they have been bereft of all hopes of redress from law or Government before their patient

and peaceful natures could be roused to the point of desperation required for such a deed?"

(Sir George Wingate, Report to the Bombay Government in 1852.)

Outstanding episodes of peasants' uprisings in the second half of the nineteenth century were the Santhal rebellion of 1855 and the Deccan riots of 1875.

But it is the last two decades since the world war of 1914-18, and especially in the last decade since the world economic crisis, that peasant unrest in India has advanced at a speed without previous parallel and takes on a more and more radical character. The world economic crisis knocked the bottom out of the already exhausted agrarian economy of India. The resulting process of rack-renting, debt enslavement and expropriation found its reflection in rising movements of the peasants in all parts of India. The peasants spontaneously formed village committees to resist evictions, boycott purchases of land sold in default and to unite against the moneylenders.

The peasants were drawn into the political struggle of the Indian National Congress on the basis of their own grievances; but the political struggle was never directly linked up with the local Kisan Committee (peasant committees). The peasants came to feel the need to develop these and create their own mass organisation. The village committees of peasants were gradually linked up into District Committees, and these, at first in a very loose manner, into provincial organisations.

In 1936 the first all-India peasant organisation was formed —the All-India Kisan Sabha. The first congress was held at Faizpur in December 1936 at the same time as the Indian National Congress. 20,000 peasants took part in the deliberations, many having marched hundreds of miles to attend. Simultaneously at Faizpur the Indian National Congress adopted its agrarian programme and the political solidarity of the two organisations was declared.

By its third congress at Comilla in May, 1938, the membership of the All-India Kisan Sabha had reached 550,000. Out of twenty linguistic provinces, nineteen had now Provincial Kisan Committees. At this congress a clear programme was adopted, both for the aims of the fight against landlordism and imperialism and for the immediate demands of the peasants.

The formation of the Congress Ministries in 1937 proved a powerful stimulus to peasant organisation. All through 1938 big peasants' struggles took place in all the Provinces of India,

and in many cases won partial success, against attempted rent increase, against evictions, and against forced labour and illegal exactions and for reductions of rents. At the same time gigantic peasant marches and demonstrations, reaching to 30,000 and 40,000 strong, the publication of weekly papers, song-books and leaflets and the initiation of peasant schools proved the growing strength and consolidation of the movement. Strong pressure was exerted on the Congress Ministries to secure reforms and counter the influence of the landlords on these Ministries.

The fourth All-India Kisan Sabha was held at Gaya in April, 1939, and revealed a membership of 800,000. The political resolution of this Congress declared:

> "The past year has witnessed a phenomenal awakening and growth of organisational strength of the kisan of India. Not only have the peasants taken a much greater part than ever before in the general democratic movement in the country, but they have also awakened to a consciousness of their position as a class, desperately trying to exist in the face of ruthless feudal imperialist exploitation. Their class organisations, therefore, have multiplied and their struggle against this exploitation has risen to a high level, witnessed by the numerous partial struggles and has brought a new political consciousness to them. They have realised the nature of the forces they are fighting against, and the true remedies of their poverty and exploitation. Their vision is no longer limited by their action taken in alliance with other anti-imperialist forces in the country. They have therefore come to the conclusion that the logical end of their day-to-day struggle must be a mighty attack on and the removal of imperialism itself and an agrarian revolution which will give them land, remove all intermediary exploiters between them and the State, and free them from the burden of debt and secure to them the full enjoyment of the fruits of their labour.
>
> "Secondly, the past year has been a year of small reliefs for the peasantry, secured to them from the Provincial Government. The crying inadequacy of these reliefs, the greater obstacles created by the vested interests that have to be encountered, showing them the patent incapability of provincial autonomy to solve any of the basic agrarian problems, have fully exposed the hollowness of the provincial autonomy. The organisation is proud to

declare to-day the determination of the peasants of India to free themselves from the feudalist-cum-imperialist exploitation and their preparedness to do so are greater than ever before.

"....the Peasant Organisation affirms that the time has come when the united forces of the country, embracing the Congress, the States people, peasants, workers and the organisations and people generally, should take a forward step and launch an attack on the slave constitution of the imperialist domination itself, for complete national independence and a democratic State of the Indian people leading ultimately to the realisation of a Kisan Mazdoor Raj (Peasants' and Workers' Rule).

Within a few months of this session at Gaya, came the opening of the war. Under the "Defence of India Act" a wave of repression was let loose on the Indian people. Countrywide mass arrests and detentions without trial of the leaders of the working class and peasant movements took place. But despite all the repression, peasants all over the country continued their determined fight against the imperialist-feudal system. In the Punjab, the kisans of Lahore and Amritsar organised mass marches and demonstrations demanding a reduction in land revenue. More than 5,000 kisans including hundreds of women were jailed; four of them lost their lives in jail before the movement was terminated after six months on partial grant of some of the demands. In Bihar, Andhra, Bengal, C.P., U.P., Malabar, Sind and Surma Valley, kisans struggled valiantly against arbitrary taxations, forcible evictions, etc. The resolution passed at the fifth session of the All-India Kisan Sabha, held at Palasa in March 1940, declared:

"....The Sabha further believes that the kisans, possessing as they do the highest stake in the peace, will themselves along with the mazdurs, be in the vanguard of the struggle for freedom in challenging the authority of the alien Government and resisting the drain of all the resources of the country. To that end, the kisans should forthwith initiate and intensify their day-to-day struggle under the leadership of their own Sabhas against the British Government as well as Indian rulers, zemindars and Sahukars who form the pillars of its power in the country. These struggles growing in intensity and extending over wider areas should very soon be integrated into a countrywide no-tax and no-rent movement which would end the

economic power of these parasites of imperialism and shake the political might of British Government in the land...."

The period 1942-45 was a period of great trial for the entire kisan movement. In August 1942, a ruthless attack was launched by imperialism on the entire national movement—the arrest of the Congress leaders was followed by heavy repression. Alongside this developed an extreme breakdown of the country's economy. The landlord-trader hoarders and blackmarketeers in alliance with the corrupt bureaucracy played havoc with the lives of millions. The masses of the pensantry were overtaken by famine and ruin, the poor impoverished kisans died like flies in Bengal and some other provinces.

Thus a great responsibility fell on the shoulders of the organised kisan movement. In fulfilment of this responsibility, the All-India Kisan Sabha and its Provincial Branches consistently agitated for the release of the national leaders and the setting up of a national government; bravely fought against the government repression; fought against forcible collection of war funds; and organised a self-help movement to grow more food, and defeat the bureaucrat, the hoarders and blackmarketeers in every village.

The whole period is full of glorious achievements of the kisans of India. Thousands and thousands of acres of fallow land was brought under cultivation in Andhra. The kisans themselves got together, built huge dams and saved big tracts of land from being devastated by floods. In Bengal, even during the worst days of the famine the kisans in most of the villages in surplus areas got together, pooled their entire stocks and sent the village surplus to their starving brothers in deficit districts. Under the leadership of the All-India Kisan Sabha, a countrywide campaign was launched for rescuing the people of Bengal from the deadening grip of famine. Kisans all over the country rose to the occasion and organised mass collections in aid of Bengal. In their own provinces, they united themselves into food committees, exposed the blackmarketeers and unearthed the hoarded stocks to be finally distributed to the needy. Every act of hindrance and repression on the part of the local government officials was overcome and resisted with outstanding vigour and confidence.

The All-India Kisan Sabha, because of its consistent fight for the freedom of the country and the rights of the common

man, its fight to bring the food of the people within their reach, became an increasingly effective and popular body. Its membership rose from 225,781 in 1942 to 553,427 in 1944 and 829,686 in 1945. At the end of the war a new awakening has swept the impoverished mass of Indian peasantry. The very intense and developing food crisis, the shortage and high prices of essential commodities, the atrocities of the government and oppression of the landlords in the villages, is rousing the Indian kisans to more and more militant action in defence of their rights. While demanding immediate agrarian legislation to abolish landlordism, the peasants are already taking the initiative and under the leadership of the Kisan Sabha, seizing the fallow lands belonging to the landlords and fiercely fighting back any attempts at eviction and enhancement of rents.

This developing agrarian revolt reached new heights in the most recent period, as in the Tebhaga movement in Bengal, and above all in the epic of Telengana in Hyderabad, where 2000 villages, in self-defence against the depredations of the fascist bands of the Nizam, set up their own People's Committees, took over the land and maintained their own administration and armed defence over an area of some 15,000 square miles, or roughly equivalent to the area of Denmark. These portents revealed the maturing of the conditions and the speeding of the advance towards the agrarian revolution in India.

Part IV

INDIAN PEOPLE IN MOVEMENT

Chapter X: RISE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

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2. Questions of Caste, Religion and Language
3. Beginnings of Indian Nationalism
4. Rise of the National Congress

Chapter XI: THREE STAGES OF NATIONAL STRUGGLE

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1. The Princes
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Chapter X

RISE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

> "The moment a mutiny is but threatened which shall be no more mutiny, but the expression of a universal feeling of nationality, at that moment all hope is at an end, as all desire ought to be at an end, of preserving our Empire.'—J. R. Seeley, "The Expansion of England." 1883.

IN THE PREVIOUS chapters we have dealt mainly with the unhappy record and situation of the Indian people as the object of history. A more cheerful view now opens before us—the Indian people as the subject of history.

The preceding analysis has endeavoured to lay bare the situation and the forces preparing and making inevitable the advancing movement of the Indian people for liberation. This movement in its first stages necessarily takes on the character of a national democratic struggle of liberation from foreign rule alongside and intertwined with the struggle of the peasantry for liberation from the yoke of the landlords and moneylenders.

The history of the Indian National Movement is the history of the advancing consciousness and mass basis of this movement of national liberation, which began from a narrow circle of the rising bourgeoisie and professional strata with the most limited aims, and is only to-day, in the process of history, reaching out to its full stature and achievement, and preparing the way for a still more far-reaching social liberation.

1. UNITY AND DIVERSITY

At the outset we are faced with a special question, which is still frequently raised by the apologists of imperialism, although it has changed its form at different stages.

Is there a people of India? Can the diversified assembly of races and religions, with the barriers and divisions of caste, of language and other differences, and with the widely varying range of social and cultural levels, inhabiting the vast sub-continental expanse of India, be considered a "nation" or ever become a "nation"? Is not this a false transposition of Western conceptions to entirely different conditions? Is not the only unity in India the unity imposed by British rule?

The approach to this basic question has gone through many stages. The older school of imperialists dismissed with contempt any conception of an Indian nation as an illusion. In the twentieth century the growing strength of the national movement led to a wider recognition, at any rate by the liberal imperialist school, of the existence of the Indian nation; and the alternative argument won favour that this development was a triumphant achievement and vindication of British rule and of the inculcation of British liberal ideals. In the most recent period, the emergence to political consciousness of the deeper masses of the Indian people, and the increasing indication of their multi-national character, has given a new aspect to this question. This aspect, which, correctly understood, in no sense runs contrary to the unity of India, has been distorted by the special propaganda presenting the theory of Hindus and Muslims as "two nations." Imperialist apologists have of course taken full advantage of this latter argument.

The answer of the older school of imperialists, before the advancing strength of the nationalist movement had sicklied o'er their naive self-confidence with doubt, used to be very downright.

"There is not and never was an India," was the firm declaration of Sir John Strachey in 1888, in the spirit of the farmer at the zoo stoutly confronting the giraffe:

> "This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India—that there is not and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious: no Indian nation, no 'people of India,' of which we hear so much."
>
> *(Sir John Strachey, "India: its Administration and Progress," 1888, p. 5.)*

Sir John Seeley was no less definite in his view:

> "The notion that India is a nationality rests upon that vulgar error which political science principally aims at

eradicating. India is not a political name, but only a geographical expression like Europe or Africa. It does not mark the territory of a nation and a language, but the territory of many nations and many languages."

(Sir John Seeley, "The Expansion of England," 1883, pp. 254-7.)

"What is honour?" asked Sir John Falstaff, and answered: "A word. What is in that word honour; what is that honour? Air." In the same spirit of profound realism the struggle of the millions of India for freedom from foreign rule is proved by our modern Sir John's a "vulgar error." So also the theorists of the Austrian Empire proved to their own satisfaction that Italy was a "geographical expression."

Since the emphatic denials of those earlier days, which failed to arrest the advancing flood of the national movement, King Canute's courtiers have changed their tactics; and the alternative argument is now favoured that, if there is an Indian nation, since all the efforts of imperialism, first to deny it, then to suppress it have failed, in that case it is self-evident that the existence of the Indian nation is a tribute to the achievement of British rule which has brought it into being. What degree of historical justification there is for this claim we shall consider in the next section.

But the argument from diversity, by implication either inferring the denial of Indian nationality, or intended to justify extreme slowness in its recognition, is still widely current. It is still to be found in all its glory in the principal propaganda piece of modern British imperialism about India, the "Survey Volume" of the Simon Report, which was produced in 1930 for wholesale circulation as a supposed information document for the general public on Indian questions. This memorable document of State begins by coolly declaring that "what is called the 'Indian Nationalist Movement'" (thus named as it were, with a pair of tongs) in reality "directly affects the hopes of a very small fraction of the teeming peoples of India." The brilliant insight of this judgment was immediately afterwards proved by the character of the civil disobedience movement of 1930-34 and the result of the elections of 1937. Thereafter the Report proceeds—always in the name of a purely scientific, impartial and objective presentation of pure facts for knowledge—to endeavour to terrorise the reader with the customary picture of the "immensity and difficulty" of the Indian "problem," the "immensity of area and population," the "com-

plication of language" with no less than "222 vernaculars," the "rigid complication of innumerable castes," the "almost infinite diversity in its religious aspects," the "basic opposition" of Hindus and Moslems, this "variegated assemblage of races and creeds," this "conglomeration of races and religions," this "congeries of heterogeneous masses," and similar polite expressions in abundance.

The purpose of this approach is obvious. It is to create in the mind of the average unprejudiced reader the impression of the impossibility of any scheme of rapid self-government for India, and to induce him to draw as his main conclusion (in the words of H. W. Nevinson, reviewing the Report at the time in all good faith in a socialist journal)

> "the almost insuperable difficulty of constructing (not criticising) a constitution or form of government to suit a minor continent including 560 native Indian States (nominally independent), races of 222 separate languages, people of two main and hostile religions (168,000,000 Hindus and 60,000,000 Moslems in British India alone), 10,000,000 outcasted or 'depressed' populations, also called 'Untouchables'....Everyone who thinks of India ought to know these bare facts to start with. If he does not, he should read Vol. I of the Report. If he neither knows nor reads, let him hold his peace."
>
> *(H. W. Nevinson, review of the Simon Report in the "New Leader," June 27, 1930.)*

The fact that the conclusion of such a character should have been reached by a sympathetic left-wing representative like H. W. Nevinson in a "socialist" journal, and that this should have been typical of the reception, not merely in the official Press, but in almost the entire left Press at the time, liberal, labour or "socialist," all accepting this official propaganda at face value, is indicative of the success of this method of approach. For in truth this approach, despite all its air of impartial and statesman-like recognition of unwelcome facts, is propaganda, and barefaced propaganda. It is by no means a presentation of the elementary "bare facts" which everyone "ought to know" about India, but a conscious and deliberate selection of facts with a purpose, and distortion even of all that underlies those facts. This official picture of India to-day, of the supposed "conditions of the problem," suppresses all that is cardinal for the real understanding of the present position of India, suppresses completely all facts of the imperialist

exploitation of India, of the role of British finance-capital in India, of the profits made by the British ruling class, of the methods of exploitation underlying the misery of the people, of the rising struggle of the masses (irrespective of racial or religious divisions) and of the methods of suppression of that struggle by imperialism. These are the essential "bare facts" which an honest socialist journal or democratic journal should declare everyone "ought to know" about India. Instead, this Report ("the Simon Commission....has done its work courageously and thoroughly....appreciation must be expressed, so far as this first report is concerned, of the care with which Sir John Simon and his colleagues have approached their task. I doubt whether the most extreme Nationalist will be able to point to serious inaccuracies on major facts"—Fenner Brockway in the *New Leader*, June 13, 1930) dwells lovingly on whatever facts can be made to appear unfavourable to the people of India and to sustain the official principle of "Divide and Rule."

A citizen of the United States would be undoubtedly astonished if he were to read in a British Blue Book the following impartial survey of the condition of his country:

> "The sub-continent of the United States is characterised by the greatest diversity of climate and geographical features, while its inhabitants exhibit a similar diversity of race and religion. The customary talk of the United States as a single entity tends to obscure, to the casual British observer, the variegated assemblage of races and creeds which make up the whole. In the City of New York alone there are to be found nearly a hundred different nationalities, some of which are in such great numbers that New York is at once the largest Italian city, the largest Jewish city and the largest Negro city in the world. The contiguity of such diverse elements has been a fruitful cause of the most bitter communal conflicts. In the Southern States especially, this has led to inter-racial riots and murders which are only prevented from recurring by the presence of an external impartial power able to enforce law and order. The notoriety of the rival gangs of Chicago gunmen and of the Chinese hongs in New York have diverted attention from the not less pressing problems presented to the Paramount Power by the separate existence of the Mormons in Utah, the Finns in Minnesota, the Mexican immigration up the Mississippi

and the Japanese on the West Coast: not to speak of the survival in considerable numbers of the aboriginal inhabitants".[1]

Yet this is the spirit in which the Simon Report approached its task of the survey of the condition of India.

Indeed, it is worth noting that similar profound analyses and "proofs" of the impossibility of unity of the American people were equally current in English expression on the very eve of the American Revolution. Lecky records in his history:

> "Great bodies of Dutch, Germans, French, Swedes, Scotch and Irish, scattered among the descendants of the English, contributed to the heterogeneous character of the colonies, and they comprised so many varieties of government, religious belief, commercial interest and social type, that their union appeared to many incredible on the very eve of the Revolution."
>
> *(W. E. H. Lecky, "History of England in the Eighteenth Century," Vol. IV, p. 12.)*

And again:

> "A country where so large a proportion of the inhabitants were recent immigrants, drawn from different nations and possessing different creeds, where, owing to the vast extent of the territory and the imperfection of the means of communication, they were thrown very slightly in contact with one another, and where the moneymaking spirit was peculiarly intense, was not likely to produce much patriotism or community of feeling." *(Ibid, p. 34.)*

Burnaby, who travelled in the North American colonies in 1759 and 1760, wrote:

> "Fire and water are not more heterogeneous than the different colonies in North America.... Such is the difference of character, of manners, of religion, of interest, of the different colonies, that I think, if I am not wholly ignorant of the human mind, were they left to themselves, there would soon be a civil war from one end of the continent to the other, while the Indians and negroes would with better reason impatiently watch the opportunity of exterminating them altogether."

[1] This admirable parody is from the pen of R. Page Arnot, in his article on "The Simon Commission Report" in the *Labour Monthly* for July, 1930, which is worth consulting.

Otis, the well-konwn American patriot, wrote in 1765:

> "God forbid these should ever prove undutiful to their mother-country. Whenever such a day shall come, it will be the beginning of a terrible scene. Were these colonies left to themselves tomorrow America would be a mere shambles of blood and confusion".[1]

The modern Die-Hard's prophecies of the "dull roar and scream of carnage and confusion" (Churchill), if the British were to leave India, are thus only the stage-encore of a familiar recitation.

The democrat will accordingly be on his guard against these *interested* prophecies and presentations of facts on the part of the rulers of an empire on the eve of the victory of a national liberation movement.

The question of the historical degree of unity of India in the past can be left to the historians. It is worth noting that the modern school of historical research, even on the side of imperialism, no longer endeavours to uphold the downright denials of the Seeleys and Stracheys half a century ago, based on very slender information.

> "The political unity of all India, although never attained perfectly in fact, always was the ideal of the people throughout the centuries. The conception of the universal sovereign as the Chakravartin Raja runs through Sanskrit literature and is emphasised in scores of inscriptions. The story of the gathering of the nations to the battle of Kurukshetra, as told in the Mahabharata, implies the belief that all the Indian peoples, including those of the extreme south, were united by real bonds and concerned in interests common to all. European writers, as a rule, have been more conscious of the diversity than of the unity of India. Joseph Cunningham, an author of unusually independent spirit, is an exception. When describing the Sikh fears of British aggression in 1845, he recorded the acute and true observation that 'Hindustan, moreover, from Caubul to the valley of Assam, and the island of Ceylon, is regarded as one country, and dominion in it is associated in the minds of the people with the predominance of one monarch or one race.' India therefore pos-

[1] These and other similar quotations can be consulted in the interesting appendix on "Contemporary India and America on the Eve of Becoming Free" in Major B. D. Basu's "Ruin of Indian Trade and Industries," Calcutta, 1935, pp. 254-67.

sesses, and always has possessed for considerably more than two thousand years, ideal political unity....

"India beyond all doubt possesses a deep underlying fundamental unity, far more profound than that produced either by geographical isolation or by political suzerainty. The unity transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners and sect."

(Vincent A. Smith, "The Oxford History of India," 1919, Introduction, pp. ix-x.)

The present degree of unity is more important to consider; and here something needs to be said on those divisions which are so prominently displayed and emphasised by imperialist propaganda as obstacles to self-government and justifications for the necessity of continued British rule.

2. QUESTIONS OF CASTE, RELIGION AND LANGUAGE

Undoubtedly the Indian people has a heavy heritage of burdens, survivals from the past, divisions and inequalities to overcome, as every people has its own inheritance and special problems. One of the strongest reasons for the necessity of self-government is in order that the progressive leaders of the people of India shall have the opportunity to tackle and solve these problems and carry forward the Indian people along the path of democratic and social advance. For the experience of the past half-century especially has already shown that, in the modern phase of imperialist decay (with the ending of the objectively progressive role of British rule in India in the first half of the nineteenth century), the offensive against these evils, such as untouchability, caste restrictions, communal divisions, illiteracy and the like, is more and more actively led by the representatives of the Indian national movement, while imperialism has maintained an obstructive role against innumerable projects of reform, pressed and demanded by India's representatives, and has worked in such a way as to sustain and even intensify these evils.

A policy which in practice fosters and maintains the division and backwardness of a subject people, and even by its administrative methods intensifies these evils, while in public it loudly proclaims these evils as a melancholy proof of the incapacity of the people for unity and self-government, condemns itself.

With regard to the communal or religious divisions, which constitute one of the most serious and urgent problems before the Indian people, it will be necessary to treat this question more fully in a subsequent chapter (see Chapter XIII, 2, 3). Proof will be given that in fact—in spite of official denials—this division has been undoubtedly fostered under the British rule as a conscious act of policy. Indeed, the Simon Report itself was compelled to admit that the Hindu-Moslem antagonism is a special feature of the territories under direct British rule ("the comparative absence of communal strife in the Indian States to-day," p. 29), and has increased under British rule ("in British India a generation ago.... communal tension as a threat to civil peace was at a minimum. But the coming of the Reforms and the anticipation of what may follow them have given new point to Hindu-Muslim competition," p. 29). The communal problem will certainly never be completely solved till the imperialist ruler is removed.

The same applies to the Indian States or Princedoms, which owe their maintenance and continued existence entirely to the British protecting hand.

With regard to caste restrictions and untouchability, the outraged indignation of the representatives of the Carlton Club and of the colour-bar (incidentally, the meaning of the original word of caste is "colour", and reflected the sense of superiority and exclusiveness of the Aryan invaders) against all caste restrictions and untouchability will undoubtedly be read with deep appreciation by the so differently placed scavengers in Britain, who, as is well known, are freely invited to the dining-tables of Mayfair. It is impossible not to appreciate the benevolent desire of the representatives of imperialism to magnify and multiply the number of the depressed classes and untouchables. A generation ago, before the political situation was so acute, the number of 30 millions was commonly given. Valentine Chirol, in his "Indian Unrest" in 1910, raised the figure to 50 millions. Anstey's "Economic Development of India," first published in 1929, boldly plumps, without evidence, for sixty millions; and this figure has been generally favoured on the platform and in parliament as the most impressive. The semi-official symposium "Modern India," published under the editorship of Sir John Cumming in 1931, hovers "from 30 to 60 millions." The Simon Report endeavoured to fix the figure at 43 millions but at the same time pointed out that in the three provinces of Bengal, United Provinces and Bihar and Orissa, covering 28 out of 43 millions, "the connection between

theoretical untouchability and practical disability is less close, and a special investigation might show that the number of those who are denied equal rights in the matter of schools, water and the like is less than the total given for the depressed classes in those areas" (p. 41). Hence the total remains disputable.

The fight against untouchability has been led, not by the British Government, but by the progressive national movement. Indeed, the incident will be recalled when certain famous temples in Southern India which had been traditionally closed to the untouchables were, under inspiration of Gandhi's crusade, thrown open to them; and police were thereupon dispatched to prevent access of the untouchables, on the grounds that such access would be offensive to the religious sentiments of the population, which it was the sacred duty of the Government to protect.

The British Government has certainly been concerned to organise a separate electoral roll of the untouchables or depressed classes, with guaranteed separate representation, in order to introduce a new element of division and weaken the National Congress. In this way the Scheduled Castes have been added to the lengthening list of separate electorates (though in the practical outcome this separate representation has been to considerable extent nullified by the workings of the Poona Pact). But for the opinion of the untouchables themselves on this loving care, the evidence of the leader of the Scheduled Castes Federation, Dr. Ambedkar, who is accepted by the Government as their leader and spokesman, may be taken, as given in his Presidential Address to the All-India Depressed Classes Congress in 1930:

> "I am afraid that the British choose to advertise our unfortunate conditions, not with the object of removing them, but only because such a course serves well as an excuse for retarding the political progress of India."
>
> *(Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Presidential Address to the All-India Depressed Classes Congress, August, 1930.)*

Dr. Ambedkar continued:

> "Before the British you were in the loathsome condition due to your untouchability. Has the British Government done anything to remove your untouchability? Before the British you could not draw water from the

village. Has the British Government secured you the right to the well? Before the British you could not enter the temple. Can you enter now? Before the British you were denied entry into the police force. Does the British Government admit you in the force? Before the British you were not allowed to serve in the military. Is that career now open to you? Gentlemen, to none of these questions you can give an affirmative answer. Those who have held so much power over the country for such a long time must have done some good. But there is certainly no fundamental improvement in your position. So far as you are concerned, the British Government has accepted the arrangements as it found them and has preserved them faithfully in the manner of the Chinese tailor who, when given an old coat as a pattern, produced with pride an exact replica, rents, patches and all. Your wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted...

"Nobody can remove your grievances as well as you can, and you cannot remove them unless you get political power in your own hands. No share of this political power can come to you so long as the British Government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj constitution that you stand any chance of getting the political power into your own hands without which you cannot bring salvation to your people."

The interests of the depressed classes and their liberation are inevitably linked up with the common national movement of liberation.

The crippling institutions of caste will only be overcome not by preaching and denunciation, but by the advance of modern industry and political democracy, as new social ties and common interest replace the old bonds. As Marx wrote:

> "Modern industry will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power."
>
> *(Marx, "Future Results of British Rule in India," New York Tribune, August 8, 1853.)*

The Census Reports already bear witness to the beginning of the realisation of this prediction of Marx seventy years earlier:

> "In places like Jamshedpur where work is done under modern conditions, men of all castes and races work side

by side in the mill without any misgivings regarding the caste of their neighbours."

(Bihar and Orissa Census Report, 1921.)

Undoubtedly there are very heavy problems arising from the special disabilities weighing down the untouchables, outcastes or "Scheduled Castes", as they are now officially termed. It is these special disabilities and grievances which have provided the basis for the development of the Scheduled Castes Federation which has won a certain degree of organised support in some areas. But the solution of these problems lies through the advance of the labour movement and democracy, and the fight of the democratic national movement for the removal of *these disabilities, and not through separatist organisation* of these groups as a sectional economic and political movement.

With regard to the division of languages, and the famous "222 separate languages", once again the hand of imperialist propaganda is visible in the fantastic exaggeration of this difficulty and in the character of the statistics provided for misleading the innocent. Different estimates can be provided from different authorities, ranging from 16 to 300. This variation already betrays the political interest behind the estimates. The 1901 Census reached a total of 147 languages. If we compare this with the 1921 Census, used by the Simon Report, we reach the interesting result that, whereas the population increased from 292 million in 1901 to 316 million in 1921 (without any influx of new foreign populations), the number of languages spoken increased from 147 in 1901 to 222 in 1921 (without the addition of any new or polyglot territory). Truly an amazing capacity of this Indian population to proliferate new languages in scores in a single generation.

But a more detailed examination will throw still further light on this heroic mythology of the "222 separate languages" which have so impressed non-Indian opinion.[1] Of these "222 separate languages" it will be found that no less than 134 belong to the "Tibeto-Burman sub-family". What is the character of these "languages"? Here light is thrown by the fuller list of 103 Indo-Chinese languages published in the "Imperial Gazetteer of India", 1909, Vol. I, pp. 390-94. In this list of 103 languages we are given the number of speakers of each of

[1] An exhaustive analysis will be found in the article on "Faked Indian Statistics as Imperialist Propaganda", published in the *Labour Monthly* of September, 1930, to which reference should be made for a fuller version of the facts given above.

these "different languages", and we find, for example, the following figures:

Language	*Number of Speakers*
Kabui	*4*
Andro	*1*
Kasui	*11*
Bhranu	*15*
Aka	*26*
Tairong	*12*
Nora	*2*

It is clear that the philosophical conception of language as a means of communication between human beings will have to be revised in the light of Andro, spoken by one person; Nora, with a grand total of two speakers, just scrapes through.

A detailed examination, which is only of value for exposing this type of imperialist propaganda, reveals (1) that the number of "languages" of the so-called Indo-Chinese family rose from 92 in 1901 to 145 in 1921; (2) that these "languages" are not spoken in India at all, but in outlying districts in the Himalayas and the Burmo-Chinese frontier; (3) that the vast majority of these are not languages at all, but either very minor dialects or names of tribes; (4) that out of the 103 "languages" included in the group, 17 are spoken by less than 100 persons; 39 by less than 1,000; 65 by less than 10,000; 83 by less than 50,000; 97 by less than 200,000. The only *language* in the group is Burmese.

Yet out of such materials is constructed the imposing total of "222 separate languages" which is trotted out on every imperialist platform, in every newspaper and in every parliamentary debate.

Since then the 1931 Census has reduced the total to 203. It is evident that some of the speakers of the languages spoken by one, two or four persons have unfortunately died in the interval, thus weakening by their thouhtless action the imperialist case against Indian self-government. The separation of Burma from India since 1937 will cause a still heavier mortality, since the majority of the languages (128) used to prove the divisions of the Indian people belong to Burma. It is interesting to note that, in order to prove the case for the separation of Burma, the obstacle of the multiplicity of languages which had mainly been built up on the basis of Burma, suddenly disappeared and gave place to insistence on the essential unity of language in Burma. "Though as many as 128 indige-

nous tongues are distinguished in the province," writes the Simon Report (p. 79), nearly seven-tenths of the whole population—and the proportion is growing—speak Burmese or a closely allied language." So elastic are imperialist statistics in the interests of policy.

The problem of a common language for India is already on the way to solution on the basis of Hindustani (Hindi or Urdu according to the script), the official national language of the Congress, which is already either spoken or understood by the majority of the Indian people. "Hindu preachers and Mahomedan Moulvis", notes Gandhi ("Speeches and Writings", p. 398), "deliver their religious discourses throughout India in Hindi and Urdu, and even the illiterate masses follow them." Similarly in the Indian army, where there is no room for nonsense about "222 separate languages," military orders are given in Hindustani. The conception, often spread, of English as the supposed common language or *lingua franca* for India is a myth; after a century of English "education" only 1 per cent of the population can read and write English (3½ millions out of 350 millions—1931 Census). As against this, "Hindustani with its various dialects accounts for over 120 million of the people, and is spreading" (J. Nehru, "India and the World", p. 188). The problem of languages in India is in practice a problem of some twelve or thirteen languages ("there are twelve main languages in India", Sir Harcourt Butler in "Modern India", 1932, p. 8) of which the nine North Indian languages are extremely closely allied, so that even the Census Report of 1921 had to admit:

> "There is no doubt that there is a common element in the main languages of Northern and Central India which renders their speakers without any great conscious change in their speech mutually intelligible to one another, and this common basis already forms an approach to a *lingua franca* over a large part of India."
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> *(Census of India, 1921, Vol. I, Part I, p. 199.)*

It is amusing to note that as soon as the British exploiters have occasion to approach the question of the Indian market, the language difficulty, which for political purposes assumes such alarming proportions, is suddenly seen as easily manageable:

> "The language approach is not by any means so insuperable as would appear from the existence of scores of languages."
>
> *(H. J. Felles, "The Indian Market: Hints to the British Exporter," The Times Trade and Engineering India Supplement, April, 1939.*

It would have been more honest if the Simon Report had reproduced this passage instead of continuing to spread what it knew to be a misleading picture.

These special questions, which are commonly advanced as supposedly insuperable obstacles to the unity of the Indian people or to any rapid advance to self-government, and which all have their place as problems to be solved and soluble by national statesmanship, have only required this detailed treatment here in order to expose the type of fabricated imperialist propaganda which is built upon their basis, and to warn democratic opinion outside India from being misled by this type of propaganda.

The real existence of the Indian nation, in the sense of the real unity of the Indian people in their struggle against imperialism, for their independence and right to build their own political future, will not be proved or disproved in the chambers of statisticians or the debating halls of parliaments. It will be proved, is being proved, and in the light of the experience of the past quarter of a century, we can say, has already been proved in the field of action. For, the problems of diversity, or the multi-national character of the Indian people, do not contradict this basic unity. They are problems which can only be settled and will be settled by the Indian people themselves.

3. BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

In the modern period the reality of the Indian national democratic consciousness can in practice no longer be denied, although the echoes of the old denial still survive. In consequence, with curious forgetfulness of the previous arguments which up to a generation ago so emphatically denied the Indian claim to national existence and dismissed India as "a geographical expression", the alternative argument is now in general favour with the more sophisticated spokesmen of imperialism, to the effect that if the Indian national consciousness exists and has compelled recognition of its existence, then this must be regarded as the proud achievement of imperialism, which has brought it into existence and planted the seeds of British democratic ideals in India; and even, by a kind of teleological anachronism, this is regarded as having been the real objective of British rule from the beginning.

> "The politically minded portion of the people of India...are itellectually our children. They have imbi-

bed ideas which we ourselves have set before them, and we ought to reckon it to their credit. The present intellectual and moral stir in India is no reproach, but rather a tribute to our work."

(Montagu-Chelmsford Report, 1918, p. 115.)

Thus not the rising struggle of the Indian people against imperialism, but the beneficent handiwork of the philanthropic imperialist rulers themselves, is presented as having guided the Indian people to national freedom. This is the picture which the modern cultured imperialist seeks to create in utterances for public survival of the old-fashioned type of utterances (such as the famous declaration of Joynson-Hicks that "we did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. I know that it is said at missionary meetings that we have conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We conquered India by the sword, and by the sword we shall hold it. We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods", or of Lord Rothermere that "many authorities estimate that the proportion of the vital trading, banking and shipping business of Britain directly dependent upon our connection with India is 20 per cent. India is the lynch-pin of the British Empire. If we lose India, the Empire must collapse—first economically, then politically") became regarded in high official quarters as in bad taste and tactically undesirable in the modern period.

There is no question of the change of tone in official utterance in the latest phase. But the sceptical may be pardoned for enquiring whether the change of tone was not the reflection rather than cause of the advancing national movement.

Nothing could be more dangerous than for the new line of official policy to give rise to any illusions as to the iron realities, the continuing strength of the imperialist stranglehold in India, or as to the intention of imperialism by every means at its command to seek to maintain that stranglehold even within the forms of nominal independence.

The practical significance of this line of argument is evident. These patronising claims of modern imperialism, to take Indian Nationalism under its wing as its own foster-child are by no means mere harmless self-delusions and self-consolations of a declining Power. The theory of imperialism as a beneficent civilising system for helping forward and training

backward peoples into national consciousness and eventual self-government (what has been termed the theory of "decolonisation") was originally put forward by a school of socialist renegades and servants of imperialism like MacDonald—who subsequently showed his practical understanding of the "civilising" mission of imperialism by his reign of terror in India and imprisonment of 60,000 Indians for the crime of demanding democratic rights. This theory has been taken up by the modern spokesmen of imperialism with a very practical purpose. For the practical conclusion to be drawn is that in that case a "sane" and "constructive" Indian Nationalism will cease to regard imperialism as its enemy, will abandon the struggle for national independence and replace it by conciliation and co-operation with imperialism, and in the final resort even maintain India, behind a figleaf of formal "independence", in association with or directly inside the British "Commonwealth" or Empire.

Is it correct to see Indian Nationalism as the offspring and outcome of British rule?

There is undoubtedly a sense in which this claim is correct although certainly not the sense in which the makers of the claim intend it.

The Japanese invaders in China could no doubt claim, if they wished to do so, that by their invasion and aggression they were helping to forge the national unity of the people of China. And this claim would be objectively correct.

In the same way, [illegible] insofar as modern Indian Nationalism has come into being [illegible]g and grown up in struggle against imperialism, imperialism can claim to be its precedent condition and starting-point, just as Tsarism was the starting-point of the victory of the working class in Russia, or Charles I of Cromwell.

This is not, however, what the modern imperialist apologists wish to imply. They wish to imply that the positive achievement of British rule not only by the political unification of India and the establishment of a modern centralised administration (here they are on strong ground), but also by the imposition of British legal and cultural institutions and the enforcement of an "Anglicised" education as the only medium of instruction for the tiny minority receiving any education, inevitably laid the seeds of Indian Nationalism and implanted in the educated class English ideals of parliamentary government and democratic freedom. "English history

taught the lesson of the gradual acquisition of popular liberties, English political thought as expressed by Burke and Mill reinforced the lesson. Educated Indians, essentially keen intellectually, and readily stirred to enthusiasm, perceived a new revelation" (L. F. Rushbrook Williams, "What About India?" 1938, p. 105).

What is the measure of truth in this claim?

The democratic revolution of the modern age, which developed in many lands, including England as one of its earliest homes, is not the peculiar patent of England. Nor is it correct that it requires the alien domination of a country in order to implant the seeds of the democratic revolution. The American Declaration of Independence, and still more the great French Revolution, with its gospel of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, far more than the already ageing English parliamentary-monarchical compromise, were the great inspirers of the democratic movement of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 have performed a corresponding role as the signal and starting-point of the awakening of the peoples, and especially of the awakening consciousness of the subject peoples of Asia and all the colonial countries to the claim of national freedom.

That the Indian awakening has developed in unison with these world currents can be demonstrated from the stages of its growth. It is worth recalling that Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian Nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century, when he made the voyage to England in 1830, insisted, at considerable inconvenience, in travelling on a French ship to demonstrate his enthusiasm for the principle of the French Revolution. The National Congress, which was originally instituted under official inspiration as an intended instrument against the rising movement of the people and to safeguard British rule, slept for twenty years, and first awakened from its slumbers in the great popular ferment and stirring after 1905, then again, when the wave of unrest had subsided, settled down to placid loyalist moderation, and once again, on a still more overwhelming scale, swept forward with the world movement of advance after 1917.

The notion that India could have had no part in these world currents, or pressed forward to the fight for national and democratic freedom, without the interposition of England, is fatuous self-complacency. On the contrary, the example of China has shown how far more powerfully the national democratic impulse has been able to advance and gain ground

where imperialism had not been able to establish any complete previous domination; and this national democratic movement of liberation has had to struggle continuously against the obstacles imposed by imperialist aggression and penetration.

Did the Indian national movement arise because the educated class in India were taught by their masters to read Burke, Mill and Macaulay and to delight in the parliamentary rhetoric of a Gladstone and a Bright? So runs the familiar legend. The legend is too simple, and on a par with the derivation of modern France from the will of a Napoleon, or the Catholic derivation of Protestantism from the personal idiosyncrasies of Luther. The Indian national movement arose from social conditions, from the conditions of imperialism and its system of exploitation, and from the social and economic forces generated within Indian society under the conditions of that exploitation; the rise of the Indian bourgeoisie and its growing competition against the domination of the British bourgeoisie were inevitable, whatever the system of education; and if the Indian bourgeoisie had been educated only in the Sanskrit Vedas, in monastic seclusion from every other current of thought, they would have assuredly found in the Sanskrit Vedas the inspiring principles and slogans of their struggle.

When Macaulay, on behalf of imperialism, imposed the system of Anglicised education, and defeated the Orientalists, his object was not to create Indian national consciousness, but to destroy it down to the very deepest roots of its being, in much the same spirit as the Tsarist methods of Russification of the conquered nationalities of the old Russian Empire. His object was to train up a stratum of docile executants of the English will, cut off from every line of contact with their people. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than to implant the seeds of democracy. On that question his views were emphatic. It was Macaulay who declared: "We know that India cannot have a free government. But she may have the next best thing—a firm impartial despotism." The fact that this system of education, imposed in the interests of efficient imperialist administration, opened the avenues at the same time to the great stream of English democratic and popular inspiration and struggle, of Miltons, the Shelleys and the Byrons—fighting against the selfsame types of tyranny, and even sometimes against the same figures of the ruling-class oligarchy, the Pitts and the Hastings and the Wellingtons, as were enslaving and

exploiting India — was a characteristic contradiction of the whole system of imperialism conducted by the ruling class of a country in which simultaneously the people were themselves pressing forward to their freedom. But this was a contradiction which was not foreseen at the time, and has never since ceased to be deplored by subsequent generations of imperialists,[1] who have done their best to avert its consequences by their increasing censorship of books to India.

There is no need to minimise the historical significance and achievement, for good and for evil, of British rule in India, or the contribution of that rule, however unwillingly or unconsciously, to the forces which have gone to mould the Indian nation. Marx showed, in those passages we have already had occasion to quote (Chapter IV, 4), the two main elements of that achievement, whereby British rule in India, although actuated by "the vilest interests", nevertheless fulfilled the role of "the unconscious tool of history" in the development of India.

The first and most important achievement of the British conquest and exploitation of India was the negative achievement, or *destructive* role—the ruthless destruction of the foundations of the old order of society in India. Such a destruction was the necessary precedent to any new advance. It does not necessarily follow from this that such a destruction would have been impossible without the British conquest. On the contrary, there is some reason to judge that the traditional Indian society in decomposition at the moment of the British conquest was trembling on the verge of the first stage of the bourgeois revolution on the basis of its own resources, when the already matured British bourgeois revolution overtook it in the phase of disorder and transition and was able to establish its domination. But in the actual historical record this destruction was the achievement of British rule.

The second achievement, less completely carried out, was the laying of the material basis for the new order by the political unification of the country, the linking up of India with the world market, the establishment of modern communications, especially the railways and telegraphic system, with the

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[1] "The course and consequences of the measures taken by the British Government to promote Western education in India have been attentively studied by the author of this volume. It is a story of grave political miscalculation."

(Sir Alfred Lyall, G.C.I.E., Introduction to Valentine Chirol's "Indian Unrest", 1910, p. xiii.)

consequent first beginnings of modern industry and training of the necessary accompanying personnel with administrative and scientific qualifications.

These achievements could not in themselves bring either liberation or any improvement in conditions for the mass of the Indian people. They could only lay the material premises for both. But "has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?"

The third step still to be achieved, whereby the Indian people should come into possession of new forces to organise them in their own interests, could only be achieved, as Marx insisted, by the action of the Indian people themselves in struggle against imperialism and developing their strength to "throw off the English yoke altogether". This is the historic task of the Indian national liberation movement, whose goal of national liberation is the first step to Indian social liberation.

In the earlier period of British rule, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the British rulers—in the midst of, and actually through all the misery and industrial devastation—were performing an actively progressive role, were in many spheres actively combating the conservative and feudal forces of Indian society. A policy of ruthless annexation was wiping out the princedoms and filling the remaining rulers with alarm. This was the period of courageous reforms, of such measures as the abolition of suttee (carried out with the wholehearted co-operation of the progressive elements of Indian society), the abolition of slavery (a more formal measure in practice), the war on infanticide and thuggism, the introduction of Western education and the freeing of the Press. Rigid in their outlook, unsympathetic to all that was backward in Indian traditions, convinced that the nineteenth-century British bourgeois and Christian conception was the norm for humanity, these early administrators nevertheless carried on a powerful work of innovation, representing the spirit of the early ascendant bourgeoisie of the period; and the best of them, like Sir Henry Lawrence, won the respect and affection of those with whom they had to deal. All tradition bears out the closer personal relations between British and Indians in that period. The deepest enemies of the British were the old reactionary rulers who saw in them their supplanters. The most progressive elements in Indian society at that time, represented by Ram Mohan Roy and the reform movement of the Brahmo Samaj, looked with unconcealed admiration to the British as the

champions of progress, gave unhesitating support to their reforms, and saw in them the vanguard of a new civilisation.

The rising of 1857 was in its essential character and dominant leadership the revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces and dethroned potentates for their rights and privileges which they saw in process of destruction. This reactionary character of the rising prevented any wide measure of popular support and doomed it to failure. Nevertheless, even so the rising laid bare the depth of mass discontent and unrest beneath the surface, and created an alarm in the British rulers, the tradition of which remains. "All India is at all times looking out for our downfall," Lord Metcafe, Governor-General in 1835-36, had written already in the preceding period ("Papers and Correspondence," p. 116, quoted in J. L. Morison, "Lawrence of Lucknow," p. 55). "The people everywhere would rejoice, or fancy they would rejoice, at our destruction. And numbers are not wanting who would promote it by all means in their power."

After 1857 a transformation took place in British policy and the character of British rule. From this point British policy shifted its centre of gravity increasingly to winning the support of reaction in India against the masses; while its relationship to the new progressive forces, who represented the rising Indian bourgeoisie, passed from the former cordial closeness to coolness and suspicion, and even hostility mitigated only by attempts here also to form temporary alliances of convenience against the masses. An abrupt end was made of the system of annexation of the Indian States into British India. Henceforth the remaining Princes were zealously preserved in possession of their puppet powers as allied "sovereign" rulers, with every form of degenerate feudal oppression and misrule protected, and even intensified, by their now completely parasitic role. The consequent political map of India was maintained as a senseless patch-work of petty principalities and divided administrations. In the most recent period these same Princes, now for the most part completely corrupt tools of their imperialist master, were brought into the forefront of constitutional development as makeweights against the forces of national independence. The path of social reform was no longer actively pursued, but gave place more and more markedly to zealous protection of every reactionary religious survival and custom (the Age of Consent Act of 1891 being almost the solitary exception in this later period). The Queen's Proclamation of 1858, while making a show of granting racial equality bet-

ween Indians and English (with regard to which the subsequent Viceroy, Lord Lytton, frankly declared that "these claims and expectations never can or will be fulfilled"—see chapter XIV, 2), emphasised the determination of the Government to "abstain from all interference with religious belief or worship" and gave the pledge to the conservative forces of Indian society that "due regard will be paid to the ancient rights, usages and customs of India." The Royal Titles Act of 1876, by which the Queen was proclaimed Empress of India the following year, was declared by the Viceroy Lord Lytton, to represent the beginning of "a new policy by virtue of which the Crown of England should henceforth be indentified with the hopes, the aspirations, the sympathies and interests of a powerful native aristocracy". From this period the methods of playing off Hindus and Moslems against one another, and of utilising other forms of sectional division, began to be more and more attentively studied, until, with the modern technique of communal electorates, this issue was successfully brought into the forefront of Indian politics. At the same time an increasing alienation grew up since 1857 between the British rulers and the progressive elements in Indian society; all tradition on both sides agrees on the transformation of relations that took place.

Thus the change which developed in the general character of capitalism in Britain and on the world scale, from its earlier ascendant progressive period, to a more and more reactionary and declining role, and finally to full decay in the period of imperialism, was accompanied by a corresponding change in the character of British rule in India. With the development into the final phase of modern imperialism or decaying capitalism this reactionary role has become especially emphasised.

On the other hand, while the objectively progressive role of the preceding phase of British rule in India was thus coming to an end in the later decades of the nineteenth century, new forces were growing up within Indian society. During the second half of the nineteenth century the Indian bourgeoisie was coming to the front. In 1853 the first successful cotton mill was started in Bombay. By 1880 there were 156 mills employing 44,000 workers. By 1900 there were 193 mills employing 161,000 workers. From the outset the new cotton textile industry was financed and controlled mainly by Indians; and it had to make its way against heavy difficulties. At the same time was appearing the new educated middle class, trained in the principles of Western education, developing as lawyers, doctors,

teachers and administrators, and advancing to the claims of nineteenth-century democratic conceptions of citizenship. These beginnings, both in the field of capitalist industry and the new Westernised intelligentsia, were still relatively small. But the new class was appearing which was inevitably to find in the British bourgeoisie its overshadowing competitor and obstacle to advance, and was therefore destined to become the first articulate expression and leadership of Indian national claims.

The basic economic conflict between the new Indian bourgeoisie and the British bourgeoisie was already revealed when in 1882 all duties on cotton imports into India were removed by the Government in response to the demands of the Lancashire manufacturers against the rising Indian industry. Three years later the Indian National Congress was formed.

Finally, the growing impoverishment and desperation of the peasantry, consequent on the cumulative process of British capitalist penetration, were beginning to reach serious proportions by the second half of the nineteenth century, and especially during its last three decades, and to find expression in mass unrest. It has already been noted that, while in the first half of the nineteenth century there were seven famines with an estimated total of 1½ million deaths, in the second half of the nineteenth century there were twenty-four famines with an estimated total of 28½ million deaths, and eighteen of these twenty-four famines fall into the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Chapter V, p. 106). The Deccan peasant risings of 1875 were the warning signal of this growing unrest, and the anxiety of the Government was revealed in the appointment of the Deccan Riots Commission in 1875, which conducted an exhaustive enquiry into the whole agrarian situation and the causes leading to the unrest, and of the Famine Commission in 1878.

Thus by the last quarter of the nineteenth century the conditions were now present, which had not existed in the first three-quarters, for the beginning of the Indian national movement.

4. RISE OF THE NATIONAL CONGRESS

The Indian National Congress, the premier organisation and for many decades the leading organisation of the Indian national movement, was founded in 1885.

The story of the origin of the National Congress has often been used to substantiate the claim of British imperialism to be

the foster-parent of Indian Nationalism. In fact, however, the story of this origin, and the contradiction of its subsequent history, afford a striking demonstration of the strength of the forces of Indian Nationalism and of the inevitable growth of the struggle against imperialism.

As is well known, the National Congress, while arising from the preceding development and beginnings of activity of the Indian middle class, was brought into existence as an organisation through the initiative and under the guidance of an Englishman. More than that—what is less universally known—the National Congress was in fact brought into being through the initiative and under the guidance of direct British governmental policy, on a plan secretly pre-arranged with the Viceroy, as an intended weapon for safeguarding British rule against the rising forces of popular unrest and anti-British feeling.

Yet no sooner had the legal existence of a national organisation, within whatever limited original intended bounds, been thus authorised, than its inevitable tendency as a focus of national feeling began to assert itself. From its early years, even if at first in very limited and cautious forms, the national character began to overshadow the loyalist character. Within a few years it was being regarded with suspicion and hostility by the Government as a centre of "sedition." The subsequent developing mass movement of national struggle swept it forward, already in a first preliminary stage before the war of 1914, and still more decisively after it, to the plane of far-reaching mass struggle, vowing the aim of complete national independence, while the Government proclaimed it illegal and sought to suppress it. In this way the National Congress became for a whole historical period the main focus of the organised millions of the national movement, until its final capitulation with the Mountbatten Settlement.

This history and development, defeating all the original claims of imperialism, is a testimony to the sweeping advance of the forces of the national movement and to the impossibility of confining those forces within the narrow channels which imperialism would have sought to mark out for them.

The origins of Indian Nationalism are commonly traced to the foundation of the National Congress in 1885. In fact, however, the precursors of the movement can be traced through the preceding half-century.[1] Reference has already been made

[1] A fuller account of these precursors and early stages of the national movement will be found in C. F. Andrews and G. Mookerjee, "The Rise and Growth of the Congress in India," 1938.

to the reform movement which found expression in the Brahmo Samaj, established in 1828. In 1843 was founded the British India Society in Bengal, which sought to "secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow subjects." In 1851 this was merged into the British Indian Association, which in the following year presented a Petition to the British Parliament, declaring that "they cannot but feel that they have not profited by their connection with Great Britain to the extent which they had a right to expect," setting forth grievances with regard to the revenue system, the discouragement of manufactures, education and the question of admission to the higher administrative services, and demanding a Legislative Council "possessing a popular character so as in some respects to represent the sentiments of the people." These earlier associations were still mainly linked up with the landowning interests; and indeed the merger by which the British Indian Association was formed included the Bengal Landholders' Society. In 1875 the Indian Association, founded by Surendra Nath Banerjea, was the first organisation representative of the educated middle class in opposition to the domination of the big landowners. Branches, both of the more reactionary British Indian Association and of the more progressive Indian Association, were founded in various parts of India. In 1883 the Indian Association of Calcutta called the first All-India National Conference, which was attended by representatives from Bengal, Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces. The National Conference of 1883 was held under the presidency of Ananda Mohan Bose, who later became President of the National Congress in 1898; in his opening address he declared the Conference to be the first stage to a National Parliament. Thus the conception of an Indian National Congress had already been formed and was maturing from the initiative and activity of the Indian representatives themselves when the Government intervened to take a hand. The Government did not found a movement which had no previous existence or basis. The Government stepped in to take charge of a movement which was in any case coming into existence and whose development it foresaw was inevitable.

The formation of the National Congress represented from the point of view of the Government an attempt to defeat, or rather forestall, an impending revolution. The documents and memoirs available already prove this, although a complete account must await the opening of archives which are still

secret and likely to be held secret until a change of regime.

The official founder of the National Congress was an English administrator, A. O. Hume, who had been in Government service until 1882, when he retired and took up the work of the formation of the Congress. Hume in his official capacity had received possession of the voluminous secret police reports which revealed the growth of popular discontent and the spreading of underground conspiratorial organisation. The period of the seventies was a period of heavy famines and distress, and the growing unrest had been demonstrated in the Deccan peasant risings. The disastrous famine of 1877 coincided with the costly durbar, at which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India, and with the Second Afghan War. Unrest was met by repression. The freedom of the Press was removed by the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. In the following year the Arms Act left the villagers without even the means of defence against the raids of wild animals. The right of public meeting was cut down. The biographer of Hume writes:

> "These ill-starred measures of reaction, combined with Russian methods of police repression, brought India under Lord Lytton within measurable distance of a revolutionary outbreak, and it was only in time that Mr. Hume and his Indian advisers were inspired to intervene."
>
> *(Sir William Wedderburn: "Allan Octavian Hume, Father of the Indian National Congress," 1913, p. 101.)*

Sir William Wedderburn further explains the purpose of his intervention:

> "Towards the close of Lord Lytton's viceroyalty, that is, about 1878 and 1879, Mr. Hume became convinced that some definite action was called for to counteract the growing unrest. From well-wishers in different parts of the country he received warnings of the danger to the Government, and to the future welfare of India, form the economic suffering of the masses and the alienation of the intellectuals." *(Ibid, p. 50.)*

The measures of repression preceded the foundation of the Congress with official blessing. The two processes were not contradictory, but complementary. It was not until the potential revolutionary movement had been struck down that the way was judged open for the formation of a legal movement

under docile leadership as the next step to "counteract the growing unrest". This double or alternating method of repression and conciliation, of seeking to strike down the stubborn fighters and make an alliance with the "loyalist" moderates, is the familiar dialectic of imperialist statesmanship, destined to be many times repeated in the ensuing period.

What was the nature of the evidence which brought Hume to the conclusion that, as he wrote, "I could not then, and do not now, entertain a shadow of doubt that we were then truly in extreme danger of a most terrible revolution"? The evidence may be usefully given in his own words as expressed in a memorandum found among his papers (the textual passages of the memorandum are given as quoted by his biographer, Sir William Wedderburn; the other passages are as summarised by his biographer):

> "'The evidence convinced me at the time — about fifteen months I think before Lord Lytton left—that we were in imminent danger of a terrible outbreak. I was shown seven large volumes (corresponding to a certain mode of dividing the country, excluding Búrma, Assam and some minor tracts) containing a vast number of entries; English abstracts or translations—longer or shorter —of vernacular reports or communications of one kind or another, all arranged according to districts, sub-districts, sub-divisions, and the cities, towns and villages included in these. The number of these entries was enormous; there were said at the time to be communications from over thirty thousand different reporters.' Many of the entries reported conversations between men of the lowest classes, 'all going to show that these poor men were pervaded with a sense of the hopelessness of the existing state of affairs, that they were convinced that they would starve and die, and that they wanted to do *something*. They were going to do something, and stand by each other, *and that something meant violence*.' Innumerable entries referred to the secretion of old swords, spears and matchlocks, which would be ready when required. It was not supposed that the immediate result in its initial stages would be a revolt against our Government, or a revolt at all in the proper sense of the word. What was predicted was a sudden violent outbreak of sporadic crimes, murders of obnoxious persons, robbery of bank-

ers, looting of bazars. 'In the existing state of the lowest half-starving classes, it was considered that the first few crimes would be the signal for hundreds of similar ones, and for a general development of lawlessness, paralysing the authorities and the respectable classes. It was considered also that everywhere the small bands would begin to coalesce into large ones, like drops of water on a leaf; that all the bad characters in the country would join, and that very soon after the bands obtained formidable proportions, a certain small number of the educated classes, at the time desperately, perhaps unreasonably, bitter against the Government would join the movement, assume here and there the lead, give the outbreak cohesion, and direct it as a national revolt'."

(Sir William Wedderburn, op. cit., pp. 80-81.)

Hume established contact with the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, an experienced politician, in the early part of 1885, to place the situation before him. It was at this interview, in the headquarters of imperialism at Simla, that the plan of the Indian National Congress was hatched. The first President of the Congress, W. C. Bonnerjee, has published his account of this origin:

"It will probably be news to many that the Indian National Congress, as it was originally started and as it has since been carried on, is in reality the work of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, when that nobleman was the Governor-General of India. Mr. A. O. Hume, C.B., had in 1884 conceived the idea that it would be of great advantage to the country if leading politicians could be brought together once a year to discuss social matters and be upon friendly footing with one another. He did not desire that politics should form part of their discussion....

"Lord Dufferin took great interest in the matter, and after considering it for some time he sent for Mr. Hume and told him that in his opinion Mr. Hume's project would not be of much use. He said there was no body of persons in this country who performed the functions which Her Majesty's Opposition did in England....It would be very desirable in their interests as well as the interests of the ruled that Indian politicians should meet yearly and point out to the Government in what respects the administration was defective and how it could be improved, and he added that an assembly such as he

proposed should not be presided over by the Local Governor, for in his presence the people might not like to speak out their minds Mr. Hume was convinced by Lord Dufferin's arguments, and when he placed the two schemes, his own and Lord Dufferin's, before leading politicians in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and other parts of the country, the latter unanimously accepted Lord Dufferin's scheme and proceeded to give effect to it. Lord Dufferin had made it a condition with Mr Hume that his name should not be divulged so long as he remained in the country"

(W. C. Bonnerjee, 'Introduction to Indian Politics," 1898)

The traditional policy of liberal imperialism is here clearly expressed. Similarly the more recent historians of the early national movement have described the episode:

"The years just before the Congress were among the most dangerous since 1857. It was Hume, among English officials, who saw the impending disaster and tried to prevent it....He went to Simla in order to make clear to the authorities how almost desperate the situation had become. It is probable that his visit made the new Viceroy, who was a brilliant man of affairs, realise the gravity of the situation and encourage Hume to go on with the formation of the Congress. The time was fully ripe for this All-India movement. In place of an agrarian revolt, which would have had the sympathy and support of the educated classes, it gave the rising classes a national platform from which to create a New India. It was all to the good in the long run that a revolutionary situation based on violence was not allowed to be created once again."

(Andrews and Mookerjee, "Rise and Growth of the Congress in India", pp. 128-9.)

It will be seen that the official role of the National Congress as the organ of opposition to a "revolutionary situation based on violence" by no means dates from Gandhi; this principle was implanted in it by imperialism at the outset as its intended official role.

Hume's own conception of the role of the Congress may here be quoted:

"A safety valve for the escape of great and growing forces, generated by our own action, was urgently needed

conduct of his flock was demonstrated in the closing episode recorded in the official report of the First Congress :

> "Mr. Hume, after acknowledging the honour done him, said that, as the giving of cheers had been entrusted to him, he must be allowed to propose—on the principle of better late than never—giving of cheers, and that not only three, but three times three, and if possible thrice that, for one the latchet of whose shoes he was unworthy to loose, one to whom they were all dear, to whom they were all as children—need he say, Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen-Empress.
>
> "The rest of the speaker's remarks was lost in the storm of applause that instantly burst out, and the asked-for cheers were given over and over."

It is a far cry from this servile beginning (the lowest depths, however, it will be noted, of servility came, not from the Orientals, but from the Englishman) to the time when the Congress was a proscribed organisation, hunted down by the Government, and enlisting the devotion of millions of Indian fighters for freedom.

This twofold character of the National Congress in its origin is very important for all its subsequent history. This double strand in its role and being ran right through its history so long as it functioned as the organ of the national movement: on the one hand, the strand of co-operation with imperialism against the "menace" of the mass movement; on the other hand, the strand of leadership of the masses in the national struggle. This twofold character, which can be traced through all the contradictions of its leadership, from Gokhale in the old stage to his disciple, Gandhi, in the new (the differences between these two deriving mainly from the difference of stage of the mass movement and consequent necessity of different tactics), is the reflection of the twofold or vacillating role of the Indian bourgeoisie, at once in conflict with the British bourgeoisie and desiring to lead the Indian people, yet fearing that "too rapid" advance may end in destroying its privileges along with those of the imperialists.

This contradiction reached its culmination in the period of revolutionary upsurge after the second world war, when the leadership of the National Congress reached what they declared to be a final settlement with imperialism by the acceptance of the Mountbatten Award for the partition of

India and the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan. From this point the National Congress became the governmental party of the new Dominion Government of the Indian Union. The Indian freedom struggle developed along other paths. But a long period of successive struggle and retreat, of advancing challenge and renewed compromise, under the leadership and through the forms of the National Congress as the main organ of the broad national movement, preceded this outcome, and constituted the governing road of development of Indian Nationalism during these decades.

Chapter XI

THREE STAGES OF NATIONAL STRUGGLE

"I am sorry to say that if no instructions had been addressed in political crises to the people of this country except to remember to hate violence, to love order and to exercise patience, the liberties of this country would never have been obtained"—William Ewart Gladstone.

THE DEVELOPMENT of Indian Nationalism over half a century would require a separate study for any adequate treatment, since it comprises the entire political history of a people passing through the most critical stages of their struggle for national unity and freedom. For the immediate purposes, however, of throwing light on the present political situation, what is most important is to see sharply the outstanding landmarks of that development and the main successive tendencies which have played their part and helped to build up the character of the present movement.

The historical development of Indian Nationalism is marked by three great waves of struggle, each at a successively higher level, and each leaving its permanent marks on the movement and opening the way to a new phase. In its earliest phase Indian Nationalism, as we have seen, reflected only the big bourgeoisie—the progressive elements among the landowners, the new industrial bourgeoisie and the well-to-do intellectual elements. The first great wave of unrest which disturbed these placid waters, in the period preceding 1914, reflected the discontent of the urban petty bourgeoisie, but did not yet reach the masses. The role of the masses in the national movement, alike of the peasantry and of the new force of the industrial working class, emerged only after the war of 1914-18. Two great waves of mass struggle developed,

the first in the years immediately succeeding the war, the second in the years succeeding the world economic crisis. All these were the prelude to the decisive tests which opened with the second world war and its sequel.

1. THE FIRST GREAT WAVE OF STRUGGLE 1905-1910

For twenty years the National Congress developed along the path laid down by its founders. During these twenty years no basic claim for self-government in any form—that is, no basic national claim—was formulated in its resolutions, but only the demand for a greater degree of Indian representation within the British system of rule. The maximum demand was for representative institutions, not yet for self-government. The outlook of the early moderate leaders may be found expressed in the statement of one of the ablest—and most moderate — of their number, Romesh Chandra Dutt, President of the Congress in 1890, who formulated the demand of "the people of India" in the following terms in 1901:

> "The people of India are not fond of sudden changes and revolutions. They do not ask for new constitutions, issuing like armed Minervas from the heads of legislative Jupiters. They prefer to work on lines which have already been laid down. They desire to strengthen the present Government, and to bring it more in touch with the people. They desire to see some Indian members in the Secretary of State's Council, and in the Viceroy's Executive Council, representing Indian agriculture and industries. They wish to see Indian members in an Executive Council for each Province. They wish to represent the interests of the Indian people in the discussion of every important administrative question. They seek that the administration of the Empire and its great provinces should be conducted with the co-operation of the people.
>
> "There is a Legislative Council in each large Indian Province, and some of the members of these Councils are elected under the Act of 1892. The experiment has proved a success, and some expansion of these Legislative Councils would strengthen administration and bring it more in touch with the people.... A Province with thirty districts and a population of thirty millions may

fairly have thirty elected members on its Legislative Council. Each District should feel that it has some voice in the administration of the Province."

(Romesh Chandra Dutt, 1901, Preface to "The Economic History of India," Vol. I, "India Under Early British Rule," p. xviii.)

The moderation of these demands correctly reflected the position of the early Indian bourgeoisie. The Congress of those days was exclusively representative of the upper bourgeoisie, and especially of its ideological representatives, the educated middle class. While it won an enthusiastic and wide response from these circles from the outset, so much so that measures had to be taken from an early date to restrict the number of delegates, that response was entirely confined to these social elements. "The four thousand gentlemen sitting round me," wrote an English Member of Parliament, W. S. Caine, who attended the 1889 Congress, "are picked men of the legal, medical, engineering and literary professions all over India." The early moderate leaders were well aware that they did not represent the masses, and that, while they might endeavour to speak as interpreters in the name of the people, they could not claim to speak as its voice. "The Congress," declared Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, the principal guiding leader of the Congress in its earlier years, "was indeed not the voice of the masses, but it was the duty of their educated compatriots to interpret their grievances and offer suggestions for their redress."

The early Indian bourgeoisie of that time understood very well that they were in no position to challenge British rule. On the contrary, they looked to British rule as their ally. For them the main enemy was not British rule as such, but the backwardness of the people, the lack of modern development of the country, the strength of the forces of obscurantism and ignorance, and the administrative shortcomings of the "bureaucratic" system responsible for the situation. In their fight against these evils they looked hopefully for the co-operation of the British rulers. "The educated classes," declared Ananda Mohan Bose, President of the 1898 Congress, "are the friends and not the foes of England—her natural and necessary allies in the great work that lies before her." "I have no fears," affirmed Sir Pherozeshah Mehta in 1890, "but that British statesmen will ultimately respond to the Call." Dadabhai Naoroji, the Father of the Congress,

when presiding over the Second Congress, appealed to the British rulers "not to drive this force (the educated Indians) into opposition instead of drawing it to your side." Surendra Nath Banerjea, the "silver-tongued orator" of the older Congress leaders, proclaimed the ideal to "work with unwavering loyalty to the British connection—for the object was not the supersession of British rule in India, but the broadening of its basis, the liberalising of its spirit, the ennobling of its character and placing it on the unchangeable foundation of a nation's affection."[1]

It should not be assumed from the tone of these declarations that these early Congress leaders were reactionary anti-national servants of alien rule. On the contrary, they represented at that time the most progressive force in Indian society. So long as the nascent working class was still completely without expression or organisation, and the peasants were still the dumb millions, the Indian bourgeoisie was the most progressive and objectively revolutionary force in India. They carried on work for social reform, for enlightenment, for education and modernisation against all that was backward and obscurantist in India. They pressed the demand for industrial and technical economic development.

But their faith and hope in British imperialism as their ally in this work were doomed to disappointment. British imperialism understood very clearly—more clearly than they did themselves—the significance of this progressive role, and the inevitable conflict that it would mean with the interests of imperialist rule and exploitation. Therefore from an early period the original patronage of the Congress turned to suspicion and hostility. Within three years of its foundation, the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, its original inspirer, was speaking with contempt for the "microscopic minority" represented by the Congress. In 1887, Mrs. Besant relates in her book "How India Wrought for Freedom", a delegate attended the Congress "in defiance of his district officer and was called on to give a security of Rs. 20,000 to keep the peace". In 1890 the Government issued a circular forbidding Government

[1]The touch of irony in the lavish encomia of British institutions customary with these older Congress leaders should not be missed. Thus it was Surendra Nath Banerjea who declared at the 1892 Congress: "We are the citizens of a great and free Empire and we live under the protecting shadow of one of the noblest constitutions the world has ever seen. The rights of Englishmen are ours, their privileges are ours, their constitution is ours. But we are excluded from them."

officials to attend the Congress even as visitors. In 1900 Lord Curzon wrote in a letter to the Secretary of State: "The Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise." (Ronaldshay, "Life of Lord Curzon," Vol. II, p. 151.)

Frustration of their hopes in British imperialism was consequently the fate of the older school of Indian Nationalists. In his last years, Gokhale, the veteran leader of the Moderates, bitterly complained that "the bureaucracy was growing frankly selfish and openly hostile to National aspirations. It was not so in the past" (Official "History of the Indian National Congress", 1935, p. 151).

As the failure of the old policy became clear, it was inevitable that a new school should arise, criticising the "Old Guard", and demanding a more positive programme and policy which should represent a definite breaking of the ties with imperialism. This new school, associated especially with the leadership of B. G. Tilak, came to the front already in the last decade of the nineteenth century, but was not able to play a decisive role until the situation became ripe in the following decade. Alongside Tilak, whose base was in Maharashtra in the Bombay Presidency, where the agrarian revolt had been most marked in the seventies, the best known of the newer leaders were Bepin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose in Bengal, and Lajpat Rai in the Punjab.

The new school termed themselves "Nationalists", also "Integral Nationalists" and "Orthodox Nationalists", and came to be widely known as "Extremists' in opposition to the "Moderates". It would be a mistake to regard these terms as the expression of a simple difference between a radical left wing and a conservative-minded right wing. In fact the situation bore a contradictory character, which reflected the still immature development of the national movement.

The starting-point of the opposition leadership, as against the Old Guard, was undoubtedly the desire to make a break with compromising policies of conciliation with imperialism, and to enter on a path of decisive and uncompromising struggle against imperialism. To this extent they represented a force of advance. But this desire was still a subjective desire on their part. There was no basis yet of the mass movement to make such a decisive struggle possible. Their appeal reached to the discontented lower middle class and to the hearts of the literate youth, especially to the poorer students and the new growing army of unemployed or poorly

paid intellectuals, whose situation was becoming increasingly desperate in the opening years of the twentieth century, as it became manifest that there was no avenue of advance or fulfilment for them under imperialist conditions, and who were little inclined to be patient with the slow and comfortable doctrines of gradual advance preached by the solidly established upper-class leaders. Such elements can provide, in periods of social transition and the impending break-up of an old order, very considerable dynamic forces of unrest and energy for struggle; but they are by the nature of their situation incapable of realising their aspirations, until they find their role in relationship to the mass movement, and can only seek satisfaction either in exalted verbal protest, or in anarchist individualist and ultimately politically ineffective forms of action.

Had the new leaders been equipped with a modern social and political outlook, they would have understood that their main task and the task of their supporters lay in the development of the organisation of the working class and of the mass of the peasantry on the basis of their social, economic and political struggle for liberation. But to have demanded such an understanding in the conditions of the first decade of the twentieth century in India would have been to demand an understanding in advance of the existing stage of social development.

Cut off from any scientific social and political theory, the new leaders sought to find the secret of the compromising ineffectiveness of the Moderate leaders in their "denationalised" "Westernising" tendencies, and concentrated their attack against these tendencies. Thus they fixed their attack against precisely those tendencies in respect of which the older Moderate leaders were progressive. Against these, they sought to build the national movement on the basis of the still massive forces of social conservatism in India, on the basis of Orthodox Hinduism and the affirmation of the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindu or "Aryan" civilisation to modern "Western" civilisation. They sought to build the national movement, the most advanced movement in India, on the basis of the most antiquated religion and religious superstitions. From this era dates the disastrous combination of political radicalism and social reaction in India, which has had such a maleficent influence on the fortunes of the national movement, and whose traces are still far from overcome.

The alliance of radical nationalism with the most reactionary forces of Orthodox Hinduism was signalised by Tilak when he opened his campaign in 1890 with a fight against the Age of Consent Bill, which sought to raise the age of consummation of marriage for girls from ten years to twelve years. This Bill was supported by Ranade and the older progressive national leaders. Tilak led a ferocious campaign against it, voicing the demands of the most reactionary forces of Hinduism. Later, he organised the "Cow Protection Society" (the sacredness of the cow, according to the principles of Hinduism, while originally explicable, like all religious observances, by the social needs of the period when the tenet arose, is to-day economically reactionary by its *encouragement of useless livestock, leading to deterioration* of livestock, and is also a dangerous source of friction with Moslems, who eat beef). National festivals were organised, not only in honour of Shivaji, the national hero of the Mahrattas, but equally in a religious form in honour of the elephant-headed god, Ganesh. In Bengal the cult of Kali, the goddess of destruction, was actively developed by some of the more ardent groups.

It is necessary to recognise the national patriotic purpose which underlay these religious forms. Beneath the protection of the religious cover widespread national agitation was conducted, through annual festivals and mass gatherings, an organisation was developed, with the formation of leagues under religious titles and gymnastic societies of the youth. Under conditions of severe imperialist repression of all direct political agitation and organisation, before the national movement had reached any mass basis, the use of such forms was justifiable. It was not a question, however, only of the formal cover, or of the historical form of growth, of a political movement. The insistence on orthodox religion as the heart of the national movement, and the proclamation of the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindu civilisation to modern "Western" civilisation (what modern psychologists would no doubt term a compensatory delusion), inevitably retarded and weakened the real advance of the national movement and of political consciousness, while the emphasis on Hinduism must bear a share of the responsibility for the alienation of wide sections of Moslem opinion from the national movement.

These conceptions are so important for the subsequent development of Indian Nationalism — for they reappear

during the modern period in a more refined form in Gandhism—that it is worth while to analyse them with some care. For these conceptions are the expression of the belief that the path to Indian development and freedom lies, not along the line of social development, of overcoming old weaknesses and divisions and harmful traditions, but along the line of social retrogression, of stimulating and reviving the outlooks and relics of the past.

How this outlook arose we have seen. The Orthodox Nationalists saw the old upper-class Moderate leaders saturated with the "denationalised" outlook and methods, learning, social life and politics of the British bourgeoisie. Against this "denationalisation" or capitulation to British culture they sought to lead a revolt. But on what basis could they lead a revolt?

They were themselves, in fact, tied to the narrow range of the bourgeois outlook (socialism had not yet in practice made any contact with Indian political life at that time), and hence could not see with critical understanding the workings of capitalism alike on its positive side and its negative side. In consequence they could not see that the so-called "British" culture they were denouncing was in reality the culture of capitalism; that the national movement, in so far as it was led by the bourgeoisie, could not yet transcend that basis; and that the only final progressive opposition to that culture could come from the working class. They could not, on the basis of experience then in India, have any conception of the rising working-class outlook and culture which alone can be the alternative and successor to bourgeois culture going beyond it, taking what is of value and leaving the rest. Therefore, when they came to look for a firm ground of opposition to the conquerors' culture, they could only find for a basis the pre-capitalist culture of India before the conquest.

So from the existing foul welter of decaying and corrupt metaphysics, from the broken relics of the shattered village system, from the dead remains of court splendours of a vanished civilisation, they sought to fabricate and build up and reconstitute a golden dream of Hindu culture—a "purified" Hindu culture—which they could hold up as an ideal and a guiding light.

Against the overwhelming flood of British bourgeois culture and ideology, which they saw completely conquering the Indian bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, they sought to hold forward the feeble shield of a reconstructed Hindu ideology

which had no longer any natural basis for its existence in actual life conditions. All social and scientific development was condemned by the more extreme devotees of this gospel as the conquerors' culture; every form of antiquated tradition, even abuse, privilege and obscurantism, was treated with respect and veneration.

So it came about that these militant national leaders of the people, devoted and fearless as many of them were, who should have been leading the people forward along the path of emancipation and understanding, away from all the evil relics of the past, appeared instead in practice as the champions of social reaction and superstition, of caste division and privilege, as the allies of all the "black" forces, seeking to hold down the antiquated pre-British social and ideological fetters upon the people in the name of a high-flown mystical "national" appeal.

The Orthodox Nationalists believed that in this way they were building up a mass national movement of opposition to imperialism. Only so can be explained that a man of the intellectual calibre of Tilak should have lent himself to such agitations as his campaign in defence of child-marriage or his Cow Protection Society.

But this policy was, in fact, not only vicious in principle, but mistaken in tactics. It not only inevitably weakened the advance of the political consciousness and clarity of the movement (nearly all the best-known leaders of Extremism moved later in varying degree to co-operation with imperialism, or to speculative abstraction from politics, and found themselves out of sympathy with the subsequent advance of the movement), but also divided the advancing forces. The programme of social reaction alienated many who would have been ready to support a more militant national policy, but were too clear-sighted to accept the reactionary and metaphysical rubbish which was being offered as a substitute for a left-wing programme. This division, tearing at the hearts of many of the best elements, was illustrated in the case of Motilal Nehru, a man of strong character, who was one of the leaders of the Moderates in the fight against the Extremists, and of whom his son writes:

> "A man of strong feelings, strong passions, tremendous pride and great strength of will, he was very far from the moderate type. And yet in 1907 and 1908 and for some years afterwards he was undoubtedly a mode-

rate of the Moderates and he was bitter against the Extremists, though I believe he admired Tilak.

"Why was this so?...His clear thinking led him to see that hard and extreme words lead nowhere unless they are followed by action appropriate to the language. He saw no effective action in prospect...And then the background of these movements was a religious nationalism which was alien to his nature. He did not look back to a revival in India of ancient times. He had no sympathy or understanding of them, and utterly disliked many old social customs, caste and the like which he considered reactionary. He looked to the West and felt greatly attracted by Western progress, and thought that this could come through an association with England.

"Socially speaking, the revival of Indian nationalism in 1907 was definitely reactionary."

(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography," pp. 23-4.)

In the practical struggle the Orthodox Nationalists, while building on this religious basis for their argument, could derive no weapon or plan of action therefrom save the universal weapon of desperate, but impotent, petty-bourgeois elements divorced from any mass movement — individual terrorism. Even here the fruits of the very vague general religious incitation and exaltation, and formation of secret societies, were very meagre (despite the noisy outcry and publicity given to them by the horrified imperialist rulers, whose own methods of mass-extermination, as later impressively illustrated at Amritsar, were far more formidable), and played no part of importance until later the ripening of the situation for a new stage of struggle brought also this aspect to the front as an accompaniment.

When by 1905 the situation was ripe for a new stage of struggle, the main weapon which was found was one which was remote from all the previous religious and metaphysical speculations and bore an essentially modern and economic character—the weapon of the economic boycott. In the choice of this weapon, which was the only possible effective weapon at the time, was expressed the bourgeois character of the movement; and indeed support of this weapon was taken up by the Moderate leaders.

The forces which gathered for a new stage of struggle in 1905 reflected the wave of world advance at that time following the defeat of Tsarism by Japan (the first victory in mo-

dern times of an Asiatic over a European Power having its own profound repercussions in India) and the initial victories of the First Russian Revolution. The immediate issue which precipitated the struggle in India was the Partition of Bengal, then the centre of political advance in India, a plan devised by Lord Curzon and carried out under his successor. Against this Partition, which aroused universal indignation, the boycott of foreign goods was proclaimed on August 7, 1905.

A rapid swing forward of the national movement followed. The 1905 session of the Congress still gave only conditional support to the boycott. But the Calcutta Congress in 1906, strongly under the influence of the Extremists, adopted a complete new programme, sponsored by the old Father of the Congress himself, Dadabhai Naoroji. This programme proclaimed for the first time the aim of Swaraj or Self-Government, defined as colonial self-government within the Empire ("the system of government obtaining in the self-governing British colonies"), support of the boycott movement, support of "Swadeshi" or the promotion of indigenous industries, and National Education. Swaraj, Boycott, Swadeshi and National Education became now the four cardinal points of the Congress programme.

A year later, in 1907, the Surat Congress saw a split between the Moderates, led by Gokhale, and the Extremists, led by Tilak. There is no doubt, on the evidence of an episode which long remained a controversial issue, that the Moderate leaders, fearing the growing influence of the Extremists, manoeuvred in a high-handed fashion to force the split. Thereafter the two sections developed in separation until the reunion in 1916; in 1918 the Moderates finally left the Congress to form the Liberal Federation.

The hand of Government repression rapidly followed the new awakening of the movement. In 1907 was passed the Seditious Meetings Act, and a new and drastic Press Act followed in 1910 (the previous Press Act of 1878 had been repealed under the liberal administration of Lord Ripon in 1882). On the basis of a regulation of 1818 the method of deportation without trial was brought into play against the Extremist leaders. All this took place under the "Liberal" Lord Morley as Secretary for India. In 1908 Tilak, the man whom the Government most feared was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for an article published in his newspaper, and was held in prison in Mandalay until the month

before the outbreak of the war of 1914. The arrest of Tilak led to a general strike of the Bombay textile workers — the first political action of the Indian proletariat, and hailed by Lenin at the time as a portent of the future. Most of the other prominent leaders were either sentenced or deported, or passed into exile to escape sentence. Between 1906 and 1909 there were 550 political cases before the courts in Bengal alone. Police action was carried out with great rigour; meetings were broken up; agrarian riots were ruthlessly suppressed in the Punjab; school-children were arrested for singing national songs.

As in the previous period, repression was followed and accompanied by concessions to "rally the Moderates". The very limited Morley-Minto Reforms in 1909 gave a grudging extension to the system of representation initiated in the Indian Councils Act of 1892, by permitting a minority of indirectly elected members in the Central Legislative Council, and a majority of indirectly elected members in the Provincial Councils; the Councils were advisory bodies and had no effective powers. The Moderate leaders, now in sole control of the Congress, seized the occasion of these reforms to proclaim their unity with the Government; the new Viceroy, arriving in 1910, was received with a loyal Address; and when in 1911 the revision of the Partition of Bengal was announced in a Royal Proclamation, the spokesman of the Congress declared that "every heart is beating in unison with reverence and devotion to the British Throne, overflowing with revived confidence in and gratitude towards British statesmanship."

The revision of the Partition of Bengal in 1911 represented a partial victory of the boycott movement. The wave of struggle which had developed during the years 1906-1911 did not maintain its strength during the immediately succeeding years; but the permanent advance which had been achieved in the stature of the national movement was never lost. Despite all the limitations of the Extremist leaders of those pre-1914 years, they had achieved a great and lasting work: the Indian claim to freedom had for the first time during those years been brought to the forefront of world political questions; and the seed of the aim of complete national liberation, and of determined struggle to achieve it, had been implanted in the political movement, and was destined in the subsequent years to strike root in the masses of the people.

2. THE SECOND GREAT WAVE OF STRUGGLE (1919-1922)

It was the shock of the first world war, with its lasting blow to the whole structure of imperialism, and the opening of the world revolutionary wave that followed in 1917 and after, which released the first mass movement of revolt in India.

Just as the awakening of 1905 reflected the world movement, even more so was this the case with the great mass movement which shook the foundations of British rule in India in the years succeeding 1917. This unity of the development of the struggle in India with the world struggle is of especial importance to realise, in view of the subjective and isolationist tendencies frequently prevalent in some of the conventional schools of Indian political thought to interpret profound movements simply in terms of the personalities or particular groups which in varying degree sought or failed to give them leadership. There is no doubt that the transformation of the political movement in India from relatively restricted sections of the population to reach out to the masses of the people took place in the years succeeding 1917. But this transformation was not limited to India.

The war of 1914, following the lesson of the defeat of Russian Tsarism by Japan a decade earlier, completed the shattering of the myth of the invincibility of Western imperialism in the eyes of the Asiatic peoples. The spectacle of the suicidal conflict of the imperialist Powers aroused hopes in the breasts of millions of the subject peoples that the hour of collapse of the existing Empires was at hand.

Imperialism took firm measures from the outset to hold the situation in hand, by the adoption of special legislation and powers, notably the Defence of India Act, and by the imprisonment or internment of the most irreconcilable fighters or members of the revolutionary groups. In this task it was assisted in the earlier period of the war by the willing co-operation of the upper sections of the political movement. The Congress, under control of the Moderate leaders, proclaimed its loyalty and support of the war in resolutions adopted at each of its four annual sessions during the war, and even at the Delhi session in 1918 at the close of the war passed a resolution of loyalty to the King and congratulations on "the successful termination of the war". In return, the Congress was treated with official favour; the 1914 Congress

was attended by Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras; the 1915 Congress by Lord Willingdon, Governor of Bombay, and the 1916 Congress by Sir James Meston, Governor of the United Provinces, the Government representatives being received with ovations. Representative Indian leaders in London at the time of the outbreak of war hastened to offer their support to the Government. The Congress deputation then in London, including Lajpat Rai, Jinnah, Sinha and others, sent a letter to the Secretary of State proclaiming their conviction that "the Princes and people of India will readily and willingly co-operate to the best of their ability and afford opportunities of securing that end by placing the resources of their country at His Majesty's disposal" for "a speedy victory for the Empire." Gandhi, newly arrived in London from South Africa, in a reception at the Hotel Cecil, urged his young Indian friends to think "imperially" and "do their duty"; and in a letter from himself and other signatories to the Secretary of State offered his services:

> "It was thought desirable by many of us that during the crisis that has overtaken the Empire...those Indians who are residing in the United Kingdom and who can at all do so should place themselves unconditionally at the service of the Authorities. On behalf of ourselves and those whose names appear on the list appended hereto, we beg to offer our services to the Authorities."

His subsequent work in raising a volunteer ambulance corps of Indians in London is well known. On returning to India, he repeated his offer of service to the Viceroy, proposing to raise a corps of stretcher-bearers for service to the Mesopotamian campaign; the Viceroy replied, excusing him on grounds of health, and stating that "his presence in India itself at that critical time would be of more service than any that he might be able to render abroad." He responded to the Delhi War Conference called by the Viceroy in 1917, and as late as July 1918, he was conducting a recruiting campaign in which he urged the Gujarati peasants to win Swaraj by joining the army.

These demonstrations of "loyalty" by the Moderate leaders were regarded by British official opinion as an expression of gratitude and enthusiasm for the blessings of British rule. In fact, however, the calculation of these leaders, as they themselves subsequently explained, had been by these services to imperialism at war to open the door most rapidly

to Indian self-government. Thus Gandhi declared, in his speech at his trial in 1922:

> "In all these efforts at service I was actuated by the belief that it was possible by such services to gain a status of full equality for my countrymen."

They were later to express their disillusionment.

The docility of the upper political leadership did not prevent the growth of mass unrest from the conditions of the war. The very heavy burdens of crippling financial contributions exacted from the poverty-stricken people of India for the service of the war, the rising prices and the reckless profiteering created conditions of mass misery and impoverishment, which were reflected in the unparalleled toll of the influenza epidemic at the end of the war, killing 14 millions. The growth of unrest was reflected in the Ghadr movement in the Punjab, and in mutinies in the army, which were suppressed with ruthless executions and sentences. In 1917 the Rowlatt Committee was appointed under a Judge of the King's Bench, to enquire into "the criminal conspiracies connected with the revolutionary movements in India" and recommend new repressive legislation.

The growing unrest began to find a reflection in the political movement, in which new stirrings appeared from 1916 onwards. In 1916 Tilak founded the Home Rule for India League. His campaign was joined by the English theosophist, Mrs. Besant, who sought to guide the national movement in channels of "loyalty" to the Empire and was later to take an active part in the fight against non-co-operation. Reunion between the Extremists and Moderates was achieved at the Lucknow Congress in 1916. Even more important, the plans for alliance between the Congress and the Moslem League (founded in 1905), which had been originally prepared at the Karachi Congress in 1913, reached fruition in 1916. One of the reasons for this closer understanding was that Moslem feeling had been strongly aroused by the war against Turkey, and the Moslem League Conference of 1915 had already revealed this discontent. In 1916 the Lucknow Pact of the two bodies reached agreement on a common scheme for reforms in the direction of partial self-government within the Empire (elected majorities in the Councils, extended powers of the Councils, half the Viceroy's Executive to be Indians), which became known as the Congress-League scheme. At the same time the aim was proclaimed of

India becoming "an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions".

This was the position when the rapid transformation of the world situation in 1917, following the Russian Revolution, affected the whole tempo of events and found its speedy reflection in the relations of Britain and India. The issue of national self-determination was brought to the forefront by the Russian Revolution in a manner highly embarrassing to the imperialist Powers on both sides. Within five months of the fall of Tsarism the British Government hastened to issue a declaration (known as the Montagu declaration, from the name of the Secretary of State at the time, but in fact planned and prepared by Curzon and Austen Chamberlain), which proclaimed the aims of British rule in India to be "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire", and promising "substantial steps in this direction as soon as possible." The hasty character of this declaration was shown by the fact that only after it was made was the work begun to endeavour to find out what it was intended to do; the consequent Montagu-Chelmsford Report was only ready a year later; the Reforms (along the lines of so-called "Dyarchy" in the Provinces, or divisions of portfolios between British and Indian Ministers) were not enacted until the end of 1919 and only came into operation in 1920. By that time the whole situation in India had changed.

The Reforms were partially successful, as with the Morley-Minto scheme a decade earlier, in creating a division in the upper-class national camp; but the support of the Moderates thus secured was of far less weight in the political situation at this more advanced stage of development. Mrs. Besant, presiding over the Calcutta Congress at the end of 1917, was able to secure the adoption of a resolution "that the Congress, speaking on behalf of the united people of India, begs respectfully to convey to His Majesty the King-Emperor their deep loyalty and profound attachment to the Throne, their unswerving allegiance to the British connection and their firm resolve to stand by the British Empire at all hazards and at all costs". But when the Report came out in the summer of 1918, a special session of the Congress at Bombay condemned the proposals as "disappointing and unsatisfactory". It was after this Special Congress that the principal Moderate leaders, other than Gandhi, left the Con-

gress, later to found the Indian Liberal Federation, representing those bourgeois elements which wished to co-operate with imperialism. As late as December, 1919, the Congress still went on record for acceptance of the Reforms; but this was only after a sharp division in which Gandhi, supported by Mrs. Besant, led the fight for co-operation, while the opposition was led by C. R. Das. The final resolution reiterated the criticism of the Reforms, and the demand for "early steps to establish full Responsible Government in accordance with the principle of self-determination", but added, on the basis of an amendment moved by Gandhi, that "pending such introduction, this Congress trusts that, so far as may be possible, the people will so work the Reforms as to secure an early establishment of full Responsible Government".

Gandhi's view, as late as the end of 1919, in favour of co-operation and working the Reforms was expressed in an article in his weekly journal at the end of the year:

> "The Reforms Act coupled with the Proclamation is an earnest of the intention of the British people to do justice to India and it ought to remove suspicion on that score... Our duty therefore is not to subject the Reforms to carping criticism, but to settle down quietly to work so as to make them a success."
>
> *(M. K. Gandhi in "Young India", December 31, 1919.)*

This declaration is important, since it was made after the Rowlatt Acts, after Amritsar and martial law in the Punjab—that is, after those issues which are subsequently declared to be the cause of non-co-operation—and thus shows that it was different calculations which led to the decision in the following year to inaugurate the non-co-operation movement.

For, in fact, despite the still-continuing co-operation of the Congress, the whole situation in India had changed in 1919, and the basis for co-operation was disappearing from under the feet of the Congress. The year 1919 saw a wave of mass unrest spread over India. Already the closing months of 1918 and the first months of 1919 saw the opening of a strike movement on a scale never before known in India. In December, 1918, the Bombay mill strike began, which by January, 1919, extended to 125,000 workers. The Rowlatt Acts, introduced in the beginning of 1919 and enacted in March, with the purpose to continue after the lapse of war-

time legislation the extraordinary repressive powers of the Government, for dispensing with ordinary court procedure, and for imprisonment without trial, aroused widespread indignation as demonstrating the iron hand of imperialism beneath the velvet glove of Reform. Gandhi, utilising his South African experience, sought to organise a passive resistance movement against the Rowlatt Bills, and formed a Satyagraha League for this purpose in February. A hartal, or general day of suspension of business, was called for April 6. The response of the masses startled and overwhelmed the initiators of the movement. Through March and April a mighty wave of mass demonstrations, strikes, unrest, in some cases rioting, and courageous resistance to violent repression in the face of heavy casualities, spread over many parts of India. The official Government Report for the year speaks with alarmed amazement of the new-found unity of the people and the breakdown of all official conceptions of Hindu-Moslem antagonism :

> "One noticeable feature of the general excitement was the unprecedented fraternisation between the Hindus and the Moslems. Their union, between the leaders, had now for long been a fixed plan of the nationalist platform. In this time of public excitement even the lower classes agreed for once to forget the differences. Extraordinary scenes of fraternisation occurred. Hindus publicly accepted water from the hands of Moslems and vice-versa. Hindu-Moslem Unity was the watchword of processions indicated both by cries and by banners. Hindu leaders had actually been allowed to preach from the pulpit of a Mosque." *("India in 1919.")*

Extraordinary measures of repression followed. It was at this time that the atrocity of Amritsar occurred, when General Dyer fired 1,600 rounds of ammunition into a unarmed crowd in an enclosed place without means of exit, killing (according to the official figures) 379 and leaving 1,200 wounded without means of attention, the object being, according to his subsequent statement, to create "a moral effect from a military point of view, not only on those who were present, but more especially throughout the Punjab"—i.e., to terrorise the population. It is a measure of the thick pall of repression which lay over India that any detailed news of this massacre only crept through even to the leaders of the Congress Committee four months later, and that for nearly

eight months all news of it was officially suppressed and withheld from parliament and the British public. For diplomatic reasons, in face of agitation and a Congress enquiry, a committee had to be set up by the Government to enquire into and condemn this outrage; but General Dyer received the plaudits (and a purse of £20,000) from the imperialists for his brave stand, and his action was officially approved by the House of Lords. Martial law was proclaimed in the Punjab; and the record of the wholesale shootings, hangings, bombing from the air, and extraordinary sentences perpetrated by the tribunals during this reign of terror, is still only available in fragmentary form from the subsequent enquiries.

"The movement", in the view of British official opinion, "assumed the undeniable character of an organised revolt against the British raj" (Sir Valentine Chirol, "India", 1926, p. 207). Gandhi took alarm at the situation which was developing. In view of sporadic cases of violence of the masses against their rulers which had appeared in Calcutta, Bombay, Ahmedabad and elsewhere, he declared that he had committed "a blunder of Himalayan dimensions which had enabled ill-disposed persons, not true passive resisters at all, to perpetrate disorders". Accordingly, he suspended passive resistance in the middle of April, within a week of the hartal, and thus called off the movement at the moment it was beginning to reach its height, on the grounds, as he subsequently explained in a letter to the Press on July 21, that "a civil resister never seeks to embarrass the Government". This initial experience of "Satyagraha" (literally, "persistence in truth," used for the method of passive resistance) was to be subsequently repeated on an extended scale.

In December, 1919, as has been seen, the Congress was deciding for working the Reforms, and Gandhi was urging that the task of the national movement was "to settle down quietly to work so as to make them a success". But the situation left no room for such dreams to be realised. The tide of rising mass unrest, which had swept forward in 1919, was still advancing in 1920 and 1921, and was to be further intensified by the economic crisis which began to develop in the latter part of 1920. The first six months of 1920 saw the greatest height of the strike movement, with no less than 200 strikes involving one and a half million workers. Such a rising tide made a mockery of the sage counsels of "settling

down quietly." The President of the Congress declared at its special session in September, 1920:

> "It is no use blinking the fact that we are passing through a revolutionary period...We are by instinct and tradition averse to revolutions. Traditionally, we are a slow-going people; but when we decide to move, we do move quickly and by rapid strides. No living organism can altogether escape revolutions in the course of its existence."
>
> *(Lajpat Rai, Presidential Address to the Calcutta Special Session of the National Congress in September, 1920.)*

The analysis of the President of the Congress was in its essential point correct. The declaration of the spokesman of the Congress was in fact a declaration that in the midst of "a revolutionary period" a leadership "by instinct and tradition averse to revolution" was faced with the problem of leading the rising movement. Herein lay the contradiction of the post-war situation in India, as indeed in many countries at that time wherein the political movement had not yet reached a maturity corresponding to the opportunities unloosed by the war.

It was in this situation that in 1920 Gandhi and the main body of the Congress leadership (now deserted by the former Moderates) executed a decisive change of front, threw over co-operation with the Reforms, determined to take the leadership of the rising mass movement and for this purpose evolved the plan of "non-violent non-co-operation". Henceforward the mass struggle was to be led by the Congress; but the price of the leadership was to be that the struggle must be "non-violent".

The new plan of non-violent non-co-operation was adopted at the Calcutta Special Congress in September, 1920. It was carried, not without opposition, by the alliance of Gandhi and Motilal Nehru with the militant Moslem leaders, the Ali brothers, at the head of the then powerful Khilafat agitation (in form the protest against the injustices of the Treaty of Sevres to Turkey, the leading Moslem Power, but in practice the rallying point of Moslem mass unrest). The resolution proclaimed the policy of "progressive non-violent non-co-operation inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi, until the said wrongs are righted and Swaraj is established." The policy envisaged successive stages, beginning with the

renunciation of titles bestowed by the Government, and the triple boycott (boycott of the legislatures, lawcourts and educational institutions), together with "reviving hand-spinning in every house and hand-weaving", and leading up at some future date to the final stage of non-payment of taxes. It will be seen that the immediate measures were measures of boycott to be adopted by the middle-class elements, officials, lawyers and students, with the only role for the masses the constructive task of "hand-spinning and hand-weaving"; the active participation of the masses, through non-payment of taxes (which inevitably meant a No-Rent campaign), was reserved for later.

The boycott of the elections to the new legislatures, which took place in November, was markedly successful, two-thirds of the electors abstaining. The boycott of educational institutions had a considerable measure of success, masses of students sweeping with enthusiasm into the non-co-operation movement. The lawyers' boycott was less successful, except for a few outstanding examples, such as those of Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das.

At the annual session of the Congress at Nagpur in December, 1920, the new programme was finally adopted with practical unanimity. The Creed of the Congress was changed from the previous proclamation of the aim of colonial self-government within the Empire, to be attained by constitutional means, to the new aim of "the attainment of Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means". The organisation of the Congress was carried forward from its previous loose character to the machinery of a modern party, with its units reaching down to the villages and localities, and with a standing Executive ("Working Committee") of fifteen.

The new programme and policy inaugurated by Gandhi marked a giant's advance for the National Congress. The Congress now stood out as a political party leading the masses in struggle against the Government for the realisation of national freedom. From this point the National Congress won its position (a position at which the militant nationalists of the earlier years would have rubbed their eyes) as the central focus of the national movement.

But the new programme and policy contained also another element, an element alien to the mass struggle, an element of petty-bourgeois moralising speculations and reformist pacifism, which found its chosen expression in the innocent-

seeming term "non-violent". That term was intended by Gandhi to represent a whole religious-philosophical conception, preached by him with eloquence and devotion, akin in certain respects to older schools of Indian speculative thought, but more closely related to and deriving from late Western schools of thought associated with Tolstoy, Thoreau and Emerson, which had had their vogue and influence during Gandhi's earlier years in the West and in the formation of his thought. That same term was accepted by many of Gandhi's associates, who were far from sharing his philosophical conception, as an apparently common-sense rule of expediency for at any rate the earlier stages of struggle of an unarmed people against a powerfully armed ruling enemy. But in fact, as the subsequent experience of events and the ever-developing interpretation of that term were to demonstrate, that seemingly innocent humanitarian or expedient term contained concealed within it, not only the refusal of the final struggle, but the thwarting also of the immediate struggle by the attempt to conciliate the interests of the masses with the big bourgeois and landlord interests which were inevitably opposed to any decisive mass struggle. Herein lay the contradiction which was to lead to the collapse of the movement, despite great achievements, both in this first trial and in the extended trial a decade later, and the failure to win that speedy victory of Swaraj which was freely promised as the certain and rapid outcome of the new policy.

A great sweep forward of the mass movement followed the adoption by the Congress of the new militant programme of struggle against the Government for the speedy realisation of Swaraj. Gandhi freely declared as a firm and certain prophecy (which, despite its naive character, was confidently believed by his followers in the flush of enthusiasm of those days) the rash promise that Swaraj would be achieved within twelve months, that is—for the date was definite—by December 31, 1921. He even went so far as to declare, at a conference in September, 1921, "that he was so sure of getting Swaraj before the end of the year that he could not conceive of himself as living beyond December 31 without having won Swaraj" (Subhas Bose, "The Indian Struggle", p. 84). However, he had still many years of political activity before him, though not yet the fortune of seeing the realisation of Swaraj.

Gandhi's plan of campaign was less clear than the date

of victory. The official "History of the Indian National Congress" writes:

> "Mass civil disobedience was the thing that was luring the people. What was it, what would it be? Gandhi himself never defined it, never elaborated it, never visualised it even to himself. It must unfold itself to a discerning vision, to a pure heart, from step to step, much as the pathway in a dense forest would reveal itself to the wayfarer's feet as he wends his weary way until a ray of light brightens the hopes of an all but despairing wanderer."
>
> *(Official "History of the Indian National Congress," 1935, p. 376.)*

Subhas Bose relates his disheartenment when, as an eager young disciple in his first interview with the Mahatma in those fateful days of 1921, he sought to obtain " a clear understanding of the details—the successive stages — of his plan, leading on step by step to the ultimate seizure of power from the foreign bureaucracy," and failed to get an answer:

> "What his real expectation was, I was unable to understand. Either he did not want to give out all his secrets prematurely or he did not have a clear conception of the tactics whereby the hands of the Government could be forced."
>
> *(Subhas Bose, "The Indian Struggle 1920-1934," p. 68.)*

Jawaharlal Nehru writes of the "delightful vagueness" of Gandhi:

> "It was obvious that to most of our leaders Swaraj meant something much less than independence. Gandhiji was delightfully vague on the subject, and he did not encourage clear thinking about it either."
>
> *(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography," p. 76.)*

However, he explains:

> "We all felt that he was a great and unique man and a glorious leader, and having put our faith in him we gave him an almost blank cheque, for the time being at least." *(Ibid, p. 73.)*

The advance of the movement in 1921 was demonstrated, not only in the enthusiastic development of the non-co-operation movement, but in the accompanying rising forms of

mass struggle in all parts of the country, as in the Assam-Bengal railway strike, the Midnapore No-Tax campaign, the Moplah rebellion in Malabar in the South, and the militant Akali movement against the Government-defended rich Mahants in the Punjab.

Towards the closing months of 1921 the struggle leapt to new heights. The Government, in deep alarm and anxiety over the whole situation, played their hoped-for Ace of Trumps against Gandhi by bringing in—not merely the Duke of Connaught, as earlier in the year—but the Prince of Wales himself to tour India, not so much in any vain hopes of conciliating the people, as to test out the feeling of the population in relation to this royal image understood by every Anglo-Saxon expert of the mysterious East to represent the deepest object of veneration and adoration of the Oriental heart. The result exceeded their expectations—in the reverse direction. The Hartal all over India which greeted the Prince of Wales on his arrival on November 17 was the most overwhelming and successful demonstration of popular disaffection which India had yet known. The hostility of the people and the angry repression by the Government led to sanguinary struggles, which Gandhi sought vainly to check and which led him to declare that Swaraj stank in his nostrils.

From this point the National Volunteer movement began to consolidate its ranks. They were still organised within the framework of the Congress or of the Khilafat movement on the basis of "non-violent non-co-operation"; but many wore uniform, drilled and marched in mass formation to organise hartals and the boycott of foreign cloth by picketing and peaceful persuasion.

The full force of Government repression was turned against the National Volunteers. The Governmental Press, such as the *Statesman* and the *Englishman*, howled that the National Volunteers had taken possession of Calcutta and that the Government had abdicated, and demanded immediate action. The Government proclaimed the Volunteers illegal organisations. Arrests spread in thousands. Thousands of students and factory workers replenished the ranks of the Volunteers.

By the end of December all the best-known Congress leaders, except Gandhi, were imprisoned. Twenty thousand political prisoners filled the jails. At the highest point of the struggle, at the beginning of the following year, 30,000 were in jail. Enthusiasm was at fever heat.

The Government was anxious and perplexed, and began to lose its nerve. If the infection of universal defiance of the Government spread from the towns and began to reach the millions of the peasantry, there was no salvation left for British rule; all their guns and aeroplanes would not avail them in the seething cauldron of rebellion of 300 millions. The Viceroy proceeded, through the intermediary of Pandit Malaviya, to negotiate with the political leaders in jail. He offered legalisation of the National Volunteers and release of the prisoners in return for the calling off of civil disobedience. The negotiations proved abortive.

In this situation the Ahmedabad Congress was held at the close of the year, with Gandhi now almost alone in the leadership. Failing C. R. Das, the valiant leader of Bengal, who was to have presided and was in prison, Gandhi introduced an English clergyman at the opening of the proceedings to deliver a religious message to the Congress, who took the opportunity to deliver a homily against the burning of foreign cloth.

Amid enthusiasm the Ahmedabad Congress passed resolutions proclaiming "the fixed determination of the Congress to continue the campaign of non-violent non-co-operation with greater vigour...till Swaraj is established and the control of the Government of India passes into the hands of the people", calling on all over eighteen years of age to join the illegal National Volunteers, pledging the aim "to concentrate attention upon Civil Disobedience, whether mass or individual, whether of an offensive or defensive character", and placing full dictatorial powers for this purpose in the hands of "Mahatma Gandhi as the sole executive authority of the Congress".

Gandhi was now Dictator of the Congress. The movement was at its highest point. Full powers had been placed in his hands to lead it to victory. The moment had come for the final trial of strength, for the launching of mass civil disobedience. The whole country was looking to Gandhi. What would he do?

In the midst of this ferment of national enthusiasm and hope one man on the Congress side was unhappy and alarmed at the development of events. That man was Gandhi. His movement, the movement that he had envisaged, was not developing at all in the way that he had intended. Something was going wrong. This was not the perfect idyllic philosophic "non-violent" movement he had pictured. He

had unchained a monster. Ugly elements were creeping in. Reckless men, especially among his Moslem colleagues, were even beginning to demand the abandonment of the "non-violence" clause. More and more openly, already in those closing weeks of 1921, when the tens of thousands of fighters were going to prison with his name on their lips, he was expressing his alarm and disgust, as in his revealing cry that Swaraj stank in his nostrils.

At Ahmedabad the retreat began. Not yet too openly, in the midst of the tense atmosphere of impending battle and expectant thousands. But the small signs were there. The Ahmedabad Congress was itself the historic moment and the ideal occasion for launching the call to mass civil disobedience throughout the country, the call to the final struggle and victory, for which the people were waiting. The Manifesto of the young Communist Party of India to the Ahmedabad Congress declared:

> "If the Congress would lead the revolution, which is shaking India to the very foundation, let it not put faith in mere demonstrations and temporary wild enthusiasm. Let it make the immediate demands of the Trade Unions its own demands; let it make the programme of the Kisan Sabhas (peasant unions) its own programme; and the time will soon come when the Congress will not stop before any obstacle; it will be backed by the irresistible strength of the entire population consciously fighting for their material interests."
>
> *(Manifesto of the Communist Party of India to the Ahmedabad National Congress, 1921.)*

The call to open struggle was not made at Ahmedabad. Instead, careful observers noted that all reference to non-payment of taxes had disappeared from the Ahmedabad resolution. The references to mass civil disobedience were hedged round with ifs and ans: "under proper safeguards", "under instructions to be issued", "when the mass of people have been sufficiently trained in methods of non-violence"... Then came the episode of the Republican Moslem leader, Hasrat Mohani, who wished to move a resolution defining Swaraj as "complete independence, free from all foreign control". Gandhi struck hard in opposition ("it has grieved me because it shows lack of responsibility"), and secured its rejection.

The Government of India, watching with straining eyes, saw the small signs at Ahmedabad and breathed a sigh of relief. The Viceroy telegraphed to the Secretary of State in London:

> "During Christmas week the Congress held its annual meeting at Ahmedabad. Gandhi had been deeply impressed by the rioting at Bombay, as statements made by him at the time had indicated, and the rioting had brought home to him the dangers of mass civil disobedience; and the resolutions of the Congress gave evidence of this, since they not only rejected the proposals which the extreme wing of the Khilafat party had advanced for abandoning the policy of non-violence, but, whilst the organisation of civil disobedience when fulfilment of the Delhi conditions had taken place was urged in them, omitted any reference to the non-payment of taxes."
>
> *("Telegraphic Correspondence regarding the Situation in India," Cmd. 1586, 1922.)*

What would Gandhi do? The Ahmedabad Congress had dissolved without a plan. All was left in Gandhi's hands. Like Parisian people in the siege of Paris, who endeavoured to comfort themselves with the belief that "General Trochu has a plan", the Indian people, under the hammer-blows of imperialist repression, looked hopefully to Gandhi to unfold his strategy.

Gandhi's action was peculiar. He waited a month. During this month districts approached him, pleading to begin a No-Tax campaign. One district, Guntur, began without permission. Gandhi sent an immediate note to the Congress officials to see that all taxes were paid by the date due. Then he decided to make a beginning with one tiny district where he had taken special care to ensure perfect "non-violent" conditions—the district of Bardoli, with a population of 87,000—or one four-thousandth part of the Indian people that was awaiting his leadership to act. On February 1 he sent his ultimatum to the Viceroy to declare that, unless the prisoners were released and repressive measures abandoned, "mass civil disobedience" would begin—in Bardoli exclusively. Hardly had he done this when, a few days later, news arrived that at a little village, Chauri Chaura in the United Provinces, angry peasants had stormed and burned the village police station resulting in the death of twenty-two policemen. This news of the growth of unrest among the peasantry

immediately determined Gandhi that there was no time to be lost. At a hasty meeting of the Working Committee at Bardoli on February 12, the decision was reached, in view of the "inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura", to end, not only mass civil disobedience, but the whole campaign of civil disobedience through volunteer processions, the holding of public meetings under ban and the like, and to substitute a "constructive" programme of spinning, temperance reform and educational activities. The battle was over The whole campaign was over. The mountain had indeed borne a mouse.

To say that the Bardoli decision created consternation in the Congress camp would be to fall short of any power of language to describe the feelings that were aroused. The nearest approach for English readers would be the effect of the calling off of the general strike in 1926 as some parallel to India's Bardoli in 1922.

> "To sound the order of retreat just when public enthusiasm was reaching the boiling point was nothing short of a national calamity. The principal lieutenants of the Mahatma, Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai, who were all in prison, shared the popular resentment. I was with the Deshbandhu at the time, and I could see that he was beside himself with anger and sorrow."
>
> *(Subhas Bose, "The Indian Struggle" p. 90.)*

Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai and others sent from prison long and indignant letters to Gandhi protesting at his decision. Gandhi coldly replied that men in prison were "civilly dead" and had no claim to any say in policy.

The entire movement, which had been organised on the basis of complete discouragement of any spontaneous mass activity and mechanical subordination to the will of one man, was inevitably thrown into helpless confusion and demoralisation by the Bardoli decision. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, who endeavours to defend the decision on the grounds that the movement would have otherwise got out of hand and certainly entered into the paths of violence and bloody struggle with the Government, in which the Government would certainly have won, admits that the manner of the decision

> "brought about a certain demoralisation. It is possible that this sudden bottling up of a great movement contributed to a tragic development in the country. The

drift to sporadic and futile violence in the political struggle was stopped, but the suppressed violence had to find a way out, and in the following years this perhaps aggravated the communal trouble."

(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography," p. 86.)

After the movement had been thus paralysed and demoralised from within, the Government struck with confidence. On March 10 Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Not a ripple followed in the mass movement. Within less than two years Gandhi was released. The crisis was over.

Great controversy has raged over the Bardoli decision and its bitter consequences for the national movement in the six years' subsequent ebb that followed. Defences have been put forward that the real cause and justification of the decision must be sought deeper than in the alleged issue of Chauri Chaura, officially given as the reason for the decision, and that in reality the time had come when it was essential to stop the movement because "our movement, in spite of its apparent power and widespread enthusiasm, was going to pieces." (Nehru, "Autobiography", p. 85). It may be asked in what sense the movement was "going to pieces." If by this is meant that the reformist-pacifist control of the movement was weakening, this is undoubtedly correct. But this advance was inherent in the advance of the movement and the condition of its future victory (Nehru's assumption of the inevitability of the Government's victory in the face of an all-Indian popular revolt would not have been as cheerfully assumed by the Government). If, on the other hand, it might be taken to mean that the effective strength of the mass struggle had in reality passed its highest point and was weakening, such a claim would certainly not be correct, and is, indeed, not intended to be suggested even by the apologists. The clearest evidence of this is afforded by the Government's own grave estimate of the actual forces of the situation three days before the Bardoli collapse. On February 9, 1922, the Viceroy telegraphed to London:

"The lower classes in the towns have been seriously affected by the non-co-operation movement...In certain areas the peasantry have been affected, particularly in parts of the Assam Valley, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa and Bengal. As regards the Punjab, the Akali agitation...has penetrated to the rural Sikhs. A large

proportion of the Mohammedan population throughout the country are embittered and sullen...grave possibilities....The Government of India are prepared for disorder of a more formidable nature than has in the past occurred, and do not seek to minimise in any way the fact that great anxiety is caused by the situation."

(Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, February 9, 1922, "Telegraphic Correspondence regarding the Situation in India", Cmd 1586, 1922.)

This was the Government's picture of the situation three days before the whole campaign was cancelled by the Bardoli decision on February 12.[1]

The discipline of the mass movement and readiness for decisive struggle were shown by the example of Guntur, where, in despite of Gandhi's orders, through a misunderstanding the No-Tax campaign was inaugurated. Not 5 per cent of the taxes were collected—until Gandhi's countermanding order came. On a word of command from the Congress centre this process could have undoubtedly been unleashed throughout the country, and would have turned into a universal refusal of land revenue and rent. But this process would have meant the sweeping away, not only of imperialism, but also of landlordism.

That these considerations were the decisive considerations behind the Bardoli decision is proved by the text of the decision itself. The text of the resolution adopted by the Working Committee at Bardoli on February 12 is so important as to deserve reproduction, and repays careful study for the

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[1] The impression of the Government on the crisis of 1922 and their view that only Gandhi's calling off of the movement saved them was subsequently expressed by Lord Lloyd, then Governor of Bombay, in an interview:

"He gave us a scare! His programme filled our jails. You can't go on arresting people forever, you know — not when there are 319,000,000 of them. And if they had taken his next step and refused to pay taxes! God knows where we should have been!

"Gandhi's was the most colossal experiment in world history; and it came within an inch of succeeding. But he couldn't control men's passions. They became violent and he called off his programme. You know the rest. We jailed him."

(Lord Lloyd in an interview with Drew Pearson, quoted by C. F. Andrews in the "New Republic", April 3, 1939.)

light it throws on the forces and contradictions of the Indian national movement. The essential clauses run:

> "Clause 1. The Working Committee deplores the inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura in having brutally murdered constables and wantonly burned police thana (station).
>
> "Clause 2. In view of the violent outbreaks every time mass civil disobedience is inaugurated, indicating that the country is not non-violent enough, the Working Committee of the Congress resolves that mass civil disobedience...be suspended, and *instructs the local Congress Committees to advise the cultivators to pay land revenue and other taxes due to the Government*, and to suspend every other activity of an offensive character.
>
> "Clause 3. The suspension of mass civil disobedience shall be continued until the atmosphere is so non-violent as to ensure the non-repetition of atrocities such as Gorakhpur or of the hooliganism such as at Bombay and Madras on the 17th of November and the 13th of January...
>
> "Clause 5. All volunteer processions and public meetings for the defiance of authority should be stopped.
>
> "Clause 6. *The Working Committee advises Congress workers and organisations to inform the ryots (peasants) that withholding of rent payment to the Zemindars (landlords) is contrary to the Congress resolutions and injurious to the best interests of the country.*
>
> "Clause 7. *The Working Committee assures the Zemindars that the Congress movement is in no way intended to attack their legal rights, and that even where the ryots have grievances, the Committee desires that redress be sought by mutual consultation and arbitration.*"

The resolution shows that it was not an abstract question of non-violence which actuated the movers. It will be noted that no less than three clauses (italicised) deal specifically, emphatically and even urgently with the necessity of the *payment of rent* by the peasants to the landlords or Government. There is here no question of violence or non-violence. There is simply a question of class interests, of exploiters and exploited. The non-payment of rent could not be suggested by any one to be a "violent" action: on the contrary, it is a most peaceful (though also most revolutionary)

form of protest. Why, then, should a resolution, nominally condemning "violence", concentrate so emphatically on this question of the non-payment of rent and the "legal rights" of landlords? There is only one answer possible. The phraseology of "non-violence" is revealed as only in reality a cover, conscious or unconscious, for class interests and the maintenance of class exploitation.

The dominant leadership of the Congress associated with Gandhi called off the movement because they were afraid of the awakening mass activity; and they were afraid of the mass activity because it was beginning to threaten those propertied class interests with which they themselves were still in fact closely linked.

Not the question of "violence" or "non-violence", but the question of class interest in opposition to the mass movement, was the breaking-point of the national struggle in 1922. This was the rock on which the movement broke. This was the real meaning of "Non-Violence".

3. THE THIRD GREAT WAVE OF STRUGGLE (1930-1934)

For half a decade after the blow of Bardoli the national movement was prostrated. The Congress fell to a low ebb. By 1924 Gandhi was declaring that, in place of the proclaimed aim of 10 million members, they could not claim more than 200,000: "We politicians do not represent the masses except in opposition to the Government." The "spinning franchise", introduced by Gandhi that year (requiring members of elected Congress organisations to send in 2,000 yards of self-spun yarn every month), had only produced a roll of 10,000 members by the autumn of 1925, when it was withdrawn as an obligatory condition and made optional. The *Bombay Chronicle* in 1925 spoke of a "general paralysis and stagnation". Lajpat Rai in the same year spoke of "chaos and confusion". "The political situation", he declared, "is anything but hopeful and encouraging. The people are sunk in depression. Everything—principles, practices, parties and politics—seem to be in a state of disintegration and dissolution." In this depression of the national movement the sinister symptom of communal disorders was able to spread over the land. The Moslem League separated itself again from the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha conducted a narrow and reactionary counter-propaganda.

A section of the leadership of the Congress, represented by C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru, sought after Bardoli to make a decisive turn away from what they regarded as the sterile and unpractical policies of Gandhi by forming a new party, while remaining within the Congress, to contest the elections and carry forward the fight on the parliamentary plane within the new legislatures. This new party was named the Swaraj Party.

The decision to end the boycott of the elections and of the legislatures was undoubtedly, in view of the weakness of the mass movement, a step in advance. It was opposed by the impotent and conservative "No-Changers" in the Congress, who clung to Gandhi's "constructive programme" of spinning, temperance, removal of untouchability and similar social reforms as the only path of salvation; but they were powerless to prevent sanctioning of its adoption by that section of the Congress which desired a more positive policy. By 1925 the Congress made its complete and unconditional surrender to the Swaraj Party, which held the majority and whose leaders took over decisive control, while Gandhi passed for the time being into the background.

The Swaraj Party leaders, however, in seeking to turn away from the policies of Gandhi which had landed the movement in an impasse, also turned away still farther from any basis in the masses. The only real advance from the policy of Gandhi could have been an advance from the domination of those upper-class interests which had betrayed the national struggle to the new basis of the interests of the main body of the nation, the workers and peasants, who alone had no ground for compromise with imperialism. In abstract principle the new Swaraj Party took a step towards recognising this; C. R. Das, in a phrase which won wide echoes, spoke of "Swaraj for the 98 per cent"; and the new programme spoke in general terms of the necessity of workers' and peasants' organisation. But in practice the Swaraj Party was the party of the progressive upper bourgeoisie; its existence depended on the support of these elements, just as its main leaders came from among them; and, however much they might talk sentimentally of the workers and peasants, to win the support of the upper-class elements they had to make perfectly clear that their party was "sound" on the essential basis of landlordism and capitalism. So their foundation programme of aims specifically included the clause that "private and individual property will be recognised and maintained, and the

growth of individual wealth, both movable and immovable, will be permitted"; while the accompanying explanatory statement of the programme rebutted the "slander" that the Swaraj Party was alleged to be opposed to the landlords by declaring: "True it is that the Party stands for justice to the tenant, but poor indeed will be the quality of that justice if it involves any injustice to the landlord."

In practice, therefore, the Swaraj Party, though intended to represent a step in advance, was no more than the reflection of the ebb of the tide of mass struggle. The Swaraj Party was the party of the progressive bourgeoisie moving to co-operation with imperialism along the inclined plane of parliamentarism. From its inception it slid downwards ever closer to the supposed enemy. At the outset the aim of entry into the Councils was declared to be "uniform and consistent obstruction". On this basis a considerable victory was won in the elections of 1923, and the Party entered the Central Assembly as the strongest single Party, able by collaboration with the Independents or Liberals (former Moderates) to establish a precarious majority. Already on entry, C. R. Das, as leader, declared: "His party had come there to offer their co-operation. If the Government would receive their co-operation, they would find that the Swarajists were their men." By 1925 C. R. Das was declaring, in a famous statement at Faridpur, that he saw signs of a "change of heart" in the Government (a statement hardly borne out by the attitude of the then Secretary of State, Lord Birkenhead, who referred with unconcealed contempt in a public speech to "the unsubstantial ghost of Indian Nationalism"), and made a formal offer of co-operation on conditions, part of those conditions being a common fight against the revolutionary movement. The spokesmen of the Liberals now affirmed that no difference of importance remained between them and the Swarajists. In the spring of 1926 the Sabarmati Pact contemplated acceptance of office, but was turned down owing to opposition of the rank and file. At the new elections in the autumn of 1926 the Swaraj Party suffered a marked setback, except in Madras.

But the hopes of the bourgeoisie for harmonious co-operation with imperialism were destined to end in disillusionment. As soon as it was clear that the forces of the national struggle had weakened, and that the Swarajists, divorced from the mass movement, were reduced to pleading for terms, imperialism reversed the engines, began to go back

on the partial economic concessions granted to the Indian bourgeoisie during the previous years, and opened an economic offensive to re-establish full domination, through the Currency Bill of 1927, the establishment of the rupee ratio at 1*s.* 6*d.* (in the face of universal Indian protests), and the new Steel Protection Bill of 1927, which undermined the protection of the 1924 Act by introducing preferential rates for British steel. Towards the end of 1927 the Simon Commission was announced, to settle the fate of the future constitution for India, with a complete exclusion of Indian representation

Thus the Indian bourgeoisie, however unwillingly, found themselves once again forced to turn aside from their hopes of co-operation and to look towards the possibility of harnessing the mass forces once more in their support, if they were to have any prospect of driving a successful bargain. But the conditions were now far more difficult and complicated than a decade ago. For in the interval the mass forces had begun to awaken to new life of their own, to independent political expression and aims, and to active struggle, not only against imperialism, but against the Indian exploiters. The triangular character of the contest, or rather the deeper contest between imperialism and the Indian masses, with the hesitant and vacillating role of the Indian bourgeoisie, was now coming far more clearly to the front. Hence the peculiar character of the new stage of struggle which now opened out, developing from its first signs in the latter part of 1927 to its full strength in 1930-34: on the one hand, the far more widespread, intensive and prolonged character of the struggle; on the other, the spasmodic, interrupted tempo of development, the zigzag vacillation of aims, the repeated accompanying negotiations, and sudden truces without settlement, until the final collapse.

The new factor which developed for the first time in the middle years of the nineteen-twenties, and gave the decisive impetus to the new wave of struggle, though not yet its leadership, was the emergence of the industrial working class as an independent force, conducting its own struggle with unexampled energy and heroism, and beginning to develop its own leadership. With this advance the new ideology of the working class, or Socialism, began to develop for the first time as a political factor in India, and the influence of its ideas began to penetrate the youth and the left sections of Indian Nationalism, bringing new life and energy and wider horizons. The Cawnpore conspiracy trial of 1924

showed the sharp look-out of imperialism to stamp out the first signs of revolutionary working-class politics. The growth of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, which came to the front during 1926 and 1927, preceded the great advance of trade unionism and the strike movement in 1928. The colossal strike movement of 1928, with a total of 31,647,000 working days lost, or more than during the previous five years put together; the growth of the new fighting Girni Kamgar Union or Red Flag Union of the Bombay textile workers to an officially returned membership of 65,000 within a year, and increase of trade-union membership by 70 per cent; the foremost political role of the working class in the demonstrations against the Simon Commission during that year; the rising militant consciousness of the trade unions and the victory of the left wing in the Trade Union Congress in 1929—these were the harbingers and the driving force that led to the new wave of struggle of the Indian people.

The reflection of this advance began to appear in the emergence of a new left wing in the Congress and the national movement. Towards the end of 1927 Jawaharlal Nehru returned from a prolonged tour of over a year and a half in Europe, where he had made contact with socialist circles and ideas. The Madras Congress, at the end of 1927, showed the advance of new leftward tendencies, especially among the youth. A resolution for complete independence as the aim of the national movement—always previously opposed by the leadership — was unanimously carried (in the absence of Gandhi, who later condemned it as "hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed"). Boycott of the Simon Commission was determined; at the same time participation in an All-Parties Conference was approved to evolve an alternative constitutional scheme. The Congress affiliated to the newly founded International League Against Imperialism. Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose, the principal leaders of the youth and of the developing leftward tendencies in the Congress, were appointed General Secretaries.

The apparent victory of the left at the 1927 Congress was superficial and based on lack of opposition. But as 1928 unfolded its events, with the success of the demonstrations against the Simon Commission, with the advance of the strike movement, and with the growth of the newly founded Independence League and of youth and student organisations, it was clear to the older leadership that the left was developing as a force which might rapidly sweep the Con-

gress. At the All-Parties Conference the older leadership, in collaboration with the moderate or reactionary elements outside the Congress, evolved a scheme (known as the Nehru Report, from the Chairman, the elder Nehru) for a constitution based on responsible government within the British Empire, thus shelving the demand for independence. But in face of the rising tide of feeling, there was doubt whether this scheme would be accepted by the Congress.

In this critical balance of forces, with the certainty of big new struggles ahead in a far more advanced situation than a decade previously, the right-wing leadership once again turned to Gandhi, whom they had previously thrust aside, and whose star now once again rose. At the Calcutta session at the end of 1928 Gandhi returned to active leadership of the Congress. Whatever the views of the moderate leaders might be with regard to his personal idiosyncrasies, there was no question that he was the most subtle and experienced politician of the older group, with unrivalled mass prestige which world publicity had now enhanced as the greatest Indian figure; the ascetic defender of property in the name of the most religious and idealist principles of humility and love of poverty; the invincible metaphysical-theological casuist who could justify and reconcile anything and everything in an astounding tangle of explanations and arguments which in a man of common clay might have been called dishonest quibling, but in the great ones of the earth like MacDonald or Gandhi is recognised as a higher plane of spiritual reasoning; the prophet who by his personal saintliness and selflessness could unlock the door to the hearts of the masses where the moderate bourgeois leaders could not hope for a hearing—and the best guarantee of the shipwreck of any mass movement which had the blessing of his association. This Jonah of revolution, this general of unbroken disasters was the mascot of the bourgeoisie in each wave of the developing Indian struggle. So appeared once again the characteristic feature of modern Indian politics, the unwritten article of every successive Indian constitution—the indispensability of Gandhi (actually the expression of the precarious balance of class forces). All the hopes of the bourgeoisie (the hostile might say, the hopes of imperialism) were fixed on Gandhi as the man to ride the waves, to unleash just enough of the mass movement in order to drive a successful bargain, and at the same time to save India from revolution.

At the Calcutta Congress in December, 1928, Gandhi

had difficulty in securing acceptance of the Nehru Report. The resolution he drafted promised that this Report should not be regarded as in any way withdrawing the aim of complete independence, and that if this Report were not accepted by the Government by December 31, 1929 (Gandhi had originally drafted 1930, giving two years' respite, but 1929 was carried), then the Congress would revive the campaign of non-violent non-co-operation, and this time begin with non-payment of taxes. Even this resolution was only carried by a relatively narrow majority, with a vote of 1,350 against 973 for the left amendment, sponsored by Bose and the younger Nehru, insisting on the immediate aim of complete independence as against the Nehru Report. Action was thus delayed for twelve months at a moment when the events of 1928 had shown the highest level of mass unrest. Twelve months' notice was given to imperialism to prepare. "The temporising resolution of the Calcutta Congress," remarks Subhas Bose ("The Indian Struggle," p. 181), "only served to kill precious time." Meanwhile, a warning signal of the situation appeared in the demonstration of 20,000 Calcutta workers (50,000, according to the official History of the National Congress), who presented themselves to the Calcutta Congress with slogans for national independence and for the "Independent Socialist Republic of India", and took possession of the pandal for two hours, while the national reformist leaders had to make way for them and hear the demand of the working class for irreconcilable struggle for national independence.

The twelve months of delay secured time for imperialism to act. Imperialism did not waste its opportunity. In March, 1929, all the most prominent leaders of the rising working-class movement were arrested from all parts of India, and brought to the remote court of Meerut for trial (where they could be tried without jury); the trial was dragged out for four years, while they were held in prison, during all the succeeding wave of struggle, before even sentence was pronounced. Besides representing the decisive leadership of the trade unions and of the Workers' and Peasants' Party, three of the leaders arrested were also members of the All-India Congress Committee or elected Executive of the National Congress. Thus the working class was decapitated, and the strongest and most clear-headed and determined leaders of the left, with a real mass basis, removed, before the struggle in the hands of the Congress leadership was allowed to begin.

At the same time was put into force the Public Safety Ordinance by decree of the Viceroy, directed against the militant forces.

On the eve of the critical approaching Congress and year of struggle, Gandhi was elected President. He showed, however, his skilful appreciation of the existing situation and relation of forces by standing down and nominating for election in his place the leader of the youth and of the Independence League, who had expressed socialist sympathies, Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi justified his choice by the following characterisation of his nominee:

"No one can surpass him in his love for his country; he is brave and passionate, and at this movement these qualities are very essential. But, although passionate and resolute in struggle, still he possesses the reason of a statesman. An adherent of discipline, he has proved in deeds his capability to submit to decisions with which he is not in agreement. He is modest and practical enough not to run to extremes. In his hands the nation is perfectly secure."

One last effort was made by the moderate leadership to reach an agreement with imperialism. Following a very vague statement by the Viceroy on October 31, 1929, which made a reference to the "goal of Dominion status" to be reached at some unknown future date (a statement which, as *The Times* declared on the following day, "contains no promises and reveals no change of policy"), the party leaders in India united to issue a response, known as the Delhi Manifesto, wholeheartedly offering co-operation: "We appreciate the sincerity underlying the declaration. ... We hope to be able to tender our co-operation with His Majesty's Government in their effort to evolve a scheme for a Dominion constitution suitable to India's needs." The statement was signed by Gandhi, Mrs. Besant, Motilal Nehru, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jawaharlal Nehru and others; the latter disapproved of it, and later judged it "wrong and dangerous"; but at the time he was, as he states, "talked into signing" it on the grounds that, as President-elect, he would otherwise be breaking unity; a "soothing letter from Gandhiji" helped to calm his doubts. The Delhi Manifesto was received with delight by imperialism as a sign of weakening ("What last night's statement means is the scrapping of the programme on which Congress was to have met at Lahore"—*The Times*, November 4, 1929). It produced no practical result save to confuse the Congress

ranks; the subsequent meeting with the Viceroy on the eve of the Congress was fruitless.

At the Lahore Congress, accordingly, at the end of 1929, the decision for action was taken. The Nehru Report, embodying Dominion Status, was declared to have lapsed and "Purna Swaraj" or Complete Independence was adopted as henceforth the Creed of the Congress. The Congress authorised the All-India Congress Committee "whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes". At midnight, as 1930 was ushered in, the Flag of Indian Independence (red, white and green—later, the red was withdrawn and substituted by saffron) was unfurled. On January 26, 1930, the first Independence Day was celebrated throughout India in vast demonstrations at which the pledge to struggle for complete independence was read out, proclaiming it "a crime against man and God to submit any longer" to British rule, and declaring the conviction that "if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes, without doing violence even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured."

What was to be the aim of the struggle that now opened? What was to be the plan of campaign? What were to be the minimum conditions which would be regarded as justifying a settlement? In what way was such irresistible pressure to be brought on the British Government as to compel "the end of this inhuman rule"? On all these questions there was from the outset no clearness.

Complete independence might appear to have been the defined aim of the campaign, and was probably so regarded by the majority of the Congress membership and by the masses who responded to the Congress call. Indeed, the recorded last dying words of Motilal Nehru, who died on the eve of the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement, appear to suggest that this had been his conception of the struggle: "Let me die, if die I must, in the lap of a free India. Let me sleep my last sleep, not in a subject country, but in a free one."

This was not, however, the conception of Gandhi. Immediately after Lahore he published a statement, through the *New York World* of January 9, that "the independence resolution need frighten nobody" (repeated in his letter to the Viceroy in March), and on January 30, through his paper *Young India*, he made an offer of Eleven Points, covering various reforms (rupee ratio of 1s. 4*d*., total prohibition, reduction of land revenue and military expenditure, protective

tariff on foreign cloth, etc.) in return for which civil disobedience would be called off. The publication of the Eleven Points on the eve of the struggle served to intimate to the other side that the claim for independence was to be regarded as only a bargaining counter, a kind of conventional maximum at the opening of a traditional bazar haggling, which could be placed on one side in return for substantial concession.

The tragedy of the campaign was equally unclear. Once again the Congress Committee meeting at Sabarmati in February, 1930, placed power in the hands of "Mahatma Gandhi and those working with him" (not any elected organ of the Congress) to lead and control the campaign, on the grounds that "civil disobedience must be initiated and controlled by those who believe in non-violence...*as an article of faith*". But what were to be the lines of the campaign which was thus handed over without directives from the elected Congress leadership? Subhas Bose writes, referring to the Lahore Congress:

> "On behalf of the left wing a resolution was moved, by the writer, to the effect that the Congress should aim at setting up a parallel Government in the country, and to that end should take up the task of organising the workers, peasants and youths. This resolution was defeated, with the result that though the Congress accepted the goal of complete independence as its objective, no plan was laid down for reaching that goal—nor was any programme of work adopted for the coming year. A more ridiculous state of affairs could not be imagined."
>
> *(Subhas Bose, "The Indian Struggle," p. 200.)*

Jawaharlal Nehru writes:

> "Still we were vague about the future. In spite of the enthusiasm shown at the Congress session, no one knew what the response of the country would be to a programme of action. We had burned our boats and could not go back, but the country ahead of us was an almost strange uncharted land."
>
> *(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography," p. 202.)*

The official Congress History rebukes those who demanded to know the plan of campaign:

> "Those gathered at Sabarmati inquired of Gandhi about his plans. It was but right that they should do so,

> although nobody would have asked Lord Kitchener or Marshal Foch or von Hindenburg to unfold their plan on the eve of the Great War. Plans they had, but they might not reveal them. It was not so with Satyagraha. There was no privacy about our plans. But they were not clear-cut either. They would unfold themselves, much as the path on a misty morning reveals itself to a fast-moving motor, almost from yard to yard The Satyagrahi carried a searchlight on his forehead It shows the way for next step."
>
> *(Official "History of the National Congress," p 628)*

Everything thus depended on Gandhi's conception of the campaign. The country and its fortunes were handed over to his guidance.

It is evident that two opposing conceptions of the campaign were possible, according to the conception of the aim. Either it was to be a decisive struggle of all the forces of the Indian people for the ending of British rule and the establishment of complete independence ("A Fight to the Finish" in the terms of the official Congress History's chapter-heading for the struggle), or it was intended to be a limited and regulated demonstration of mass pressure with a view to securing better terms and concessions from British rule. The former was clearly the conception of the Lahore Congress, and what the masses of the people in India were expecting. But if this were the aim, to undertake so gigantic a task and reduce to impotence a formidable opponent, it is evident that any hope of success depended on rapidly throwing the maximum forces into the offensive with a view to overwhelming the opposing forces before any effective counter-measures could be taken: the calling of a General Strike, with the entire weight of the Congress and working-class movement behind it, the calling of the entire peasantry to a No-Tax and No-Rent campaign, and the setting up of a parallel National Government with its organs, courts, Volunteer Corps etc., throughout the country. Such a campaign, in the then heightened state of national and mass feeling, could have, if conducted with extreme speed and resoluteness, stood a reasonable chance of mobilising the mass of the people, isolating imperialism (the Garhwali mutiny, and the experience of Peshawar and Sholapur showed the great possibilities of this), and winning independence.

This was not the conception of Gandhi. Indeed, it is clear from all his expressions at the time and after that his main

problem was how to prevent such a development of the struggle. In an article in May, 1931, he explained that he preferred defeat to victory if the price of victory should be infringement "by a hair's breadth" of his doctrine of non-violence:

> 'I woud welcome even utter failure with non-violence unimpaired, rather than depart from it by a hair's breadth to achieve a doubtful success."
>
> *(Gandhi, in May, 1931, quoted in "The Times," May 8, 1931.)*

In his letter to the Viceroy in March, 1930, Gandhi made clear his analysis of the forces underlying the struggle, and his purpose in undertaking its leadership:

> "The party of violence is gaining ground and making itself felt...It is my purpose to set in motion that force (non-violence) as well against the organised violence force of the British rule as the unorganised violence force of the growing party of violence. To sit still would be to give rein to both the forces above mentioned."
>
> *(Gandhi, letter to the Viceroy, March 2, 1930.)*

Thus on the eve of rising mass struggle Gandhi proclaimed the fight on two fronts, not only against British rule, but against the internal enemy in India. This conception of the fight on two fronts corresponds to the role of the Indian bourgeoisie, alarmed as it sees the ground sinking beneath its feet with the growing conflict of imperialism and the mass movement, compelled to undertake leadership of the struggle, despite the "mad risk" (in Gandhi's phrase in his letter to the Viceroy), in order to hold it within bounds ("to sit still would be to give rein to both the forces above mentioned"), and seeking to conciliate both with the magic wand of "non-violence". However, "non-violence", like the notorious "non-intervention" of later days practised by the democratic Powers in relation to Spain, was "*one-way non-violence*". It was "non-violence" for the Indian masses, but not for imperialism, which practised to its heart's content—and won the battle.[1]

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[1] Gandhi's object in undertaking the non-co-operation movement in 1930 was made clear by him in his statements and correspondence. Thus his disciple C. F. Andrews records:

> "Letters have reached me from him which have given me his own personal reasons; and he had also explained in the Press the grounds for taking such a seemingly desperate action. He wrote to me, for instance, that the violence of the Government of India in its repressive policy had been

Gandhi's strategy corresponded to this conception of the struggle. Given this understanding, that it was not a strategy intended to lead to the victory of independence, but to find the means in the midst of a formidable revolutionary wave to maintain leadership of the mass movement and yet place the maximum bounds and restraints upon it, it was a skilful and able strategy. This was shown already in his brilliant choice of the first objective of the campaign and the method of conducting it. He decided to lead the fight against the salt monopoly of the Government. This diverted the fight from the possibility of participation by the industrial working class, the one force which Gandhi has made clear in every utterance that he fears in India; it was capable of enlisting the support and popular interest of the peasantry, while diverting them from any struggle against the landlords. To make assurance doubly sure, Gandhi intended at first to confine the campaign to himself and a small band of chosen disciples:

> "So far I am concerned, my intention is to start the movement only through the inmates of the Ashrama and those who have submitted to its discipline and assimilated its methods."
>
> *(Gandhi, in "Young India", February 27, 1936.)*

So followed the march to Dandi, on the seashore, by Gandhi and his seventy-eight hand-picked followers, dragging on through three precious weeks, with the news-reel cameras of the world clicking away, while the masses were called on to wait expectant. The enormous publicity which was given to this Salt March through the Press, the cinema and every other device, was regarded by the Congress leadership as a triumph of strategy for awakening and mobilising the masses; but, while it is undoubtedly true that it did help to perform this function for the more backward elements among the masses, the free encouragement and permission given by the imperialist authorities for this publicity, in striking contrast to their later attitude (and to their very alert arrest of Subhas Bose, the leading left nationalist, even before Independence Day, before the struggle opened), was evidently not simple naivete and failure to understand its significance, but, on the contrary,

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increasing day by day, and that it had induced a violent reaction—especially in Young India. The only way to meet such a situation was to forestall it by a campaign of non-violence and himself take the lead in it, however great the risk."

(C. F. Andrews, in the Spectator, *September 27, 1930.)*

very sharp understanding of its significance and direct help to ensure the diversion of the mass movement into the channels which were being prepared for it by Gandhi.

Nevertheless, the moment the three weeks were completed with the ceremonial boiling of salt by Gandhi on the seashore on April 6 (not followed by arrest), the overwhelming mass movement which broke loose throughout the country took the leadership on both sides by surprise. The official instructions given were confined to the most limited and relatively harmless forms of civil disobedience; violation of the Salt Law, boycott of foreign cloth, picketing of the foreign cloth shops and Government liquor shops. Gandhi's conception of the movement was shown in the instructions given by him on April 9:

> "Our path has already been chalked out for us. Let every village fetch or manufacture contraband salt, sisters should picket liquor-shops, opium dens and foreign cloth dealers' shops. Young and old in every home should ply the takli and spin and get woven heaps of yarn every day. Foreign cloth should be burnt. Hindus should eschew untouchability. Hindus, Mussulmans, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians should all achieve heart unity. Let the majority rest content with what remains after the minorities have been satisfied. Let students leave Government schools and colleges, and Government servants resign their service and devote themselves to the service of the people, and we shall soon find that Purna Swaraj will come knocking at our doors."

The mass movement which developed already in April went considerably beyond these simple limits, with rising strikes, powerful mass demonstrations, the Chittagong Armoury Raid in Bengal, the incidents at Peshawar, which was in the hands of the people for ten days, and the beginnings of spontaneous no-rent movements by the peasants in a number of localities, especially in the United Provinces, where the Congress vainly sought to mediate on a basis of 50 per cent payment of rents.

Most significant for the whole future was the refusal of the Garhwali soldiers at Peshawar to fire on the people. Following the arrest of local leaders, armoured cars were sent to cow the angry mass demonstrations; one armoured car was burned, its occupants escaping; thereupon wholesale firing on the crowds was followed by hundreds of deaths and casu-

alties. Two platoons of the Second Battalion of the 18th Royal Garhwali Rifles, Hindu troops in the midst of a Moslem crowd, refused the order to fire, broke ranks, fraternised with the crowd, and a number handed over their arms. Immediately after this, the military and police were completely withdrawn from Peshawar; from April 25 to May 4 the city was in the hands of the people, until powerful British forces, with air squadrons, were concentrated to "recapture" Peshawar; there was no resistance. The Government subsequently refused all demands for an enquiry into the incident. Seventeen men of the Garhwali Rifles were subjected by court-martial to savage sentences, one to transportation for life, one to fifteen years' rigorous imprisonment, and fifteen to terms varying from three to ten years.

The example of the Garhwali soldiers, who refused to fire upon their fellow-countrymen, might have been thought, to put it at its lowest, at least a triumphant demonstration of "non-violence", which should have been dear to the heart of Gandhi. This was not, however, Gandhi's view. This was a non-violence which really threatened the foundations of British rule. In the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement the clause for the release of prisoners specifically excluded the Garhwali men. The official Congress History records in detail many petty terrorist acts and the national sentiment aroused by them. But the Garhwali episode finds no place in the official record. Through the years the Garhwali men were left to serve their sentences; and it was not until the latter part of 1937 that they were at last released through the influence of the Congress Ministers. Their memory lives in the hearts of the people, and will rank high in the future annals of free India, when the memory of many of the politicians will have sunk lower. Gandhi subsequently explained to a French interviewer, during his visit to the Round Table Conference in London, his reasons for disapproving of the Garhwali men:

> "A soldier who disobeys an order to fire breaks the oath which he has taken and renders himself guilty of criminal disobedience. I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey; for when I am in power, I shall in all likelihood make use of those same officials and those same soldiers. If I taught them to disobey I should be afraid that they might do the same when I am in power."
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> *(Gandhi, reply to the French journalist Charles Petrasch on the question of the Garhwali soldiers. "Monde", February 20, 1932.)*

This sentence (which may be recommended to the study of every pacifist admirer of Gandhi), no less clearly than the previous Bardoli decision, throws a flood of light on the real meaning of "non-violence".

When it became clear that the power of the mass movement was exceeding the limits set it, and that the authority of Gandhi, who had been left at liberty, was in danger of waning, on May 5 the Government arrested Gandhi. The official justification for the arrest was stated in the Government *communique*:

> "While Mr. Gandhi has continued to deplore these outbreaks of violence, his protests against his unruly followers have become weaker and weaker, and it is evident that he is unable to control them...Every provision will be made for his health and comfort during his detention."

The response to the arrest was shown in the wave of hartals and mass strikes all over India. In the industrial town of Sholapur in the Bombay Presidency, with 140,000 inhabitants, of whom 50,000 were textile operatives, the workers held possession of the town for a week, replacing the police and establishing their own administration, until martial law was proclaimed on May 12. "Even the Congress leaders had lost control over the mob, which was seeking to establish a regime of its own," reported the correspondent of *The Times* on May 14, 1930. "They took charge of the administration", reported the Poona *Star*, "and tried to establish their own laws and regulations." Contemporary evidence bears witness to the complete order maintained.

Imperialist repression was limitless. Ordinances followed one another in rapid succession, creating a situation comparable to martial law. In June the Congress and all its organisations were declared illegal. Official figures recorded 60,000 civil resisters sentenced in less than a year up to the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement in the spring of 1931. These figures are certainly an under-estimate, since they omit the masses sentenced for offences of intimidation, rioting, etc., and cover only those recognised by the Government as political prisoners. The very detailed nationalist records place the total at 90,000: "in 1930-31, within a short interval of ten months, ninety thousand men, women and children were sentenced" ("History of the National Congress", p. 876). All this took place under a "Labour" Government. Well might the reac-

tionary *Observer* declare on April 27, 1930, that it was a "providential chance" that Labour was in power and that "in view of India the over-riding public necessity is to keep the Labour Ministry in power."

Imprisonment was the least of the forms of repression. The jails were filled to overflowing, and it was clear that wholesale imprisonment was powerless to check the movement. Therefore the principal weapon employed was physical terrorism. The records of indiscriminate lathi charges, beating up, firing on unarmed crowds, killing and wounding of men and women, and punitive expeditions made an ugly picture.[1] The strictest measures were employed to cast a veil of censorship over the whole proceedings; but the careful records of the Congress provide volumes of certified and attested facts and incidents which throw some light on the brutality employed.

Nevertheless, the power of the movement during 1930, exceeding every calculation of the authorities, and growing in spite of repression, began to raise the most serious alarm in the imperialist camp, which already found open expression by the summer of 1930, especially in the British trading community, who were hard hit by the boycott. This was especially noticeable in Bombay, where was the centre of strength of the industrial working class, where repression was most severe, but where the movement was strongest, and again and again held possession of the streets, despite repeated police charges, in mass demonstrations which the Congress leaders vainly begged to disperse, and in which the red flags were conspicuous beside the Congress flags, or even predominated. "Visitors here from Calcutta and other big cities", wrote the *Observer* correspondent on June 29, "are frankly amazed at the state to which Bombay has been reduced." "But for the presence of troops and armed police", declared "A letter from Bombay", published in the *Spectator* of July 5, "the Government of Bombay would be overthrown in a day, and the administration would be taken over by the Congress with the assent of all." The British business men in Bombay joined with the Indian business men, through the Millowners' Association (with a one-third European element) and the Chamber of Commerce, in demanding immediate

[1] According to an official answer in the Legislative Assembly on July 14, 1930, in 24 cases of firing on the public from April 1 to that date there were 108 killed and 420 wounded.

self-government for India on a Dominion basis. The amazing spectacle was witnessed of the *Times of India* (Bombay) clamouring for responsible parliamentary Government at the Centre. By July 6 the *Observer* was reporting with alarm the "demoralisation of the Europeans" in India:

> "Except in the colums of the Calcutta *Statesman* defeatism prevailed, and only too well-informed rumours circulated of negotiations between British business men of Calcutta and Bombay and Congress elements for permanent political surrenders in return for immediate alleviation of the boycott and other temporary evils...The demoralisation of Europeans...But this demoralisation is by no means general, and in Calcutta there is a strong public opinion against it." *(Observer, July 6, 1930.)*

By August the Calcutta correspondent of the *Observer* was reporting under the heading "Weakness in Bombay":

> "The news from Bombay that some of the British-managed mills have had to accept the Congress terms and that a prominent citizen is therefore resigning his commission in the Bombay Light Horse has shocked opinion here. So has the collapse of the Bombay branch of the European Association, which by a substantial majority declined to commit itself to the Simon Report because it was not acceptable to Indian opinion. The Bombay branch has also withdrawn its candidate for the Round Table Conference."
>
> *(Observer, August 24, 1930.)*

Thus a situation of "defeatism" and "demoralisation" bordering on panic, despite all the bluster and repression, was beginning to show itself in the imperialist camp; and it became essential for imperialism at all costs to negotiate a settlement. On the basis of the struggle and sacrifices of the Indian people the Congress leadership held a strong hand. The only hopes of imperialism for salvation were now placed in the moderate national leadership, whose alarm at the extension and unknown possibilities of the mass struggle they knew to be genuine. After an interview with Gandhi in September, Professor H. G. Alexander, Professor of International Relations at Selly Oak College, Birmingham, reported the views of Gandhi:

> "Even in the seclusion of his prison he is acutely conscious that such embitterment is developing, and for

that reason he would welcome a return to peace and co-operation as soon as it could be honestly obtained... His influence is still great, but more dangerous and uncontrollable forces are gathering strength daily."

(Professor H. G. Alexander, "Mr. Gandhi's Present Outlook", in the "Spectator", January 3, 1931.)

Thus the alarm grew on both sides, and on the basis of this mutual alarm there was the possibility of a settlement — against the Indian people.

Negotiations were begun in the autumn of 1930, but without result. On January 20, 1931, MacDonald as Prime Minister made the declaration at the Round Table Conference:

"I pray that by our labours India will possess the only thing which she now lacks to give her the status of a Dominion among the British Commonwealth of Nations—the responsibility and the care, the burdens and the difficulties, but the pride and the honour of Responsible Self-Government."

The bait was thus held out in a round phrase which in hard practice committed the Government to nothing, as subsequent events were to show. The Round Table Conference was then adjourned to enable the Congress to attend.

On January 26 Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee were released unconditionally and given freedom to meet. Gandhi dclared that he left prison with "an absolutely open mind." Prolonged negotiations followed. On March 4 the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement was signed, and the struggle was declared provisionally suspended.

The Irwin-Gandhi Agreement secured not a single aim of the Congress struggle (not even the repeal of the Salt Tax). Civil Disobedience was to be withdrawn. Congress was to participate in the Round Table Conference, which it had sworn to boycott. Not a single concrete step to self-government was granted. The basis of discussion at the Round Table Conference was to be a Federal Constitution with "Indian responsibility"—but there were to be reservations of safeguards in the interests of India." The Ordinances were to be withdrawn and political prisoners released—but not prisoners guilty of "violence" or "incitement to violence" or soldiers guilty of disobeying orders. Freedom of boycott of foreign goods was to be allowed—but not "exclusively against British goods,"

not "for political ends," not with any picketing that might be regarded as involving "coercion, intimidation, restraint, hostile demonstration, obstruction to the public". And so on with the clauses, which gave with one hand and took away with another. The maximum gain was the right of peaceful boycott of foreign cloth—the one positive element which very clearly pointed to the decisive interests on the Indian side behind the agreement.

The fact that the British Government had been compelled to sign a public Treaty with the leader of the National Congress, which it had previously declared an unlawful association and sought to smash, was undoubtedly a tremendous demonstration of the strength of the national movement. This fact produced at first a widespread sense of elation and victory, except among the more politically conscious sections, who understood what had happened and saw that all the struggle and sacrifice had been thrown away at the negotiating table. Only slowly, as the meaning of the terms began to be understood, the realisation dawned that nothing whatever had been gained. All the aims of complete independence and no compromise with imperialism, so loudly proclaimed at Lahore, had gone up in smoke. Even Gandhi's Eleven Points, which had previously been an offer of a compromise surrender behind the back of the Congress, had now vanished; not one had been conceded. The Congress was now reduced to accepting the Round Table Conference, which it had previously refused, and in which it could have participated anyway without a struggle (save that it could have obtained far better representation, had it chosen to demand this at the start).

The Irwin-Gandhi Agreement thus repeated the Bardoli experience on an enlarged scale. Once again the movement was suddenly and mysteriously called off at the moment when it was reaching its height ("the suggestion of the impending collapse of our movement is entirely false; the movement was showing no signs of slackening" — Gandhi, interview to *Monde*, February 20, 1932, on the situation at the time of the Agreement). "Such a victory has seldom been vouchsafed to any Viceroy," jubilated *The Times* on March 5. "The Congress has never made any bid for victory," explained Gandhi in his statement to the astonished pressmen on March 5 justifying the Agreement (Gandhi "Speeches and Writings," p. 778), and in this respect expressing certainly the truth of his strategy. Later, he explained his thought further.

"We should give up the attempt to secure a Swaraj Constitution at the present moment," he wrote in *Young India* in June, 1931; "we can gain our end without political power" Alternatively, he explained, in an interview to the Press on March 6, that Purna Swaraj really means "disciplined self-rule from within" and by no means excludes "association with England" ("association" is delicate—especially when it means "association" with the sharp end of a bayonet). So the phrases were poured out, by Gandhi on the one side as by MacDonald on the other, to confuse the plain aim of independence as proclaimed at Lahore ("complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism") in a wealth of legal interpretation and theological casuistry, until it was difficult to know whether to award the palm to Gandhi or to MacDonald, both masters of the art of the bewildering phrase and the higher spiritual appeal to conceal the realities of capitulation and slavery.

The Karachi Congress, hastily convened the same month, unanimously endorsed the Agreement. Jawaharlal Nehru was given the task of moving it, "not without great mental conflict and physical distress". "Was it for this", he thought, "that our people had behaved so gallantly for a year? Were all our brave words and deeds to end in this?" He felt, however, that it would only be "personal vanity" to express his dissent. Subhas Bose, who was sharply critical, felt that it was not possible to oppose the Agreement at the Congress, on the grounds that this might appear as a breach of national unity. The Agreement was "not popular", according to Jawaharlal Nehru's account; but few voices were found to oppose it at the Congress. One delegate said that if anyone but Gandhi had brought forward such an Agreement, he would have been thrown into the sea; but such an expression in the public sessions was exceptional. The fatal breach between the rigid Congress machinery and the wider mass movement reavealed itself at Karachi: Subhas Bose notes that the opponents of the Agreement "would not have much support from the elected delegates who alone could vote at the Congress, though among the general public, and particularly the youths, they had larger support" ("The Indian Struggle", p. 233). There was no one to voice this "larger support" inside the Congress. This collapse of Left Nationalism at the Karachi Congress underlined the strength of Gandhi's position.

In return, a concession was made to Left Nationalism by the adoption of a progressive social and economic programme.

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embodied in a "Fundamental Rights" resolution, which included a basic democratic charter of an advanced type, nationalisation of key industries and transport, labour rights and agrarian reform. This programme, which remains valid, marked an important step forward for the Congress. It was not, however, compensation for the capitulation embodied in the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement.

Outside the Congress, sharp criticism of the Agreement was expressed from the youth and from the working-class movement. This was shown in numerous resolutions from youth organisations and conferences, and in the hostile demonstrations of Bombay workers against Gandhi on his departure for the Round Table Conference. Such demonstrations, *The Times* noted, would have been unthinkable ten years earlier.

Disillusionment rapidly spread to wider circles. The role of Gandhi at the Round Table Conference in London during 1931 (and among the devotees of higher ethical thought in England who crowded round him in the intervals in innumerable little receptions and gatherings to hear the message of the World Teacher) was an unhappy farce, over which a veil is best drawn. The honour of the Congress was lowered by its inclusion as an item in this motley array of Government puppets brought like captives to imperial Rome to display their confusion and division for the amusement of Westminster legislators. Gandhi returned, meeting Mussolini on the way. He brought back no fruits from the Round Table Conference.

On his way back Gandhi expressed the hope that there would be no need to renew the struggle; from Port Said he cabled the India Office that he would do all in his power for peace. He drafted a resolution to this effect immediately on return. But he reckoned without his host.

Imperialism, once it had secured the whip-hand, was determined to use its advantage to the utmost. The "truce" from the outset had been one-sided; repression had continued. Gandhi returned in the last days of 1931 to hear a pitiful tale from his colleagues. He cabled at once to the Viceroy, begging for an interview. It was refused. Imperialism had utilised every day of that nine months' truce (while the comedy had been enacted in London) to complete its grim preparations for a decisive battle. Sir John Anderson, with experience of the "Black and Tan" regime in Ireland, had been nominated Governor of Bengal to take in hand the arrangements. There was to be no surprise this time. The

Congress was to be taught a lesson It was to be a fight to a finish, with unconditional surrender as the only terms.

Swift and sharp the blow fell on January 4, 1932. On the same day negotiations were broken; the Viceroy issued his Manifesto; Gandhi was arrested; Ordinances appeared in a batch (no dribbling out this time, one by one, as they were thought of, as in 1930, but straight from the pigeon-holes on the first day); all the principal Congress leaders and organisers were arrested all over the country; the Congress and all its organisations were declared illegal, their Press banned, their premises, funds and property confiscated. A triumph of organisation.

The Government made clear that the object was a knock-out blow. Sir Samuel Hoare informed the House of Commons that the Ordinances were "very drastic and severe" and that there was to be no "drawn battle" this time. Sir Harry Haig, Home Member of the Government of India, stated that "we are not playing a game with artificial rules," and that so far as the Government was concerned there was no time limit. The spokesmen of the Bombay Government informed the Legislature that "war is not fought with gloves on."

The Congress leadership was taken by surprise. This was such a sudden change from the atmosphere of the Round Table Conference. They had made no preparations. In 1930 the Congress has been on the offensive. Now it was thrown on the defensive. They had not realised the price of the Irwin-Gandhi Agreement. Dr. Syed Mahmud, of the Congress Working Committee, informed the India League Delegation:

> "The world does not know anything about the resolution that Mahatma Gandhi drafted and proposed before the Working Committee. The Mahatma was bent on co-operation. . . The Government did not want co-operation. From my own inside knowledge I can say that the Congress was not prepared for the conflict. We had hopes that the Mahatma would bring peace somehow on his return from London."
>
> *("Condition of India," Report of India League Delegation, 1933, p. 27.)*

He added "that he and his collegues had definite information that the Government's plans for repression were ready in November while Gandhi was still in London, and that the Government's sudden blow at first staggered the Congress."

Repression this time, in 1932-33, far exceeded the level of 1930-31. In the first four months, according to the public report of Pandit Malaviya on May 2, 1932, there were 80,000 arrests. After fifteen months, by the end of March, 1933, according to the report to the illegal session of the Congress at Calcutta in April, 1933, the total had reached 120,000 arrests. Some record of the accompanying wholesale violence, physical outrages, shooting and beating up, punitive expeditions, collective fines on villages and seizure of lands and property of villagers can be found in the India League Delegation Report, "Condition of India", issued in 1933.

The Government had counted on a fight to a finish in six weeks. The toughness of the national movement was such that the battle, despite the unfavourable conditions, dragged on for twenty-nine months before the final surrender. But it was a soldiers' battle without strategic leadership. Under the conditions of illegality and violent repression the task of leadership was in any case sufficiently difficult. But it was not rendered easier by the actions of Gandhi and the High Command, whose role amounted, not merely to abdication, but to repudiation of leadership. Orders were actually issued against secrecy (under illegal conditions!) as a perversion of Congress principles. A resolution was issued to the zamindars (landlords) to assure them that no campaign would be approved against their interests. By the summer of 1932 Gandhi abandoned all public interest in the national struggle, and devoted himself to the cause of the Harijans (untouchables). His dramatic "fast unto death" in September was directed, not against the repression, not to any object of the life-and-death struggle of the national movement going on, but to prevent the scheme of separate representation for the "depressed classes". It ended, neither in death nor in the attainment of its objective, but in the Poona Pact, by which the number of reserved seats for the "depressed classes" was doubled. The episode served to divert attention from the national struggle, of which he was still supposed to be the responsible leader.

In May, 1933, Gandhi began a new fast, directed, not against the Government, but to change the heart of his countrymen. He described it as a "heart-prayer for purification of myself and my associates for greater vigilance and watchfulness in connection with the Harijan cause." The delighted Government released him unconditionally. Immediately the Acting-President, on the recommendation of Gandhi, announ-

ced the suspension of civil disobedience for six weeks, not on the basis of any terms reached with the Government, or even hopes of terms, but on the grounds that, as Gandhi said, the country would be in "a state of terrible suspense" during his fast, and it would be therefore better to hold up the campaign for it (even if the Government did not hold up its repression).[1]

In July, 1933, after a request by Gandhi for an interview with the Viceroy had been refused unless civil disobedience were first finally ended, the Congress leadership decided to end mass civil disobedience and replace it by individual civil disobedience. At the same time the Acting-President issued orders dissolving all Congress organisations. The Government showed no response save to increase its repression against the individual civil resisters. In August Gandhi was arrested anew, but was released before the end of the month, following a fast. During the autumn, having decided to abstain from political activity for a period on conscientious grounds, he devoted himself to a Harijan tour. Meanwhile the struggle dragged on, neither ended, nor led.

It was not until May, 1934, that the final end came to the struggle which had opened with such magnificent power in 1930. In April Gandhi had issued a statement explaining his view of the reasons for the failure of the movement. The fault lay with the masses. "I feel that the masses have not yet received the message of Satyagraha owing to its adulteration in the process of transmission. It has become clear to me that spiritual instruments suffer in their potency when their use is taught through non-spiritual media.... The indifferent civil resistance of many.... has not touched the hearts of the rulers." Even the transition from *mass* civil disobedience to individual civil disobedience had not solved this problem of the uncontrollable character of any mass movement. The conclusion was drawn with faultless logic. "Satyagraha needs to be confined to one qualified person at a time." "In the present circumstances only one, and that myself, should for the time being bear the responsibility of civil disobedience." Such was the final *reductio ad absurdum*

[1] It was the culminating blow of this decision which led Subhas Bose and V. Patel, who were then outside India, to issue a Manifesto declaring: "The latest action of Mr. Gandhi in suspending Civil Disobedience is a confession of failure.... We are clearly of the opinion that Mr. Gandhi as a political leader has failed. The time has come for a radical reorganisation of the Congress on a new principle, with a new method, for which a new leader is essential."

of the Gandhist theory of "non-violent non-co-operation" as the path of liberation for the Indian people.

In May, 1934, the All-India Congress Committee was allowed to meet at Patna to end civil disobedience unconditionally (with the solitary exception recommended by Gandhi). There were no terms and no concessions from the Government. At the same time decisions were taken, for which the preliminary steps had already been prepared, for the new stage of contesting the coming elections directly on behalf of the Congress.

In June, 1934, the Government lifted the ban on the Congress, but not yet on many of its subsidiary organisations, youth organisations, peasants' unions and the Red Shirts of the North-West Frontier Province. In July, 1934, the Government proclaimed the Communist Party of India illegal. The new stage was opening.

In the autumn of 1934 Gandhi resigned from membership of the Congress, his work for the time being accomplished. In a parting statement he explained that "there is a growing and vital difference of outlook between many Congressmen and myself." It was clear that for "the majority of Congressmen" non-violence was not "a fundamental creed", but only "a policy". Socialist groups were growing in the Congress in numbers and influence: "if they gain ascendancy in the Congress, as they well may, I cannot remain in the Congress." The new stage was making itself felt; and it was unwelcome to the old ideas.

Gandhi left the Congress. But he did not leave until he had bequeathed to it a reactionary revision of its Constitution and organisation, which considerably hampers its further progressive development. And he remained the most powerful guiding influence behind the scenes, ready in case of need to assume direct leadership anew. In the crisis of 1939-40 and again in 1942 he assumed direct leadership.

The unhappy final ending of the great wave of struggle of 1930-34 should not blind us for a moment to its epic achievement, its deep and lasting lessons and its gigantic permanent gains. The reasons, in the tactics and methods pursued, for the temporary failure of a movement which had at its command such limitless resources of popular support, enthusiasm, devotion and sacrifice, and which was undoubtedly within reach of success, constitute a lesson which needs to be learned and studied again and again for the future. Those reasons have been implicit in this narrative. But the national move-

ment can be proud of the record of those years Imperialism dreamed in those years by every device in the modern armoury of repression to smash and cow the people of India into submission to its will, and to exterminate the movement for independence. It failed. Within two years, after all those heavy blows, the national movement was advancing again, stronger than ever. The struggle had not been in vain. The furnace of those years of struggle helped to forge and awaken a new and greater national unity, self-confidence, pride and determination.

Chapter XII

RISE OF LABOUR AND SOCIALISM

"The Indian proletariat has already matured sufficiently to wage a class-conscious political mass struggle — and that being the case, Anglo-Russian methods in India are played out.'—LENIN IN 1908.

THIRTY-SEVEN years ago it was possible for a leader of socialism in Britain—one who had done pioneer service in the organisation and socialist awakening of the British working class, and who went to India as a friend of the Indian people and a critic of British rule—to return and write a book on India without making any mention of the Indian working class, or even guessing at the possibility of the future existence of an Indian labour movement (Keir Hardie's "India: Impressions and Suggestions," published in 1909). Similarly in MacDonald's "The Awakening of India," published in 1910, we find one bare speculation that the Indian industrial workers might possibly at some future date evolve some form of "trade combination"; "these combinations will probably be of a kind midway between the castes of India and the trade unions of Great Britain" (p. 179).

This parochial blindness to the decisive future forces of Indian development was not deliberate. Only a Marxist understanding could at the time discern below the surface the real forces that were gathering and their significance for the future. Lenin already in 1908 had greeted the emergence of "the Indian proletariat" as "matured sufficiently to wage a class-conscious and political mass struggle," basing this judgment on the Bombay mill-workers' political strike in protest against the imprisonment of Tilak in that year, and had drawn therefrom the conclusion that this heralded the doom of British rule in India.

To-day the truth of this insight is being borne out by the power of events. The old blindness is no longer possible. The history of the Indian national struggle has shown, with each succeeding stage, the increased weight and importance of the role of the working class, while questions of socialism or communism are now in the forefront of Indian political discussion.

In the pre-1914 period this role of the working class was still in the background; it followed, rather than preceded the national movement; the only outstanding political action was the Bombay general strike against the six years' sentence on Tilak.

In the new period of awakening at the close of the first world war, the great strike movement of 1918-21 was the harbinger of the national wave, which finally brought the Congress into movement in the non-co-operation campaign of 1920-22.

By a decade later the working class was already an independent and organised force, with its own ideology playing a direct role, although not yet the leading role; the great strike movement of 1928, led by the militant class-conscious section of the proletariat, carried with it the awakening of the youth and of the petty bourgeoisie, and led to the new wave of national struggle; and in that new wave of struggle, during 1930-34, the bourgeois leadership openly expressed its conception of the struggle as a fight on two fronts, as much against a mass uprising from below as against imperialism.

Since the outbreak of the second world war, the working class stands out more clearly than ever before as the decisive force of the future in Indian politics.

1. GROWTH OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKING CLASS

The industrial working class in India, in the modern sense, is not numerically large in relation to the population; but it is concentrated in the decisive centres, and is the most coherent, advanced, resolute and basically revolutionary section of the population.

Lord Chelmsford, speaking on behalf of the British Government at the Council of the League of Nations in October, 1922, claimed 20 million "industrial wage-earners" for India:

> "It remains to justify India's specific claim to inclusion among the eight States of chief industrial importance. Her claim is based on broad general grounds and does not

> need elaborate statistical methods to justify it. She has an industrial wage-earning population which may be estimated at roughly twenty millions, and in addition a large wage-earning class employed in agricultural work."

This fantastic claim, seeking to place India among the leading industrialised countries of the world, was a piece of diplomatic bluff in order to secure an extra vote in the British Government's hand at Geneva. The figure of 20 millions was composed overwhelmingly of hand-workers and domestic industries, and bore no relation to modern industry.

Similarly the British Trades Union Congress delegation to India in 1927-28 estimated in its report a total of over 25 million "organisable workers" in India. But of this 25 million no less than 21½ million consisted of the agricultural proletariat, existing under conditions, not of large-scale capitalist farming (outside the 1 million employed on the plantations), but of irregular employment, largely under peasants in extreme poverty, and offering very little scope for conventional trade union organisation (although able to play a very important part in the peasant movement). The industrial "organisable workers" in their analysis amounted to only 3½ millions.

In estimating the strength of the Indian working class, it is necessary to distinguish between the very large number of propertyless proletarians and the narrower grouping of industrial wage-earners in modern industry, who can alone constitute the decisive, organised, conscious and leading force of the Indian working class.

There are no available statistics of the extent of the Indian working class. The 1931 Census Report records:

> "The number of workers employed in organised labour is extraordinarily low for a population the size of India's, and the daily average number of hands employed by establishments in British India to which the Factories Act applies is only 1,553,169....
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> "The total India figures for persons employed in plantations, mines, industry and transport in 1921 was 24,239,555, of whom only 2,685,909 were employed in organised establishments employing 10 or more employees.
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> "The total figure under the same heads in 1931 amounts to 26,187,689; and if labour in similar establishments is in the same proportion, it will now number 2,901,776. Figures of the daily average of persons emplo-

yed indicate that it has increased during the last decade at the rate of about 30 per cent, in which case it would now number 3,500,000. Probably 5,000,000 may be fairly taken as the figure of organised labour in India in 1931."

("Census of India, 1931", Vol. I, p. 285.)

In the broadest sense, the number of wage-workers in India may be estimated at about 60 millions. The returns of the Indian Franchise Committee showed 56½ million for 1931:

"The total number of agricultural labourers, which was given as 21.5 million in 1921, was shown by the census of 1931 to be over 31.5 million, of whom 23 million were estimated by the Indian Franchise Committee in 1931 to be 'landless,' while the total number of non-agricultural labourers, as estimated by the Indian Franchise Committee, was 25 million. There are, therefore, about 56.5 million wage labourers out of 154 million persons in all occupations in the whole of India, or in other words, over 36 per cent of the people in all occupations depend upon wage labour as a means of livelihood."

(I.L.O. Report, 1938, "Industrial Labour in India," p. 30.)

In the narrower sense of the industrial proletariat in modern or other than petty industry, the Industrial Census of 1921 reached a total of 2.6 millions employed in establishments employing ten or more workers. There has been no later Industrial Census; but the estimate of the 1931 Census, given above, would place the total at about 3½ millions. The only exact records are those of the Factories Act administration: the latest 1934 Factories Act covers power-driven factories employing twenty or more, or, in some cases, ten or more workers; the total in 1938 was 1,737,755 workers. To these should be added 299,003 workers returned as employed in "large industrial establishments" in the Indian States, giving a full total of 2,036,758 workers in modern large-scale industry in India.

Taking this as basis, we reach the following:

Factory workers in medium and larger factories (on the above basis) ..	2,036,758
Miners	413,458
Railwaymen	701,307
Water Transport (Dockers, Seamen)[1] ..	361,000
Total of above groups ..	3,512,523

[1] 1935 figure.

These 3½ million represent the kernel of the industrial proletariat in modern large-scale industry in India to-day. Excluded from this total are all the workers in petty industry (establishments under ten workers), as well as in larger enterprises without power-driven machinery (e.g., cigarette-making, with, in some cases, over fifty workers). From the standpoint of the potential strength of the organised labour movement, we should add the over 1 million workers employed on the plantations, who are employed in fully large-scale enterprise under the most scientific slave-driving conditions, and have already shown a high degree of militant activity in periods of unrest, although so far cut off from all organisation and held under conditions of complete isolation and subjection; and a proportion of the workers in petty industry and in the larger unregulated enterprises. The immediate effective organisable strength of the Indian working class should therefore certainly represent over 5 million workers.

The growth of the industrial proletariat is shown in the Factories Acts statistics (reflecting also extension of the range covered by the Acts):

	Number of Factories	*Average daily number employed*
1891	815	349,810
1902	1,533	541,634
1911	2,936	950,973
1918	3,436	1,122,922
1922	5,141	1,361,002
1926	7,251	1,518,391
1930	8,148	1,528,302
1935	8,831	1,610,932
1936	9,323	1,652,147
1938	9,743	1,737,755
1939	10,466	1,751,137
1943	13,209	2,436,810
1944	14,071	2,522,753

2. CONDITIONS OF THE WORKING CLASS

Of the conditions of the industrial working class in India some genral picture has been given in Chapter II. It may be useful to recall the conclusions reached by the British Trades Union Congress delegation to India which reported in 1928:

> "All enquiries go to show that the vast majority of workers in India do not receive more than about 1s. per

day. In the province of Bengal, which includes the largest mass of industrial workers, investigators declared that as far as they could ascertain, 60 per cent of workers were in receipt of wages of not more than 1*s.* 2*d.* a day in the highest instance, scaling down to as low as 7*d.* to 9*d.* for men and 3*d.* to 7*d.* in the case of children and women.... Our own enquiries support these figures and, as a matter of fact, many cases have been quoted to us of daily rates in operation which descend to 3½*d.* for women and 7*d.* or even less for men."

(A. A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth, "Report on Labour Conditions in India," Trades Union Congress, 1928, p. 10.)

The same delegation reported with regard to the housing of the workers:

"We visited the workers' quarters wherever we stayed and had we not seen them we could not have believed that such evil places existed.... Here is a group of houses in 'lines,' the owner of which charges the tenant of each dwelling 4*s.* 6*d.* a month as rent. Each house, consisting of one dark room used for all purposes, living, cooking and sleeping, is 9 feet by 9 feet, with mud walls and loose-tiled roof, and has a small open compound in front, a corner of which is used as a latrine. There is no ventilation in the living room except by a broken roof or that obtained through the entrance door when open. Outside the dwelling is a long narrow channel which receives the waste matter of all descriptions and where flies and other insects abound.... Outside all the houses on the edge of each side of the strip of land between the 'lines' are the exposed gulleys, at some places stopped up with garbage, refuse and other waste matter, giving forth horrible smells repellent in the extreme. It is obvious that these gulleys are often used as conveniences, especially by children...

"The overcrowding and insanitary conditions almost everywhere prevailing demonstrate the callousness and wanton neglect of their obvious duties by the authorities concerned." *(Ibid, pp. 8-9.)*

This report was issued eleven years ago. Since then the British Trades Union Congress has not sent any further delegation to India.

For a more recent picture, to show how little these conditions have changed, or have even changed for the worse, we may take the report of the Indian Workers' Delegate, S. V. Parulekar, to the International Labour Conference at Geneva in 1938:

"In India the vast majority of workers get a wage which is not enough to provide them with the meanest necessities of life. The report of an enquiry into the working class budgets in Bombay by Mr. Findlay Shirras in 1921 states that the industrial worker consumes the maximum cereals allowed by the Famine Code but less than the diet issued to criminals in jail under the Bombay Prisons Code. The conditions have deteriorated since the publication of that report, as the earnings are lower to-day than what they were in 1921.

"The wage census carried out by the Bombay Government in 1935 reveals the fact that in cotton textiles, which is one of the premier and most organised industries, the *monthly* earnings of 18 per cent of the workers in Gokak were between 3*s.* and 9*s.*, of 32 per cent of the workers in Sholapur between 7*s.* 6*d.* and 15*s.*, and of 20 per cent of the workers below 22*s.* 6*d.*, and of 32 per cent of the workers between 22*s.* and 30*s.* in the city of Bombay.

"The level of wages in unorganised industries, whose number is very large in India, can better be imagined than described. Taking advantage of the class of expropriated peasants which is incessantly increasing by leaps and bounds, the employers have driven the wage far below the subsistence level and do not allow it to rise to a point which the conditions of industry can permit....

"The workers of India are unprotected against risks of sickness, unemployment, old age and death...The Government of India have consistently refused to devise any scheme of benefits for the unemployed...Suicides by workers to protect themselves against unemployment are in evidence and deaths due to hunger are recorded in the municipal reports for the city of Bombay.

"In the census report for 1931 it is stated that the housing conditions in the city of Bombay, the most industrialised centre in India, are a disgrace to any civilised community. Ninety-five per cent of the working class families in the city of Bombay live in one-room tenements of the average dimensions of 110 square feet. There are

thousands of workers in Bombay in whose case the footpaths serve the purpose of the shelter of a home.

"The following table showing infantile mortality in Bombay per thousand births for 1933-34 discloses a staggering contrast of infantile mortality in the ranks of the working class and the rest:

1 room and under	524.0
2 rooms	394.0
3 rooms	255.4
4 rooms and over	246 5

Conditions have not changed for the better since then. The Government have done nothing to enable the workers to live in healthy houses without having to pay rents which their purses cannot afford and then to check the death rate—shall I use a stronger, but more appropriate term, massacre—of working-class infants."

(Speech of S. V. Parulekar, Indian Workers' Delegate at the International Labour Conference, Geneva, July, 1938.)

The fullest general survey of wage levels and the movement of wages in Indian industry, outside the Whitley Commission's Report in 1931, will be found in D. H. Buchanan's "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India" (1934), Chapter XV, pp. 317-60. The author reaches the conclusion that "between 1860 and 1890 there appears to have been very little change in the real incomes of Indian factory hands"; between 1890 and 1914 "prices rose markedly, and wages followed, though with a lag"; "with the war-time boom, wages lagged for several years, then advanced sharply, but unevenly, in some cases fully abreast of the high prices." Thus up to the end of the war of 1914-18 there was no advance in the level of real wages, but, if anything, deterioration. Only in the subsequent period a change set in. "Since the war there have been numerous wage disputes, and while there have been some slight recessions, there have been some remarkable advances." "In a few industries, notably in Bombay cotton manufacturing, wages rose considerably more than the cost of living; and even during recent years, when prices have declined so markedly, wages have been maintained. Labour has become sufficiently awakened to make wage reduction extremely difficult." The depression brought heavy losses through

cuts in wages, rationalisation, unemployment and short time; nevertheless, some of the gains in real wages were held, and in the pre-war period new advances were won, as in the successful Cawnpore textile strike in 1938. It will thus be seen that the only advances in real wages of the Indian industrial workers have coincided with the development and activity of trade unionism, and have closely corresponded to the location and strength of trade unionism. But the masses of the most backward workers have been little affected.

There are no general wage statistics for India, nor any uniform rates, even for the same type of work in the same industrial centre. Light on the average rates of semi-skilled industrial workers has been afforded by the returns of cases under the Workmen's Compensation Act, which were analysed in the Whitley Commission's Report for the five years 1925-29. These returns would exclude the unskilled workers, or lower-paid workers who would be too helpless, and even ignorant of the existence of the Act, to claim compensation. Even so, these favourable figures, officially put forward as representing "a general impression of wage-levels for the semi-skilled operatives in organised industry" (excluding children, excluding unskilled workers, excluding the badly paid workers in unorganised industry), reveal a sufficiently striking picture. To make their significance clearer for non-Indian readers, we have not only translated the rupee figures into English money, on the basis of 1*s.* 6*d.* for the rupee, but have also translated the monthly total into weekly wage figures on the basis of four and one-third weeks to the month. The result of such a calculation shows the following picture:

AVERAGE EARNINGS OF ADULT SEMI-SKILLED WORKERS IN ORGANISED INDUSTRY

	Percentage earning the weekly equivalent of					
	Under 4s. 6d.	4s. 6d.— 6s.	6s.— 7s. 9d.	7s. 9d.— 9s. 6d.	9s. 6d.— 11s. 3d.	11s. 3d. and over
United Provinces ..	20	27	15	9	7	16
Madras ..	22	25	19	15	4	15
Central Provinces ..	18	38	17	8	4	15
Bihar and Orissa ..	21	24	21	12	8	14
Bengal ..	13	18	18	16	10	26
Bombay ..	3	10	19	23	13	32

(Table from Report of the Whitley Commission on Labour in India, p. 204, calculated into English equivalents on the basis given above.)

Thus over one-quarter of the adult semi-skilled workers in the United Provinces earn under 4*s.* 6*d.* a week, and over one-half under 6*s.* a week; over one-half in the Central Provinces, and nearly one-half in Madras and in Bihar and Orissa, under 6*s.* a week; in Bengal one-half under 7*s.* 9*d.* a week; and even in Bombay, with its higher cost of living, over one-half earn less than 9*s.* 6*d.* a week.

These are favourable figures for relatively better-placed workers, not general figures for all workers. In more recent years a series of enquiries into working-class family budgets have been conducted under the Provincial Labour Departments, and the results published, for Bombay in 1935 (the enquiry covering 1932-33), for Ahmedabad in 1937, and for Madras in 1938; an earlier similar enquiry had been published for Sholapur in 1928, covering the year 1925.

The results showed an average *family* income (not individual income) in Bombay amounting to Rs. 50 a month, or 17*s.* 4*d.* a week; in Ahmedabad, Rs. 46 a month, or 15*s.* 11*d.* a week; in Sholapur, Rs. 40 a month, or 13*s.* 10*d.* a week; and in Madras, Rs. 37 a month for workers in organised industries, or 12*s.* 10*d.* a week, and for workers in unorganised industries and occupations, Rs. 20 to 27 a month, or 7*s.* to 9*s.* 3*d.* a week. The average family (according to the Bombay, Sholapur and Ahmedabad enquiries) numbered four persons, of whom one and a half to two persons were wage-earners. The above figures should thus be diminished by one-third to one-half for average wages. This would give 9*s.* 10*d.* a week for the average wage in Bombay; 9*s.* 1*d.* in Ahmedabad; 7*s.* 11*d.* in Sholapur; and in Madras 7*s.* 4*d.* for the workers in organised industries, and 4*s.* to 5*s.* 3*d.* for the workers in unorganised industries.

It is necessary to recognise that the nominal wage figures are still further reduced by the numerous deductions, commissions, fines, customary bribes to foremen and the heavy burden of indebtedness at exorbitant rates of interest (an indebtedness made almost compulsory by the institution of paying wages monthly in the majority of cases, in the more favourable cases fortnightly, and with the actual payment often deferred ten days or a fortnight after the completion of the month, thus exacting six weeks' credit from the worker). The Whitley Commission estimated that "in most industrial centres the proportion of families or individuals who are in debt is not less than two-thirds of the whole," and that "in the great majority of cases the amount of debt exceeds three months'

wages and is often far in excess of this amount." Subsequent enquiries have shown that the estimate of two-thirds was an under-statement. In the Bombay Enquiry quoted above, 75 per cent of the families were found to be in debt. The Madras Report found that 90 per cent of the families in organised industries were in debt, and that the amount of debt averaged six months' wages.

The wages of dockyard workers are also very low. According to the investigations of the Rege Committee (1946) in the Cochin Dockyard, 30½ per cent of the total employees get below Re. 1 per day and 68 per cent earn between Re. 1 and Rs. 2. In Scindia Shipyard 82 per cent earn below Re. 1 per day.

The miners are especially low paid, and their wages have been heavily cut in recent years. Four-fifths of the total force employed in the Indian coal-fields are in Raniganj and Jharia coal-fields. In the Raniganj coal-field the wages of miners before 1914 were 6 annas, or 6*d.* a day; after the war they rose, until by 1929 they were 13 annas or 1*s.* 2*d.* a day; by 1936 they were 7¼ annas, or 8*d.* a day. Well might the President of the National Association of Colliery Managers speak in February, 1937, of the "ridiculously low wages of the workers". The average annual output of coal of a miner in India was 131 tons above and below ground, as compared with 207 tons in Japan, 298 tons in the United Kingdom, and 671 tons in the United States.

The conditions of the plantation workers reach the lowest levels. "In the Assam Valley tea-gardens (Assam and Bengal produce by far the greater bulk of the tea in India) the average monthly earnings of men workers settled in the gardens are about Rs. 7-13-0 a month, of women and children about Rs. 5-14-0 and Rs. 4-4-0 respectively" (Shiva Rao, "The Industrial Worker in India," 1939, p. 128). This is equivalent to 2*s.* 8*d.* a week for men, 2*s.* a week for women and 1*s.* 5½*d.* for children. The addition of free "housing", medical treatment and other concessions only emphasises the slave conditions. In the Surma Valley the rates are still lower. The Rege Committee gives the level of monthly wages in the Surma Valley at about Rs. 2 lower than that in the Assam Valley. In the South India plantations the rates have been lowered to 4 to 5 annas (4½*d.* to 5½*d.*) a day for men and less than 3 annas (3½*d.*) for women.

The fantastic profits extracted on the basis of this rate of exploitation are notorious, and reached the most colossal

heights in the boom after the first world war. The delegation of the Dundee Jute Trade Unions to India reported in 1925 with regard to the jute industry:

> "When Reserve Funds and Profits are added together the total gain to the shareholders in the ten years (1915-1924) reached the enormous total of £300 million sterling, or 90 per cent per annum of the capital. There are from 300,000 to 327,000 workers employed at an average wage to-day of £12 10*s.* per annum. A profit of £300 million taken from 300,000 workers in ten years means £1,000 per head. That means £100 a year from each worker. And as the average wage is about £12 10*s.* per head, it means that the average annual profit is eight times the wages bill."
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> *(T. Johnston and J. F. Sime, "Exploitation in India", pp. 5-6).*

With regard to the cotton industry the Tariff Board Enquiry reported in 1927:

> "An examination of the balance sheets of the Bombay mills shows that for 1920, 35 companies comprising 42 mills declared dividends of 40 per cent and over, of which 10 companies comprising 14 mills paid 100 per cent and over and two mills paid over 200 per cent. In 1921 the number was 41 companies comprising 47 mills, out of which 9 companies comprising 11 mills paid dividends of 100 per cent and over."
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> *(Report of the Indian Tariff Board, Cotton Textile Enquiry, 1927, Vol. I, p. 83.)*

Cases were reported of dividends as high as 365 per cent. The souvenir booklet issued on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Empress Mills at Nagpur in 1927 proudly boasted:

> "The dividends of the first twenty years show an average of close upon 16 per cent, and in the period preceding the boom which followed the world war the return to the shareholders averaged 23 per cent. During the boom period the profits were sufficient to justify an average dividend of over 90 per cent. It was Mr. Tata's ambition that the Empress Mills should pay a dividend of 100 per cent. Though this sum was not attained till after his death, the fact that it was at length attained is sufficient to show how successfully the firm has carried on the traditions of its

founder. In 1919 the dividends on each ordinary share of Rs. 500 were Rs. 350; but in 1922 they rose again to Rs. 525 though the mills were working under great difficulties. . . In 1923 despite depression in the textile trade and the trouble of strikes the dividends paid amounted to Rs. 280 on each ordinary share.

"The orginal holders who had received bonus shares upon which the same dividends were paid could in 1920 reckon their actual dividend to be 488 per cent. . . .

"In general it is interesting to note that the total profits of the Empress Mills up to the 30th June, 1926, aggregate over Rs. 92,214,527, which is nearly 61.47 times the original ordinary share capital; and up to the same date the company has paid Rs. 59,431,267 in dividends on ordinary shares which works out to 80.86 per cent per annum on the originally subscribed capital. . . The original shareholder has consequently gained, by being the first fortunate allottee of a share of the paid up value of Rs. 500 in the Company, 2.05 shares given him gratis worth to him Rs. 7,838 on the basis of the present market value... and it has brought him Rs. 19,810 in the shape of dividends."

("The Empress Mills, Nagpur, Golden Jubilee, 1877-1927," pp. 90-93.)

This eldorado of profit-making could not continue indefinitely, although exceptionally high rates were maintained right up to the world economic crisis. Thus as late as 1928, 1929 and 1930 the Empress Mills quoted above was declaring dividends of 28, 26 and 24 per cent. In jute the leading Gourepore Mill (which had paid 250 per cent in 1918) was paying 100 per cent in 1927, 60 per cent in 1928 and 50 per cent in 1929. In coal four leading companies in 1929 were paying 70, 55, 36 and 30 per cent. In tea 98 companies incorporated in India declared dividends averaging 23 per cent in 1928, and 74 paid an average of 20 per cent in 1929.

The crisis and economic depression hit Indian industry hard. Ruthless measures of rationalisation and wage-cutting were pushed through to maintain profits, especially in the textile industry. In cotton the consumption was raised from 4.7 million cwt. in 1922-23 to 10.9 million in 1934-35, or an increase of 60 per cent, while the numbers employed rose only from 356,000 to 414,000, or an increase of 16 per cent. In jute the mill consumption rose from 4.7 million bales in 1922-23 to 6 million in 1935-36, or an increase of 28 per cent,

while the numbers employed actually fell from 321,000 to 278,000, or a decrease of 13 per cent. On the railways staff was cut from 817,000 in 1929-30 to 710,000 in 1936-37. In coal the output was raised from 19.3 million tons in 1921 to 23 million in 1935, while the numbers employed were reduced from 205,000 to 179,000.

The level of profits before the war, while no longer equalling the orgies of the post-1914-18 boom, still abundantly revealed the exceptional exploitation. Thus in jute the Reliance Jute Mills Company paid dividends of 50 per cent in 1935, 42½ per cent in 1936 and 30 per cent in 1937. In cotton, the Muir Mills Company paid dividends of 35 per cent in 1935, 27½ per cent in 1936, and 22½ per cent in 1937. In tea, the New Dooars Tea Company paid dividends of 50 per cent both in 1935 and 1936; the Nagaisuke Tea Company paid 60 per cent in 1935 and 50 per cent in 1936; and the East Hope Estates Company paid 23 per cent in 1935, 33 per cent in 1936 and 40 per cent in 1937. And during the war, the increase in profits was manifold even on this high figure (see Chapter VI, p. 172).

Even a portion of the colossal profits during the thirty years since the war of 1914-18, aggregating many hundreds of millions of pounds, could have done much to wipe out the most extreme scandals of the housing of the workers and begin the most elementary measures of social protection and hygiene. The responsibility to adopt the measures which could make this possible has never been recognised by the existing regime in India. In no leading country in the world are the rich let off so lightly in taxation as in India, while the main burden of taxation is placed squarely on the shoulders of the poorest. The peasants have to pay the land revenue, while the landlords' incomes are exempted from income tax. The workers have to pay through crushing indirect taxation, while the weight of income tax on the higher incomes is kept low. The total annual burden of indirect taxation, according to Sir James Grigg, the Finance Member of the Government of India, speaking in April, 1938, amounted to eight times the total of direct taxation. The total proceeds from income tax amounted in 1936-37 to £11½ million, or one-fourteenth of the total revenue, and represented, according to the same authority, less than 1 per cent of the national income, as against the corresponding figure for income tax, surtax and death duties in Britain, representing over 10 per cent of the national income.

Labour and social legislation in India is no less backward; and the reality is far below the appearance on paper. Factory legislation of a kind was initiated in 1881, largely under the pressure of Lancashire employers alarmed at the growth of the Indian mill industry. For decades it was to a considerable extent a dead letter, even in the very limited respects in which it was directed, owing to lack of provision for enforcement.

> "At the beginning of 1905 the system of factory inspection in India had partly broken down. There was a Factories Act, but in certain respects it had become almost a dead letter. . . In the city of Bombay there were 79 cotton mills, employing a daily average of 114,000 people; yet every officer associated wih the inspection of the Bombay factories had many other things to do. The 'Chief Inspector of Factories' was the Assistant Collector, usually a young civil servant. In 1905 the post was held by six different men, all inexperienced, and generally indisposed to regard factory inspection as a serious part of their manifold duties. The single whole-time factory inspector was chiefly employed in checking produce under the Cotton Excise Act, for the Government carefully looked after their dues. . . . It was only natural that under such a system the provisions of the Factories Act were systematically evaded. In Calcutta the failure of factory inspection, and the evils which followed in its train, were even more apparent. One Calcutta mill manager frankly admitted to the second Factory Labour Commission that he had taken no notice of the Factories Act. Another manager elsewhere, whose mill employed nearly 400 children, actually affirmed that he had never heard of a Factories Act imposing restrictions in child labour."
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> *(Lovat Fraser, "India under Curzon and After," pp. 330-31.)*

Even as late as 1924 the Collector of Bombay, under whose authority the Annual Factories Report for that year was issued (which recorded, incidentally, "irregularities in practically every factory"), stated as the official view in the introductory note:

> "The tightening up of the Factories Act and rules tends to work too rigidly in my opinion and to hamper

industry. . . . It is hard both on employers and employees not to be able in the case of special jobs to have work occasionally on rest days and overtime hours. The men in such cases are willing to work, take no harm from it, and get overtime wages. Hence it has been the policy of the Department to recommend reasonable exemptions."

(Annual Factory Report of the Presidency of Bombay, 1925 : Preface by the Collector of Bombay.)

The present Factories Act of 1934 limits hours in permanent factories to the ten-hour day and fifty-four-hour week and in seasonal factories (not working more than half the year) to the eleven-hour day (ten hours for women) and sixty-hour week; with a maximum spreadover of thirteen hours; and with arrangements for overtime. Women's labour at night is prohibited; children under twelve years are not allowed to be employed, and between twelve and fifteen years are limited to five hours in the day-time, with a spreadover of seven and a half hours. This Act affects only 2½ million workers (1944).

The Mines Act of 1935 limits hours to ten above ground and nine below ground, with a spreadover of twelve hours, the employment of children under fifteen years is prohibited. This Act affects one quarter of a million workers. In 1937, employment of women in mines underground was prohibited. But by an Ordinance in 1943, this ban was again removed for the duration of the war.

On the railways hours are limited to sixty per week

The Indian Ports Act of 1931 prohibits the employment of children under twelve and provides certain limited safety regulations for dockers.

The Workmen's Compensation Act of 1934 affects about 6 million workers; but very limited advantage has in practice been taken of its provisions, owing to fear of victimisation.

The Payment of Wages Act of 1936 makes the maximum wage period one month (weekly or fortnightly wages were refused), with payment within one week after the month, and limits the imposition of fines and arbitrary deductions.

It will be seen from the above how extremely limited is labour legislation in India.

"Taking all labour legislation into account, affecting factories, mines, plantations, docks, railways, harbours, etc., it is doubtful whether more than seven or eight millions at the outside come within its protective influ-

ence. The rest who constitute by far the greater majority of the industrial workers are engaged in small or what is known as unregulated industries."

(Shiva Rao, "The Industrial Worker in India," 1939, p. 210.)

The main factories' legislation proper extended in 1944 to only 2,522,753 workers, or a minute fraction of the Indian working class. Even here the weakness of machinery for enforcement impairs its effectiveness. With 14,071 factories registered under the Factories Act in 1944, only 11,713 or 83.2 per cent were inspected. 2,358 factories, or 16.8 per cent, were not inspected at all during the year and a very high proportion was inspected only once. The consequences for the effectiveness of the regulations can be imagined. Even in the 1,775 convictions obtained under the Act, the fines imposed were extremely light, and a virtual incitement to violation. The report from the United Provinces expressed the view (a view shared by some other provinces also) that the "imposition of such fines will not induce offenders to improve their ways when the benefit of breaking the law is more remunerative than the fine to be paid" *(Indian Labour Gazette*, September 1946, p. 75).

Industry in the Indian States is completely outside the Factories Act.

The main body of industry in India is unregulated. Here child labour, even of the tenderest years, is rampant; hours are unlimited; the most elementary provisions for health are lacking. The Madras Report of 1938, previously quoted, found that child labour was on the increase in the unorganised industries. In the tanneries, the carpet factories and the cigarette-making factories the conditions defy description. In the cigarette-making factories the children normally begin work at five or six years of age; the hours are ten to twelve hours a day without a weekly rest day; the wages earned by these children for their ten to twelve-hour day are two annas, or 2*d.* a day.

Social legislation in the modern sense is completely absent. There is no health insurance, no medical provision or sickness benefit, no provision for old age, no provision for unemployment and no general system of education. Even the most elementary requirements for public health, street-cleaning, water-supply, lighting, removal of refuse are almost entirely neglected in the working class areas, while elaborate

provision is made in the rich residential quarters inhabited by the Europeans and upper-class Indians, and the proceeds of taxation are spent on these quarters. The rotting slums, which bring disease and early death of their inhabitants, and regular returns of 30 to 40 per cent a year to their owners, are left to rot by the public authorities. There is no street-cleaning in the slums owned by private individuals and trusts, the narrow lanes between the lines are left covered with rotting refuse and garbage. Jawaharlal Nehru has related his experience when he was Mayor of Allahabad

> "Most Indian cities can be divided into two parts: the densely crowded city proper, and the widespread area with bungalows and cottages, each with a fairly extensive compound or garden, usually referred to by the English as the 'Civil Lines'. It is in these Civil Lines that the English officials and business men, as well as many upper middle class Indians, professional men, officials, etc., live. The income of the municipality from the city proper is greater than that from the Civil Lines, but the expenditure on the latter far exceeds the city expenditure. For the far wider area covered by the Civil Lines requires more roads, and they have to be repaired, cleaned up, watered and lighted; and the drainage, the water-supply and the sanitation system have to be more widespread. The city part is always grossly neglected, and of course the poorer parts of the city are almost ignored; it has few good roads, and most of the narrow lanes are ill-lit and have no proper drainage or sanitation system."
>
> *(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography", p. 143.)*

Nehru attempted to introduce a tax on land values to make possible improvements. He was at once held up by the District Magistrate, who pointed out that any such proposal would be in contravention of various enactments or conditions of land tenure; such a tax would have fallen mainly on the owners of the bungalows in the Civil Lines.

Thus under the enlightened protection of the "civilised" British Raj the filth-ridden conditions, limitless exploitation and servitude of the Indian workers are zealously maintained. From their carefully protected and hygienically safeguarded palaces the European lords rule over their kingdom of squalor and misery.

"Nothing can equal, for squalor and filth and stench, the *bustees* (workers' quarters) in Howrah and the suburbs north of Calcutta. . . . The great majority of the workers in the jute mills are compelled to live in private *bustees*. Under the Bengal Municipalities Act the duty of improving the slum areas is cast on the owners who make very handsome incomes from the poor occupants But vested interests see to it that these powers under the Act are never brought into operation. It would be impossible to describe the conditions of these *bustees*—'filthy disease-ridden hovels', as they have been called, with no windows, chimneys or fireplaces, and the doorways so low that one has to bend almost on one's knees to enter. There is neither light nor water supply, and of course no sanitary arrangements. Access to groups of *bustees* is usually along a narrow tunnel of filth, breeding almost throughout the year, but particularly during the rains, myriads of mosquitos and flies. . .

"Conditions in certain parts of Howrah, which is the second biggest municipality in Bengal, are even worse than in the northern suburbs of Calcutta. Land being extremely valuable has been built on to the last available foot. The lanes on either sides of which these *bustees* have been built are not more than 3 feet wide, but right through them, as in the other mill areas, run the open drains."

(Shiva Rao, "The Industrial Worker in India," pp. 113-14.)

These are the living conditions of the jute-workers from whom dividends running into hundreds per cent have been wrung by the European-run companies, extending to a return many times over of the original capital.

This is the background of the Indian Labour Movement. It is to the millions living in these conditions that Socialism and Trade Unionism have brought for the first time hope and confidence, and awakening to the power of combination, and the first vision of a goal which can end their misery.

3. FORMATION OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

The beginnings of the labour movement in India go back half a century; but its continuous history as an organised movement dates only from the end of the first world war.

Once the conditions of factory industry were established by the eighteen-seventies, it was inevitable that strikes should take place, even though at first in an elementary and unorganised form. There is record of a strike in 1877 at the Empress Mills at Nagpur over wage rates. Between 1882 and 1890 twenty-five strikes were recorded in the Bombay and Madras Presidencies.

The conventional history of the labour movement in India commonly derives its starting-point from the meeting of Bombay mill-workers in 1884, convened by a local editor, N. M. Lokhande, who drew up a memorial of demands for limitation of hours, a weekly rest day, a noontime recess and compensation for injuries, to present to the Factories Commission as the demands of the Bombay workers. Lokhande described himself as "President of the Bombay Millhands' Association"—which is consequently often referred to as the first labour organisation in India—and later started a journal *Dinabandhu*, or *Friend of the Poor*.

This picture of the activity of Lokhande, which had its important role in Indian labour history, as the starting-point of the Indian labour movement is a misleading one; and it is of a misleading character which we shall have occasion to note repeatedly in the early history of the Indian labour movement, owing to the extreme difficulty of articulate expression of the real working-class struggle. The "Bombay Millhands' Association" was in no sense a labour organisation; it had no membership, no funds and no rules. "The Bombay millhands have no organised trade union. It should be explained that although Mr. N. M. Lokhande, who served on the last Factory Commission, describes himself as President of the Bombay Millhands' Association, that Association has no existence as an organised body, having no roll of membership, no funds and no rules. I understand that Mr. Lokhande simply acts as Voluntary Adviser to any millhand who may come to him" (Report on the Working of the Factory Act in Bombay for 1892, p. 15). Lokhande was a philanthropic promoter of labour legislation and of workers' welfare, not a pioneer of labour organisation or of labour struggle.

For the early history of the Indian labour movement it would be necessary to piece together the records of the strike movement from the eighties onwards in the documents of the period. Although there was not yet any organisation, it would be a mistake to underestimate the growth of solidarity in action and elementary class-consciousness of the Indian in-

dustrial workers during the decades preceding the war of 1914. The Directors' Report of the Budge Budge Jute Mill in 1895 stated that they "regret that a strike among the work-people, by which the mills were closed for nearly six weeks, occurred during the half year". At Ahmedabad in 1895 a strike of 8,000 weavers against the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association is recorded (Bombay Factory Report, 1895).

> "Despite almost universal testimony before Commissions between 1880 and 1908 to the effect that there were no actual unions, many stated that the labourers in an individual mill were often able to act in unison and that, as a group, they were very independent. The inspector of boilers spoke in 1892 of 'an unnamed and unwritten bond of union among the workers peculiar to the people', and the Collector of Bombay wrote that although this was 'little more than in the air' it was 'powerful'. 'I believe', he wrote to the Government, 'it has had much to do with the prolonged maintenance of what seems to be a monopoly or almost a monopoly wage'. Sir Sassoon David said in 1908 if labour 'had no proper organisation, they had an understanding among themselves'. Mr. Barucha, lately Director of Industries in Bombay Presidency, stated that 'the hands were all-powerful against the owners, and could combine, though they had not got a trade union'. If there is some degree of exaggeration in these statements, the word of the British deputy commissioner at Wardha certainly overshot the mark when he said that 'the workers were masters of the situation; and the millowners were really more in need of protection than the workers'."
>
> *(D. H. Buchanan, "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India," p. 425.)*

These words already breathe the masters' fear of the incipient class-consciousness of the Indian workers.

During 1905-09 there was a notable advance, parallel to the militant national wave. A strike in the Bombay mills against an extension of hours, serious strikes on the railways, especially the Eastern Bengal State Railway, in the railway shops, and in the Government Press at Calcutta characterised this period. The highest point was reached with the six-day political mass strike in Bombay against the sentence of six years' imprisonment on Tilak in 1908.

Any stable organisation was not yet possible. But this was a reflection of the utter poverty and illiteracy of the workers and lack of any facilities, rather than of backwardness or lack of militancy. Possibilities of organisation were still in the hands of other elements. Thus in 1910 a "Kamgar Hitvarthak Sabha," or Workers' Welfare Association, was formed by philanthropists in Bombay; its objects were to present petitions to the Government and to settle disputes between employers and workers. Trade Unionism in the normal sense extended before 1914 only to the upper ranks (European and Anglo-Indian) of railwaymen and government employees; thus the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants was formed in 1897 and registered under the Companies Act; its functions were primarily concerned with friendly benefits, and although it has continued in existence into the modern period (changing its name in 1928 to the National Union of Railwaymen), it has played no part in the Indian labour movement.

It was the conditions of the close of the first world war, of the sequel of the Russian Revolution and the world revolutionary wave, that brought the Indian working class at a bound into full activity and opened the modern labour movement in India. Economic and political conditions alike contributed to the new awakening. Prices had doubled during the war; there had been no corresponding increase in wages; fantastic profits were being amassed by the employers. In the political field new demands were in the air; Congress-Muslim League unity had been achieved on the basis of a programme of immediate self-government; the first waves of revolutionary influence were reaching India.

The strike movement which began in 1918 and swept the country in 1919 and 1920 was overwhelming in its intensity. The end of 1918 saw the first great strike affecting an entire industry in a leading centre in the Bombay cotton mills; by January, 1919, 125,000 workers, covering practically all the mills, were out. The response to the hartal against the Rowlatt Acts in the spring of 1919 showed the political role of the workers in the forefront of the common national struggle. During 1919 strikes spread over the country. By the end of 1919 and the first half of 1920 the wave reached its height.

> "Some conception of the intensity and extent of the strikes of this period may be had from the following data: November 4 to December 2, 1919, woollen mills,

Cawnpore, 17,000 men out; December 7, 1919, to January 9, 1920, railway workers, Jamalpur, 16,000 men out; January 9-18, 1920, jute mills, Calcutta, 35,000 men out; January 20-31, millworkers, Rangoon, 20,000 men out; January 31, British India Navigation Company, Bombay, 10,000 men out; January 26 to February 16, millworkers, Sholapur, 16,000 men out; February 2-16, Indian Marine Dock workers, 20,000 men out; February 24 to March 29, Tata iron and steel workers, 40,000 men out; March 9, millworkers, Bombay, 60,000 men out; March 20-26, millworkers, Madras, 17,000 men out; May, 1920, millworkers, Ahmedabad, 25,000 men out."

(R. K. Das, "The Labour Movement in India," 1923, pp. 36-37.)

In the first six months of 1920 there were 200 strikes, involving 1½ million workers.

These were the conditions in which Indian trade unionism was born. Most of the Indian trade unions in the main industries and centres derive from this period, although, from the inevitable conditions, organisation has seldom been continuous. This great period of militancy was the birth of the modern Indian labour movement.

Trade unions were formed by the score during this period. Many were essentially strike committees, springing up in the conditions of an immediate struggle, but without staying power. While the workers were ready for struggle the facilities for office organisation were inevitably in other hands. Hence arose the contradiction of the early Indian labour movement. There was not yet any political movement on the basis of socialism, of the conceptions of the working class and the class struggle. In consequence, the so-called "outsiders" or helpers from other class elements who came forward, for varying reasons, to give their assistance in the work of organisation, and whose assistance was in fact indispensable in this initial period, came without understanding of the aims and needs of the labour movement, and brought with them the conceptions of middle class politics. Whether their aims were philanthropic, as in some cases, careerist, as in others, or actuated by devotion to the national political struggle, as in others, they brought with them an alien outlook, and were incapable of guiding the young working class movement on the basis of the class struggle which the workers were in fact waging. This misfortune long dogged the Ind-

ian labour movement, seriously hampering the splendid militancy and heroism of the workers; and its influences still remain.

The starting-point of Indian trade unionism is commonly derived from the Madras Labour Union, formed by B. P. Wadia, as associate of the theosophist Mrs. Besant, in 1918. This picture is to a certain extent misleading in relation to the living history of the Indian working class. First attempts at trade union organisation were being made all over India during this period; there is trace of the Warpers in the Ahmedabad cotton mills forming a union in 1917. But the basis of organisation was still very weak, and far behind the level of militancy and activity of the working class. The Madras Labour Union was certainly the first systematic attempt at trade-union organisation, with regular membership and dues, of the mass of Indian workers in an industrial centre. For this initiative all credit must be paid to its founders. But the appearance of this initiative in a relatively weak industrial centre (during the whole period 1921-33 the number of strike days in Madras was 2.8 million against 20 million in Bengal and 60 million in Bombay) reveals its accidental personal character; and it would not be correct to exaggerate its influence in the general development of the Indian labour movement. The limitations of the outlook of its founder, B. P. Wadia, were revealed when the Madras workers, having formed their union under his presidency in April, 1918, and having presented their demands to the employers, received no satisfaction and demanded a strike; Wadia opposed any strike on grounds of devotion to the cause of British imperialism (a role thus parallel to that of Mrs. Besant in the national movement) in a speech on July 3, 1918:

> "If by going on strike you were affecting the pockets of Messrs. Binny and Co., I would not mind, for they are making plenty of money; but by such a step you will injure the cause of the Allies. Our soldiers, who have to be clothed, will be put to inconvenience, and we have no right to trouble those who are fighting our King's battles, because a few Europeans connected with the mills and this Government are acting in a bad manner. Therefore we must have no strikes."

He was successful in preventing any strike; but Messrs. Binny and Co., undeterred by Wadia's "patriotic" arguments then declared a lock-out, and the workers, caught unpre-

pared, and having been persuaded to forego the strike weapon, were compelled at the moment to give way to their demands. The main contest in Madras came in 1921 with a lock-out followed by a strike; the company used the method of the injunction; the High Court imposed a fine of £7,000 on the union, and, as the price of the company consenting not to prosecute the judgment, Wadia was compelled to sever his connection with the labour movement. This was a very powerful demonstration of the methods used to crush the early labour movement in India.

In other centres many types of helpers, sometimes closely connected with the employers, came forward to take charge of labour organisation. In Ahmedabad Gandhi, in close association with the mill owners, organised a separatist form of labour organisation on a basis of class peace; and to this day the Ahmedabad Labour Association remains isolated from the Indian labour movement.

It was in this period that the Indian Trade Union Congress was founded in 1920. The inaugural session was held in Bombay in October, 1920, with the national leader, Lajpat Rai, as President, and Joseph Baptista as Vice-President. In its early years this body was mainly a "top" organisation, and many of its leaders had very limited connection with the working class movement. The main impetus to its founding was to secure a nominating body for representation at the International Labour Conference at Geneva. N. M. Joshi, one of its earliest leaders, in his pamphlet on "The Trade Union Movement in India" (p. 10) derives the foundation of the Trade Union Congress from the effects of the Washington Labour Conference: "This brought out clearly the necessity of not only starting labour organisations, but also of bringing about some sort of co-ordination amongst them in order that they should be able to make their recommendations with one voice." At the fourth session in 1924 the President was the leader of the Swaraj Party, C. R. Das. The official addresses mainly inculcated the principles of class peace, moral and social improvement of the workers and uplift, and voiced demands for labour legislation and welfare provisions. As characteristic of the old outlook of the middle class leadership of the early years of the Trade Union Congress, we may take the following passage from the Chairman's Address to the Sixth Trade Union Congress in 1926:

> "I heartily commend to you the good work of the Purity Mission started by the Central Labour Board, Bom-

bay....The mission was started with the object of helping the labourer to give up his habits of vice and encourage him to live an honest, peaceful and contented life..... Social workers visit the localities and explain the evils of drink, gambling and other vices. This is the sort of education that a labourer wants, and this is what will make him a better man both socially and economically."

(Address of the President, V. V. Giri, to the Sixth Trade Union Congress at Madras, 1926)

The attitude to strikes was expressed in the General Secretary's Report to the Eighth Trade Union Congress at Cawnpore in 1927:

"During the period under report no strike was authorised by the Executive Council; but owing to very acute industrial conditions obtaining in different trades and different parts of India there occurred some strikes and lock-outs in which the officials of the Congress had to interest themselvs."

(Report of the General Secretary, N. M. Joshi, to the Eighth Trade Union Congress at Cawnpore, 1927.)

Up to 1927 the Trade Union Congress had a very limited practical connection with the working-class struggle. Nevertheless it formed the ground on which the leaders of the newly forming trade unions came together, and it was therefore only a question of time for the breath of the working-class struggle to reach it. This new period opened in 1927. By 1927 the Trade Union Congress united *fifty-seven* affiliated unions, with a recorded membership of 150,555.

4. POLITICAL AWAKENING

Despite the character of the early nominal leadership of the Indian labour movement, the Government was under no illusions as to the significance of the emergence of the working class movement in the last two decades. Their concern was shown in the appointment of the Bengal Committee on Industrial Unrest in 1921, the Bombay Industrial Disputes Committee of 1922, and the Madras Labour Department in 1919-20, followed by the Bombay Labour Department. A Trade Union Bill was prepared in 1921, although it was not finally passed until 1926. From 1921 regular statistics of industrial disputes

were recorded. The record is significant for the picture it affords of the advance of the movement (see Table below). Of this total, considerably over half, in the measure of working days, was in cotton textiles, and considerably more than half in Bombay.

INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

Year	Number of strikes and lock-outs	Number of workpeople involved	Number of working days lost
1921	396	600,351	6,984,426
1922	278	433,434	3,972,727
1923 . ..	213	301,044	5,051,704
1924	133	312,462	8,730,918
1925	134	270,423	12,578,129
1926	128	186,811	1,097,478
1927	129	131,655	2,019,970
1928	203	506,851	31,647,404
1929	141	532,016	12,165,691
1930	148	196,301	2,261,731
1931 ..	166	203,008	2,408,123
1932 . ..	118	128,099	1,922,437
1933	146	164,938	2,168,961
1934	159	220,808	4,775,559
1935	145	114,217	973,457
1936	157	169,029	2,358,062
1937	379	647,801	8,982,000
1938	399	401,075	9,198,708
1939	406	409,189	4,992,795
1940	322	452,539	7,577,281
1941	359	291,054	3,330,503
1942	694	772,653	5,779,965
1943	716	525,088	2,342,287
1944	658	550,015	3,447,306
1945	820	747,530	4,054,499
1946	1593	1,951,756	12,678,121
1947	1811	1,840,784	16,562,666
1948	1639	1,332,956	7,214,456

The Government were sharply aware, as their many committees and commissions of enquiry throughout this period, revealed, of the menace to the whole basis of imperialism once the rising working-class movement, whose power of struggle was demonstrated throughout these post-war years, should reach political awakening and firm organisation under class-conscious leadership. Their problem was to find the means to direct the movement into "safe" channels, or what one of their reports termed the "right type" of trade unionism — a more difficult task in a colonial country than in an imperialist country. This purpose underlay the Trade Union Act of 1926, with its special restriction of political activities. This understanding equally governed the sharp look-out against any signs of political working-class awakening.

Nevertheless, despite all obstacles, through whatever initial confusions, the beginnings of political working class awakening, of socialist and communist ideas, were slowly reaching India in the post-war years. From 1920 onwards the literature of the still very weak Communist Party of India had begun to make its way. From 1924 a journal, the *Socialist*, was appearing in Bombay under the editorship of S. A. Dange, who was to become Assistant Secretary and later, President of the Trade Union Congress. The Government lost no time to strike. In 1924 (under a Labour Government in England) the Cawnpore Trial was staged against four of the communist leaders, Dange, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmed and Das Gupta. All four were sentenced to four years' imprisonment. This was the baptism of the political working class movement in India.

Repression could not check the advance of awakening. By 1926-27 socialist ideas were spreading widely. A new initial form of political working class and socialist organisation began to appear in the Workers' and Peasants' Parties, which sprang up and united militant elements in the trade union movement with left elements in the National Congress. The first Workers' and Peasants' Party was formed in Bengal in February, 1926; others followed in Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab. These were united in 1928 in the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party, which held its first Congress in December, 1928. This political expression, still suffering from many forms of initial confusion, but revealing the growing new forces, accompanied the new wave of working-class awakening, the first signs of which began to appear in 1927.

At the Delhi session of the Trade Union Congress in the spring of 1927 (which was attended by the British Communist M.P., Shapurji Saklatvala), and still more markedly at the Cawnpore session later in the year, the emergence was revealed of challenging militant voices within the leadership of trade unionism. It became speedily clear that the new working class leadership had the support of the majority of Indian trade unionists, although the slow procedure of registration of actual voting strength delayed the final official recognition of the majority until 1929. The First of May in 1927 was for the first time celebrated in Bombay as Labour Day—the symbol of the opening of a new era of the Indian labour movement as a conscious part of the international labour movement.

1928 saw the greatest tide of working class advance and activity of any year of the post-war period. The centre of this advance was in Bombay. For the first time a working-class leadership had emerged, close to the workers in the factories, guided by the principles of the class struggle, and operating as a single force in the economic and political field. The response of the workers was overwhelming. The political strikes and demonstrations against the arrival of the Simon Commission in February placed the working class for the moment in the vanguard of the national struggle; for both the Congress leadership and the reformist trade union leadership had frowned on the project and were startled by its success. Many of the Bombay municipal workers were victimised and discharged for their participation; a further strike compelled their reinstatement.

Trade union organisation shot up. According to the Government's figures trade union membership in Bombay, which in the three years 1923-26 had only advanced from 48,669 to 59,544, reached 75,602 by 1927, leapt forward to 95,321 by March, 1928, and to 200,325 by March, 1929. Foremost in this advance was the famous Girni Kamgar (Red Flag) Union of the Bombay mill-workers, which started during the year with a membership of only 324, and, according to the Government's *Labour Gazette* returns, had reached 54,000 by December, 1928, and 65,000 by the first quarter of 1929. Meanwhile the older Bombay Textile Labour Union, founded in 1926, which stagnated under the reformist leadership of N. M. Joshi, Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, and which had the official encouragement of the Government and the employers, moved, according to the same official

returns, from 8,436 in October, 1928, to 6,749 in December 1928. The choice of the workers was evident. The strength of the Girni Kamgar Union lay in its system of mill committees, close to the workers.

The strike movement during 1928 totalled 31½ million working days, or more than the previous five years together. Although the Bombay textile workers were the centre, the movement was spread over India. Of the 203 disputes, 111 were in Bombay, 60 in Bengal, 8 in Bihar and Orissa, 7 in Madras and 2 in the Punjab; 110 were in the cotton and wool textile industry, 19 in jute, 11 in the engineering workshops, 9 on the railways and in the railway workshops, and 1 in coal-mining. Towering over all the rest was the Bombay textile strike, the greatest strike in Indian history, in which the entire labour force of 150,000 workers stood united for six months from April to October against every form of pressure and Government violence. The strike was originally directed against measures of rationalisation and a 7½ per cent wage cut, and was extended, as it developed, to a wide series of demands. The reformist leadership originally opposed the strike, N. M. Joshi describing their position as that of "lookers-on," but were drawn into the movement. After every attempt to break the strike had failed, the Government appointed the Fawcett Committee, which recommended the withdrawal of the 7½ per cent wage cut and conceded certain other demands of the workers.

A critical point had thus been reached by the opening of 1929. The working class movement was advancing in the forefront of the economic and political scene. The old reformist leadership was being thrust aside. The mission of the British Trades Union Congress in 1927-28, in which imperialism had placed great hopes ("the interest which the British Trades Union Congress has lately taken in Indian labour conditions may be very beneficial, if it leads to the better organisation of Indian labour unions and the expulsion of the communist elements," London *Times*, June 14, 1928), had failed in its objective of securing the affiliation of the Indian Trade Union Congress to the reformist Trade Union International in Europe. The alarm of the Government was unconcealed. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, in his speech to the Legislative Assembly in January, 1929, declared that "the disquieting spread of communist doctrines has been causing anxiety," and announced that the Government would take measures. "The growth of communist propaganda and influ-

ence," records the Government annual report on "India in 1928-29," "especially among the industrial classes of certain large towns, caused anxiety to the authorities." Liberalism in England echoed the alarm. "Experience of the past two years," stated the *Manchester Guardian* in August, 1929, "has shown that the industrial workers in the biggest centres are peculiarly malleable material in the hands of unscrupulous communist organisers" The Indian national Press joined in the outcry. "Socialism is in the air," proclaimed the *Bombay Chronicle* in May, 1929, "for months past socialistic principles have been preached in India at various conferences, especially those of peasants and workers." The Reformist leaders, feeling the ground slipping from under their feet, demanded drastic action. "The time has come," declared Shiva Rao, Chairman of the Executive of the Trade Union Congress, already in May, 1928, "when the trade union movement in India should weed out of its organisation mischief-makers. A warning is all the more necessary because there are certain individuals who go about preaching the gospel of strike."

In 1929 the Government acted and turned its full offensive to counter the rise of the working-class movement. The Public Safety Bill had been introduced in September, 1928, with the object, according to the official report, "to curb communist activities in India," but had been rejected by the Legislative Assembly; in the spring of 1929 it was issued as a special Ordinance by the Viceroy. The Whitley Commission on Labour was appointed. The Trades Disputes Act was passed to provide conciliation machinery, prohibit sympathetic strikes and limit the right to strike in public utility services. The Bombay Riot Enquiry Committee was set up, and recommended that "the Government should take drastic action against the activities of the communists in Bombay"; it further raised the question whether the Trade Union Act should not be so amended "as to exclude communists from management in registered trade unions."

5. THE MEERUT TRIAL

In March, 1929, the Government's main blow fell. The principal active leaders of the working class movement were arrested from all over India and brought to the small inland town of Meerut, far from any industrial centre, for trial. One of the longest and most elaborate state trials in history opened.

Thirty-one leaders were originally arrested, and one more was subsequently added. Their names may be recorded: for, whatever their varying subsequent roles or activities, they stand as pioneers of the Indian working class movement; and many of them are still to-day among the best leading forces of the Indian working class. They were:

S. A. Dange: Assistant Secretary of the Trade Union Congress; formerly sentenced in the Cawnpore trial, General Secretary of the Girni Kamgar Union.

Kishorilal Ghosh: Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Federation of Trade Unions.

D. R. Thengdi: Ex-President and Executive member of the Trade Union Congress; member of the All-India Congress Committee.

S. V. Ghate: Assistant Secretary of the Trade Union Congress (1927) and Vice-President of the Bombay Municipal Workers' Union.

K. N. Joglekar: Organising Secretary of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union; member of the All-India Congress Committee.

S. H. Jhabwalla: Organising Secretary of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation; former Vice-President of the Girni Kamgar Union.

Shaukat Usmani: sentenced in the Cawnpore trial; Editor of Urdu working class paper in Bombay.

Muzaffar Ahmed: Vice-President of the Trade Union Congress; Secretary of the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party; sentenced in the Cawnpore trial.

Philip Spratt: former Executive member of the Trade Union Congress.

B. F. Bradley: former member of the London District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in Britain; Executive member of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union and of the Girni Kamgar Union; Vice-President of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation, and Treasurer of the Joint Strike Committee in the Bombay textile strike.

S. S. Mirajkar: Assistant Secretary of the Girni Kamgar Union.

P. C. Joshi: Secretary of the United Provinces Workers' and Peasants' Party.

A. A. Alve: President of the Girni Kamgar Union.

G. R. Kasle: official of the Girni Kamgar Union.

Gopal Basak: President of the Socialist Youth Conference in 1928.

G. M. Adhikari, Ph. D., contributor to the Bombay socialist paper, the *Spark*.

M. A. Majid: left India in 1920 with the Khilafat Movement. Visited Russia and was imprisoned on return. Secretary of the Kirti Kisan (Peasants) Party, Punjab, and founder of the Punjab Youth League.

R. S. Nimbkar: Secretary of the Bombay Trades Council and of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee: General Secretary of the All-India Workers' and Peasants' Party; member of the All-India Congress Committee.

Vishwa Nath Mukherji: President of the United Provinces Workers' and Peasants' Party.

Kidar Nath Sehgal: President of the Punjab Congress Committee and Financial Secretary of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee; member of the All-India Youth League.

Radha Raman Mitra: Secretary of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union.

Dharani K. Goswami: Assistant Secretary of the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party; prominent trade unionist.

Gouri Shankar: E. C. member of the United Provinces Workers' and Peasants' Party.

Shamsul Huda: Secretary of the Bengal Transport Workers' Union.

Shib Nath Banerjee: President of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union: previously sentenced to one year in connection with the Kharagpur railway strike.

Gopendra Chakravarty: official of the East India Railway Union; previously sentenced to one and a half years in connection with the Kharagpur railway strike.

Sohan Singh Josh: President of the first All-India Workers' and Peasants' Conference.

M. G. Desai: Editor of the Bombay socialist journal, the *Spark*.

Ajudhya Prasad: active member of the Bengal Workers' and Peasants' Party.

Lakshman Rao Kadam: Organiser of the Municipal Workers' Union at Jhansi.

Dharamvir Singh: Member of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces and Vice-President of the United Provinces Workers' and Peasants' Party.

The thirty-second, subsequently arrested, was Lester Hutchinson, an English journalist, who after the arrests, took on the editorship of the *New Spark*, and was thereon also charged in the trial.

It will be seen that the arrested men included the Vice-President, a former President and two Assistant Secretaries of the Trade Union Congress; the Secretaries of the Bombay and of the Bengal Provincial Trade Union Federation; all the officials of the Girni Kamgar Union, most of those of the G.I.P. Railwaymen's Union, as well as those of a number of other unions, and the Secretaries and other officials of the Workers' and Peasants' Parties in Bengal, Bombay and the United Provinces. Three members of the All-India Congress Committee were arrested, including the Bombay Provincial Secretary of the Congress. Three of the four sentenced at Cawnpore were again on trial. Three Englishmen were included. When these three representatives of the English working class movement stood in the dock with Indian workers, and eventually went to prison with them, this was a historic demonstration of living international working class unity, shattering the old barriers and constituting a landmark of deep significance for the future fraternal relations of the British and Indian peoples.

The arrested leaders of the Indian working-class movement bore themselves in a manner which revealed that the Indian working class movement, even though still only in an initial stage of organisation, had reached full consciousness and dignity of its role. The speeches of the defence remain among the most valuable documents of the Indian labour movement. A new India was revealed in them.

By its role in this trial the Indian labour movement lived up to the highest standards of the international labour movement, and gave an example and an inspiration for those who have to-day the responsibility to carry forward the flag of labour and socialism in India.

The Government dragged out the trial for three and a half years — four critical years of India's history, during which the best leaders of the working class were thus re-

moved. No attempt was made to present evidence to sustain the formal charge, under Section 121A of the Penal Code:

> "Whoever within or without British India conspires to commit any of the offences punishable by Section 121 or to deprive the King of the sovereignty of British India or any part thereof or conspires to overthrow, by means of criminal force or the show of criminal force, the Government of India or any local Government, shall be punished with transportation for life or any shorter term or with imprisonment of either description which may extend to ten years."

It was admitted that no act could be brought forward to prove the charge. Thus the High Court Judge summed up:

> "It is conceded that the accused persons have not been charged with having done any overt illegal act in pursuance of the alleged conspiracy."

The Prosecutor declared:

> "The accused were not charged with holding communist opinions, but with conspiring to deprive the King of his sovereignty of India. It was unnecessary for the purposes of the case to prove whether the accused did actually do anything; it would suffice if only conspiracy could be proved."

There was no "conspiracy." The socialist principles of the accused were open and openly proclaimed; the work of labour organisation was equally open. There was no "criminal force." There was only the organisation and leadership of the labour movement.

The real charge was revealed in the indictment, which charged the prisoners with "the incitement of antagonism between capital and labour," "the creation of Workers' and Peasants' Parties, Youth Leagues, Unions, etc." and "the encouragement of strikes." The entire weight of the evidence was concerned with this activity, especially trade union activity. Of one of the prisoners, the Secretary of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union, the Prosecutor declared that his "career in the conspiracy began when he participated in the Calcutta Scavengers' strike." The dominant motive of the trial was laid bare by the judge when he declared in his summing up:

> "Perhaps of deeper gravity was the hold acquired over the Bombay textile workers, illustrated by the 1928

strike, and the revolutionary policy of the Girni Kamgar Union."

Yet this trial, as historic a trial for the suppression of a rising labour movement as that of the Dorchester Labourers a century ago in British labour history, was conducted under a Labour Government, which accepted "full responsibility" for it ("We accept full responsibility.... The Secretary of State is energetically backing up the Government of India": Dr. Drummond Shiels at the Labour Party Conference at Brighton in 1929). "The machinery of the law must operate," was the judgment of the *Daily Herald* on June 25, 1929. "The trial should be expedited as quickly as possible," wrote Sir Walter Citrine on October 1, 1929, in answer to the appeal of the Indian Trade Union Congress to the British Trades Union Congress; "the offence with which the accused are charged is a political offence and one which in the opinion of the General Council does not directly affect the Indian trade union movement as such." Later, after the trial was over and the Labour Government out of office, in 1933 the National Joint Council of the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party issued a pamphlet stating that "the whole of the proceedings from beginning to end are utterly indefensible and constitute something in the nature of a judicial scandal."

In January, 1933, savage sentences were awarded: transportation for life for Muzaffar Ahmed; twelve years' transportation for Dange, Ghate, Joglekar, Nimbkar and Spratt; ten years' transportation for Bradley, Mirajkar and Usmani; and so down to the lightest sentence of three years' rigorous imprisonment. The international agitation which followed was successful in securing drastic reduction of these sentences on appeal.

6. WORKING CLASS RECOVERY AFTER MEERUT

The first years after the Meerut arrests were a difficult period for the Indian labour movement. The Meerut trial, although, as in every such case, sowing deep the seeds for the future strength and victory of the movement, dealt a heavy immediate blow.

The Indian working class, at such an early stage of development, could not easily at once replace the leadership which had been removed. The strike movement of these years of economic crisis met with heavy defeats. In the

critical years of the national struggle which followed, the political role of the working class was weakened — as had been the intention of imperialism.

Difficulties in the trade union movement also followed. The victory of the Left-wing majority in the Trade Union Congress on the basis of superior strength and practical work of organisation achieved in the preceding two years was finally realised at the Nagpur Trade Union Congress at the end of 1929. The old reformist leadership finding themselves in a minority, refused to accept the democratic decision of the majority and split the Trade Union Congress, carrying away the unions supporting them to form the Trade Union Federation. "The proceedings of the Executive Council of the All-India Trade Union Congress have revealed beyond doubt that the majority of its members are determined to commit the Congress to a policy with which we are in complete disagreement" declared the statement issued in the names of N. M. Joshi, Shiva Rao, Giri, Dewan Chamanlal and others, who further affirmed, "We have no doubt that they will be carried by a large and decisive majority in the Congress. Under these circumstances, we have to dissociate ourselves completely from the resolutions of the Executive Council and we further feel that no useful purpose will be served by continuing our participation in the proceedings of the Congress."

The Left leadership, however, which came into control of the Trade Union Congress lacked coherence, being composed of very diverse elements and a further split took place mainly on the question of the independent political role of the working class. The Communist section which held this view formed the Red Trade Union Congress.

These splits seriously weakened the Trade Union movement but the working class fought on through separate strike struggles not only for its economic demands but also against victimisation, that is, for the democratic right of association. This can be seen from the increase in the number of strikes from 141 in 1929 to 148 in 1930 and 166 in 1931, involving more than 100,000 workers every year. The Communists of the Red Trade Union Congress led these struggles and by the year 1933, the Government had to admit with chagrin that though the Meerut leadership was still kept in jail, the Communist "menace, however, remains and has intensified" (*India*, 1932-33).

All these separate strike struggles laid the basis for the big strike wave in 1934 directed against the "rationalisation" scheme of the millowners—the system of intensifying labour and greater exploitation. The sweep and intensity of the wave could be seen from this that while in 1933 there were 146 strikes involving 164,938 workers and resulting in 2,168, 961 working days being lost, in the year 1934 there were 159 strikes involving 220,808 workers and covering 4,775,559 working days, that is more than twice the figure for the previous year. The textile general strike in Bombay lasting from April to June and in Sholapur from February to May, despite intense repression, was clear proof that the working class had resurrected its scattered forces, reforged its unity and thrown up a new crop of militant leadership.

The Government struck again. An Emergency Powers Ordinance was brought into operation and Communists and trade union leaders were detained without trial. The Communist Party was declared illegal. More than a dozen legally registered trade unions were declared illegal, the Young Workers' League was banned, firing was employed to crush the militant and revolutionary organisation of the working class.

It was out of this mighty strike struggle that the move began to re-unite the working class organisations. The Red Trade Union Congress and the All-India Trade Union Congress came together in 1935, and S. H. Jhabwalla, Chairman of the Reception Commitee of the All-India Trade Union Congress declared:

> "From my personal experience I can easily say without fear of exaggeration, that it has been a pleasure for me to work with the 'Reds' in whom I have found some of the most persistent defenders of unity and the day-to-day interest of the working class."
>
> *(Report of the 15th Session of the All-India Trade Union Congress, Bombay, May 1936.)*

From the platform of this session an appeal was made to the reformist leaders of the National Federation of Trade Unions to agree to unite the central leadership of the workers because "nothing but a nationwide offensive of the working class" could fight back the offensive of the owners and the Government. They were assured that, in the interests of unity, all their conditions would be met provided they agreed to two basic principles: first, acceptance of class struggle as the basis

of the trade union movement; secondly, internal trade union democracy. The leaders of the Federation resisted immediate structural unity. So a joint board was set up in 1936 and it was only in 1938 at Nagpur that the National Federation of Trade Unions affiliated itself to the All-India Trade Union Congress with equal representation to the two sections in the governing body of the Congress. The Trade Union Congress once again became the uniting body of Indian trade unionism as a whole; only the Textile Labour Association of Ahmedabad under Gandhist inspiration remaining outside.

In the political field also new developments took place. The Workers' and Peasants' Parties which in view of their two-class character, could only form a transitional stage of growth, and no permanent basis for political working class organisation, passed out of the picture after Meerut. Though the Communist Party was declared illegal, such measures could not check the growth of socialist and communist influence and of Marxist ideas. New accessions of strength were won after the close of the national Civil Disobedience struggle of 1930-34, as the younger national elements proceeded to draw the lessons of that struggle.

In 1934, a group of younger Left nationalist elements, who had come partially under the influence of Marxist ideas in this period, formed the Congress Socialist Party. The special character of the Congress Socialist Party was that its membership was made conditional on membership of the National Congress; the party thus constituted a wing within the Congress and discouraged mass membership. The objective effect of this programmatic and constitutional basis (whatever the intention of the progressive elements among its founders) inevitably represented an attempt to subordinate the independence of the working class movement to the control and discipline of the existing dominant leadership of the National Congress, which meant—in practice— of the bourgeoisie. This contradiction at the root of the Congress Socialist Party showed itself throughout its history in its role at every critical stage of the working class struggle. The contradiction showed itself further in the conflict between the Left-wing of the party, which sought co-operation with the Communist Party and the working class forces, and the dominant reactionary Right-wing, which was hostile to the Communist Party and to all independent working class activity.

7. PRE-WAR UPSURGE

Alongside the National Congress election victories and the formation of the Congress Provincial Ministries, there was a new upsurge of trade union activity resulting in the big strike wave of 1937-38, part of the world strike wave consequent on the temporary capitalist revival due to the armament race.

The trade union movement spread leading to the formation of several new unions and powerfully influencing even the workers in seasonal factories and unorganised industries. The number of registered unions which was only 29 in 1928, 75 in 1929 and 191 in 1934 rose to 296 by 1938 with a recorded membership of 261,000, but these trade unions were really centres which could mobilise many times that number.

In 1937, the number of strikes reached 379 or the highest number since 1921 and within seventeen of the 1921 record; 676,000 workers participated in strikes—the highest number on record and over thrice the recorded trade union membership; and the total number of working days covered was 8,983,000 or the highest since 1929.

In 45 per cent of the strikes, the workers were successful in securing concessions.

The peak was the Bengal Jute Strike which soon developed, despite intense repressive measures, into a general strike in the jute industry, drawing in 225,000 workers in all. The discontent had been gathering since the depression of 1929 when 130,000 workers were thrown out, wages were cut and the most intense "speed-up" and exploitation was resorted to through "rationalisation" measures. Between 1931-36, though the number of looms increased only by 13 per cent, the production of jute yardage increased by 65 per cent. "When the world-wide depression set in, they were able to maintain a reasonable margin of profits," declared Sir Alexander Murray, one of the jute capitalists of Bengal. The jute industry was entering a period of revival since 1936 and the jute workers began their strike in February for restoration of wage-cuts and adequate wages. It lasted till May, despite the measures taken by the reactionary Ministry under Fazlul Huq to crush it on the plea that it had no economic basis and that it was "being used by Communist leaders to pave the way to a revolution in India." The workers held on unitedly, secured the solidarity of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee which made an appeal to the

public to contribute to the Strike Fund of the jute workers, and finally won recognition of their union and acceptance of the principle of restoration of wage-cuts by the owners.

A notable feature of the strike wave was its extension to Ahmedabad, the previous stronghold of Gandhist class-peace unionism; here the Bombay Congress Government brought into operation the hated Section 144 of the Penal Code, prohibiting meetings of five or more, a section against which National Congress has consistently protested.

The high water-mark of the strike wave was the Cawnpore Textile Strike which, beginning in 1937, developed into a general strike drawing in 40,000 workers and also those of other industries in sympathy, such as those of the Match Factory, Iron Foundry and Burmah Shell Depot. The award of the Congress Enquiry Committee was accepted by the workers but the owners refused to implement it and a general strike was launched in 1938 to compel the owners to implement the award. Here a model of Congress-Labour unity was achieved, the United Provinces Congress Committee declaring in a resolution "The workers of Cawnpore are fighting not only for themselves but for the entire working class of India.... (and) are fighting for human rights" and calling on the public "to give every assistance to the strikers in the great struggle that they have begun." After a fifty-five days' struggle in which the Hindu and Muslim workers unitedly foiled the attempts of the owners' agents to foment communal riots, a notable victory was achieved, including recognition of the union.

The Bombay Protest Strike of November 1938 of over 90,000 workers, with the full support of the United Trade Union Congress against the dangerous Industrial Dispute Bill (imposing conciliation machinery with a four months' delay on the right to strike, as well as imposing regulations in respect of registration of unions, favourable to company unions) was a powerful demonstration of working class consciousness and a warning to the Bombay Congress Government to implement the Congress election pledges in respect of trade union rights.

In the ranks of railway labour also, a powerful revival was seen despite the reformist leadership at the top. The Bengal Nagpur Railway Strike involving 40,000 workers lasted for a month and won the sympathy of the Faizpur Congress. The All-India Railwaymen's Federation dominated by reformist leaders had quietly watched the retrench-

ment of 17 per cent of the workers, wage-cuts, greater intensification of labour leading to a 50 per cent rise in accidents and greater profits to the Railway companies. But the wave of trade union activity led to unification of the reformist and Red Flag Unions on the Great Indian Peninsular Railway and to a mass membership of over 20,000. A similar revival was seen on the Bombay Baroda and Central Indian, the Madras and Southern Maratha and the South Indian Railways. An example of the tactics adopted by the railway management to fight the growing menace of militant trade unionism was the offer to recognise the reformist union on the Bombay Baroda and Central Indian Railway "as long as Mr. Jamnadas Mehta was associated with it and so long as Communists were excluded from it." But the unification of the All-India Trade Union Congress and the National Federation of Trade Unions, and the unmistakable urge of the railway workers to unite rival unions on the railways laid the basis for fighting such disruptive moves.

By 30th October 1938, the foundation anniversary day of the Trade Union Congress, it had a membership of 325,000 organised workers. The working class, through its powerful political protest actions against imperialist misdeeds, in support of national demands and by its daily battles against imperialist repression, already stood out as a strong, organised section of the anti-imperialist forces.

Alongside these developments and because of them the political role and influence of the labour movement was felt inside the national movement. A wide campaign supported by several trade unions and led by radical Congressmen, developed behind the demand for lifting the ban on the Communist Party. Despite the ban, the widened civil liberties under the Congress Ministries made it possible for the Communist Party to bring out the *National Front*, a weekly in English and *Kranti* in Marathi, the language of the majority of the working class in Bombay. These served to popularise the ideas of the United National Front against imperialism and the growing menace of Fascism. It canvassed support of all sections of the people for the struggles of workers, peasants and the States peoples. Communists were elected to important executive posts in various Congress Committees and there were no fewer than 20 in the All-India Congress Committee, the highest elective body in the Congress. Repeated attempts to achieve Left unity as between Communists and Congress Socialists to fight the compromising policies

of the dominant Right-wing leadership of the Congress, met with limited success due to the heavy opposition of the reactionary section of the leadership of the Congress Socialist Party.

8. THE WORKING CLASS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

With the outbreak of war in September, 1939, a decisive period opened for the national liberation movement in India and the Indian working class.

While the national leadership temporised, it was the labour movement that opened the offensive with a one-day political protest strike on October 2, 1939, when 90,000 workers in Bombay downed tools—the first anti-war strike in the world labour movement. From a strong, organised section, the working class was coming forward as the vanguard of the anti-imperialist forces in India.

The sharp rise in the cost of living in consequence of the war, without a corresponding rise in wages, was admitted by Dr. T. E. Gregory, Economic Adviser to the Government of India, who said that by December "the general index of primary commodity prices had risen to 137" if September prices were taken as 100. To this must be added the profit of the retailers. "The profiteering in these commodities", that is, foodgrains like *bajra, jowar,* rice and wheat, said the special correspondent of the *Bombay Chronicle* "on September prices on an average is 28 per cent. Add to this the profit of the retailers, which is estimated between 8 to 14 per cent and you get a fair idea of the strain on the poor man's purse." (*Bombay Chronicle,* December 6, 1939.)

Against these economic burdens of war, the working class opened the offensive with the Dearness Allowance Strike of 175,000 textile workers in Bombay on 5th March, 1940. The strike was complete and lasted for 40 days despite wholesale arrest of the strike leaders and terrorisation of workers when police entered working class houses and beat up the inmates. All sections of workers demonstrated their solidarity when in response to the call of the Trade Union Congress 350,000 workers went on a one-day strike on March 10.

The Bombay strike unleashed a wave of strikes all over the country, 20,000 textile workers of Cawnpore, 20,000 municipal workers in Calcutta, jute workers of Bengal and

Bihar, oil workers of Digboi in Assam, coal-miners of Dhanbad and Jharia, iron and steel workers of Jamshedpur and workers in scores of other industries, struck work demanding dearness allowance. It was clear that the working class as a whole was on the move.

The Government struck once more. The *National Front* and *Kranti* were banned. Defence of India Rules were brought into operation. A country-wide round-up of Communists and other radical elements took place and in January 1941 Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member, declared that of the 700 who were detained in jail without trial "about 480 persons were almost without exception, either acknowledged Communists or else active supporters of the Communist programme of violent mass revolution" (Legislative Assembly Debates, February 12, 1941). There were 6,466 convicted of offences and over 1,664 restricted, externed or interned.

Alongside this onslaught by the authorities against the Communist Party, the Congress Socialist leadership also opened an offensive against the Communists and expelled from its party those suspected of being Communists or in sympathy with Communism, on the grounds that they failed to accept the Gandhist theory of non-violence. "There are irresponsible people....thoughtless and reckless enough to foster the spirit of violence.... he (Gandhi) was able to see that our (Congress Socialist) influence was exercised on the side of peaceful and ordered mass struggle" (circular of the General Secretary, Jai Prakash Narain, to members of the Congress Socialist Party). During this period the majority of the militant members of the Congress Socialist Party left it to join the illegal Communist Party, being acutely dissatisfied with a socialist leadership which thus abandoned the basis of class struggle to surrender to Gandhist theories of non-violence. The Congress Socialist Party remained mainly a group of leaders without any mass organisation or real basis in the working class.

The attack of the authorities did not succeed in breaking the organisation or active role of the Communist Party. Although deprived of almost its entire leadership, the Party continued to function; a few successfully evaded the vigilant police hunt; and illegal revolutionary propaganda was combined with legal mass action. Numerically small and placed under severe handicaps, it could not decisively influence events; but it stood out unmistakably as the dominant party of the working class and a vital force in Indian politics.

At the same time the country-wide united action of the working class led to the completion of unity in the central trade union organisation. The National Federation of Trade Unions completely merged with the All-India Trade Union Congress, but not until it had insisted on and secured a clause in the constitution that "all political questions as well as questions of strikes and affiliation with any foreign organisation be decided by a three-fourths majority." This clause was accepted by the militant section of trade unionists in the interests of unity though it seriously hampered the organised trade union movement from reaching a clear-cut political lead in the ensuing period.

The disadvantages of this limitation were shown in relation to the new problems which arose with the further development of the war, following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the Japanese entry into the war and overrunning of South East Asia, the establishment of the United Nations alliance, an dthe increasing Japanese menace to India.

The Cawnpore session of the All-India Trade Union Congress met in February, 1942. Conditions of life had in the meanwhile considerably worsened for the working class. The Japanese armies were overrunning Malaya and Burma and threatening India.

The central leadership of the trade union movement, however, failed to give a clear political lead. The majority supported a Communist resolution advocating unconditional support to the war in the interests of national defence, and calling on the working class to fight for a Charter of National Demands to make national defence effective. But this resolution, though supported by the majority failed to secure the requisite three-fourths majority. Each political group in the trade union movement was accordingly left free to advocate its own policies.

The period 1942-45 was a period of great trial for the working class and the country as a whole. The Government's resort to unrestricted inflationary measures to pay for the war, the hoarding and blackmarketing of vital necessaries, the rise in the cost of living by 200 per cent; the arrest of the national leaders and the intense brutal countrywide repression that followed; the national anger roused by the Government policy, were such that any one of them taken singly would have sufficed to goad the working class to go on strike. But it was a striking tribute to the sound class instinct and advanced national consciousness of the working

class and of the Communist Party that led them, that it realised the changed situation, the needs of national defence and held back from strikes, though instances were numerous of provocations and attempts at bribing a section of workers to bring about a strike. It is significant also that the only strikes of any real magnitude were those at Ahmedabad, the stronghold of Gandhian trade unionism lasting for 3 months, and at Jamshedpur Iron and Steel Works, which were at least as much due to the owners as to the workers.

During this period, the working class led by the Communist Party came forward resolutely against imperialist repression. The Trade Union Congress gave a call to observe September 25, 1942, as Anti-Repression Day. It popularised the ideas of national defence and launched a vigorous campaign for the daily needs of the people such as price control and rationing, the fight against black-marketing and hoarding, and warned the people against falling a prey to imperialist provocation or Jap blandishments.

This led to a growth in the trade union movement and to the influence of the Communist Party in the trade union movement. The legalisation of the Communist Party in 1942 after 8 years of illegality, was a triumph for the working class movement. The growth of the trade-union movement can be seen from the following figures of membership of the All-India Trade Union Congress:

Year	*Number of Trade Unions*	*Registered Membership*
1938	.. 188	363,450
1940	.. 195	374,256
1941	.. 182	337,695
1942 (February)	.. 191	269,803
1943	.. 259	332,079
1944	.. 515	509,084
1947	.. 608	726,000

The many-sided activity of the Communists during the period of crisis in 1942-45, despite the heavy odds, led to a signal growth in the membership of the party. Starting with a bare 4,000 in July 1942, it had jumped to 15,000 by May 1943, 30,000 by January 1944 and over 53,000 by the summer of 1946.

An unsuccessful attempt to split the unity of the trade union movement was made during the war by the adherents

of M. N. Roy, who passed over to complete identification with British imperialist interests His adherents established in 1941 the so-called "Indian Federation of Labour" which was subsidised by the Government with a monthly grant of Rs. 13,000, but—despite lavish publicity—failed to win any effective basis in the working class. A Government Enquiry in September 1946, finally established that the All-India Trade Union Congress, with 700,000 members, was the decisive representative organisation of Indian trade unionism.

The Congress Socialist Party, which after 1940 consisted mainly of a group of leaders, endeavoured to build its underground organisation after the August 1942 resolution of the Congress and the arrest of the Congress leaders (see Chapter XVI), and on this basis sought to organise the spontaneous popular upsurge which followed the arrest of the Congress leaders. In these endeavours they were not successful in winning the support of the working class. In the measure that the upsurge subsided and their efforts proved unavailing, they moved increasingly from a position of neutrality towards Fascism to a position closely analogous to that of the adherents of Subhas Bose (who had allied himself with German and Japanese Fascism, hoping to win the freedom of India with Fascist aid). Notwithstanding this, the fact that they brought out a stream of illegal literature glorifying the spontaneous heroism of the people, and organised in some measure acts of sabotage, won for them an important measure of influence over the younger nationalist sections, particularly students, though not among the working class. After the war they developed a very sharp anti-Communist and anti-Soviet line of propaganda.

The achievement and advance of the working class movement during the war represented a memorable stage of development. By the close of the war and victory over Fascism the labour movement stood out as the most organised, most disciplined and most relentless fighter against imperialism, as the great post-war mass struggles further demonstrated. It had succeeded in uniting and keeping united within its ranks Hindus, Moslems, and Untouchables, despite the sharpening of conflict among the top leadership in the general political movement. The working class had won its place as the fighting vanguard in the further battles for national and social liberation.

The rise of the Communist Party to third place in Indian politics, though not comparable in mass influence to

either the National Congress or the Moslem League, was a reflection of this advance of the working class.

In the stormy period that followed the war, with the great national upsurge and extending mass strike movement, this advance of the working class, and of its political role as the vanguard in the mass struggle of the people has continued to go forward.

Chapter XIII

PROBLEMS OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

"Divide et impera was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours."—**Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, minute of May 14, 1859.**

THE RISING forces of Indian nationalism, of the peasant revolt and of the working class movement represent the progressive elements of Indian society. But they are by no means the whole picture of Indian society. Although they constitute the overwhelming majority of the Indian people, they are not the whole people. If they were, if the conflict were a simple conflict between a united Indian people ranged in one camp, and the handful of British rulers ranged in the other, it would be already over, or rather, the domination could never have arisen.

In a society characterised by arrested development, as is the case with India under imperialist rule, it is inevitable that the social conservative forces should assume an importance out of all proportion to their inner strength. These decaying forces helped to make possible the original conquest. As the tide of national awakening sweeps forward, the rule of these outdated relics appears to grow more important and prominent, precisely because they are the sole surviving props of imperialist rule.

The total numbers of the British in India, according to the Simon Report, came to 156,000 (registered as Europeans, but mainly British); the 1931 Census showed a total of 168,000. Of these, 60,000 were in the army; 21,000 were in business or private occupations; and 12,000 were in the civi-

lian government services. This makes an effective total of less than 100,000 occupied adults directly representing the imperialist domination over the country, or 1 per 4,000 of the Indian population. It is obvious that, even after every precaution has been taken to disarm the Indian population, and especially to maintain all heavy arms, artillery and air-power in exclusively British hands, such a force could not hope to maintain continuous domination over the 400 millions of India by power alone. A social basis within the Indian population is indispensable.

The maintenance of a social basis, allied to imperialism, within the Indian population is the condition of the maintenance of imperialist rule. As in the case of every reactionary rule, and especially of alien rule, the division of the people is the necessary law of the rulers' statecraft. But such a social basis cannot be found in the progressive elements which are straining against imperialism. It can only be found in the reactionary elements whose interests are opposed to those of the people. We have already seen how British rule has consciously built on the basis of the landlord class, which it has largely brought into existence by its own decrees as an act of State policy. Along with these are various trading interests and money-lending interests closely allied with the imperialist system of exploitation, and looking to imperialism for protection, as well as the subordinate official strata. In the most recent period the big monopolist interests of the upper bourgeoisie have also been brought into close association and alliance with imperialism, and this has found political expression in the formation of the Governments of the Dominions of India and Pakistan. We have also seen how imperialism has abandoned the socially reforming role of a century ago, and to-day preserves and protects, so far as possible (always in the name of impartial non-interference in the social customs and religious beliefs of the population), all that is culturally backward in the life of the people against the national demands for reform, as well as utilising to the utmost the lingering reactionary lines of division such as caste (the separate representation of the depressed classes, and encouragement of parties founded upon this basis). But nowhere is this policy more signally demonstrated than in two spheres which have come into special prominence in the recent period, the question of the Indian Princes or so-called "Indian States", and the question of communal division, especially in the form of Hindu-Moslem antagonism.

Both these problems are in reality aspects of the general problem confronting the national movement in respect of the reactionary forces in India. With the advance of the national liberation movement desperate efforts are being made to use these reactionary forces. This is inherent in the character of the present period. These are phenomena of the break-up of imperialist rule. They represent the calling into play of the last reserves.

The solution of these problems is vital for the victory of democracy in India.

1. THE PRINCES

Imperialism has divided India into unequal segments—British India and the so-called "Indian States". The fantastic and irritational character of this division, which is far more than an administrative division, and extends deeply into social, economic and political conditions, can only be appreciated by an examination of the map. Pre-nineteenth century Germany was an orderly system by comparison with the anarchic confusion of petty "States" which was the map of India under British rule until the recent consolidation of the States following the Mountbatten Settlement.

From west to east, from north to south, from the 200 States of Kathiawar or the score of States of Rajputana in the west to Manipur and the score of Khasi chieftainships in the extreme east, from Kashmir and the minute Simla Hill States in the north to Mysore and the Madras States in the south, the limitless miscellany of hundreds of States of every shape and size extended over two-fifth to nearly half of India (45 per cent now that Burma is separated from India), with boundaries which defy the cartographer. There were 563 States with a total area of 712,000 square miles and a population of 81 million (in the 1931 census) or nearly one-quarter (24 per cent) of the Indian population. They ranged from States like Hyderabad, as large as Italy, with 14 millions of population, to petty States like Lawa with an area of nineteen square miles, or the Simla Hill States, which are little more than small holdings. The variety of their status and jurisdiction defies any generalised description. There were 108 major States whose rulers were directly included in the Chamber of Princes. There were 127 minor States which indirectly returned twelve representatives to the Chamber of Princes. The remaining 328 States were in practice special forms of land-

holdings, with certain feudal rights, but with very limited jurisdiction. In the more important States a British Resident held the decisive power; the lesser States were grouped under British Political Agents, who managed bunches of them in different geographical regions.

To call them "States" is really a misnomer; for they are, rather artificially maintained ghosts or preserved ruins of former States, whose puppet princes have been maintained for political reasons by an entirely different ruling Power. While plenty of petty despotism, tyranny and arbitrary lawlessness was freely allowed, all decisive political power lay in British hands. What Marx wrote already in 1853 is still more true to-day:

> "As to the native States, they virtually ceased to exist from the moment they became subsidiary to or protected by the Company...The conditions under which they are allowed to retain their apparent independence are at the same time the conditions of a permanent decay, and of an utter inability of improvement. Organic weakness is the constitutional law of their existence, as of all existences living upon sufferance. It is therefore not the native *States,* but the native *Princes* and courts about whose maintenance the question resolves. The native Princes are the stronghold of the present abominable English system and the greatest obstacles to Indian progress."
>
> *(Marx: "The Native States," New York Daily Tribune, July 25, 1853.)*

That was nearly a century ago. The Indian "States", or rather, Princes, still linger on in their "permanent decay"; and there are even macabre new attempts to galvanise the corpses in order to stage a transparent constitutional make-believe.

Why did British rule, which in general sought to replace the motley disarray of India on the eve of the conquest, and has freely boasted of so doing, by a uniform political and administrative system, nevertheless retain and zealously preserve right up to the present day this phantasmagoria of tottering States, whose existence defeats all administrative uniformity, all uniformity of legislation or maintenance of the most elementary minimum standards, or even statistical uniformity? Abstractly considered, such a procedure might apppear most irrational from the standpoint of bourgeois rule,

from the standpoint of the merchant's ledger or the investor's placing of capital, requiring the most uniform and economical administrative system for the convenient penetration of the country as a whole. In fact, it is no more irrational than the maintenance of the monarchy and aristocracy (in a similar emasculated and ghostly form) in bourgeois England. The reasons are "reasons of State". The alien bourgeois rule in India required the feudal basis for its support.

This policy of assiduous preservation of the Princes as puppets was by no means consistently followed until the modern period. In the first half of the nineteenth century, while the British domination was still vigorous and confidently advancing, a policy of expanding absorption of the decaying States into British territory, under any and every pretext, was actively followed. But the turning-point came with the Revolt of 1857. The Revolt of 1857 was the last attempt of the decaying feudal forces, of the former rulers of the country, to turn back the tide of foreign domination. As has been already pointed out, the progressive forces of the time, of the educated class, representing the nascent bourgeoisie, supported British rule against the Revolt. The Revolt was crushed; but the lesson was learned. From this point the feudal forces no longer presented the main potential menace and rival to British rule, but the main barrier against the advance of the awakening masses. The progressive elements, which had formerly been treated with favour, were now regarded with increasing suspicion as the potential new leadership of the awakening masses. The policy was consciously adopted of building more and more decisively on the feudal elements, on the preservation of the Princes and their States, as the bulwark of British rule.

Already in the years just before the Revolt Sir William Sleeman had warned the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, that "the annexation of Oudh would cost the British power more than the value of ten such kingdoms, and would inevitably lead to a mutiny of the Sepoys"; and had put forward the view that the Indian States should be regarded as "breakwaters", since "when they are all swept away, we shall be left to the mercy of our native army, which may not always be sufficiently under our control". But Dalhousie, who was an energetic and relentless innovator and a protagonist of the policy of expansion, was not convinced; and it required the experience of the war of 1857 to bring about the decisive turn of policy.

The Queen's Proclamation of 1858 proclaimed the new policy: "We shall respect the rights, dignity and honour of the Native Princes as our own." The purpose of the policy was frankly described by Lord Canning, the Governor-General who succeeded Dalhousie, in 1860:

> "It was long ago said by Sir John Malcolm that if we made all India into Zillahs (or British Districts) it was not in the nature of things that our Empire should last fifty years; but that if we could keep up a number of Native States without political power, but as royal instruments, we should exist in India as long as our naval supremacy was maintained. Of the substantial truth of this opinion I have no doubt; and the recent events have made it more deserving of our attention than ever". *(Lord Canning, April 30, 1860.)*

The calculation was thus to preserve the Indian Princes as "royal instruments", "without political power", for the maintenance of British rule. A decade and a half later the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, similarly described the significance of the Royal Titles Bill of 1876, by which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India, as marking the beginning of "a new policy by virtue of which the Crown of England should henceforth be identified with the hopes, the aspirations, the sympathies and the interests of a powerful native aristocracy."

The preservation of the Indian States from the dissolution which would have been sooner or later their fate was thus an instrument of modern British policy, and by no means an expression of the survival of ancient institutions and traditions in India. As Professor Rushbrook-Williams, the principal Government propagandist on behalf of the Princes (former Joint Director of the Indian Princes Special Organisation, Adviser to the Indian States Delegation at the Round Table Conference, and also Director of Public Information of the Government of India up to 1925), declared in 1930:

> "The rulers of the Native States are very loyal to their British connection. Many of them owe their very existence to British justice and arms. Many of them would not be in existence to-day had not British power supported them during the struggles of the later part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century. Their affection and loyalty are important assets for Britain in the present troubles and in the readjustments which must come....

"The situation of these feudatory States, checker-boarding all India as they do, are a great safeguard. It is like establishing a vast network of friendly fortresses in debatable territory. It would be difficult for a general rebellion against the British to sweep India because of this network of powerful loyal Native States."

(L. F. Rushbrook-Williams, in the "Evening Standard", May 28, 1930.)

The "fortresses" were, however, not so strong as the amiable Government propagandist of these slave-States of reaction would like to pretend. That the majority of the Princes only owed the continuance of their rule against the will of their peoples to the protection of the British power was widely recognised.

"Were a referendum taken to-day among the subjects, they would cheerfully vote for the annexation of the States to British India. The States exist to-day because of the mercy of the British."

(S. C. Ranga Iyer, "India, Peace or War".)

"Hardly any of the States have the attributes required for the making of a modern nation State. The frontiers are usually artificial and do not correspond with differences in race or language or culture. Further the ties which bind the dynasty to the State are usually accidental or artificial and the connection is often less than 200 years old. On the other hand the cultural and social links which connect the State subjects with their cousins in British India are almost everywhere of immense strength and antiquity. It would seem to follow that the ruler's hold upon the affections of his subjects is far weaker than is generally said to be the case."

(J. T. Gwynn, "Congress and the States," Manchester Guardian, May 12, 1939.)

The Butler Committee Report in 1929 laid down in formal terms the obligation of the British power to maintain the Princes against "rebellion or insurrection":

"The duty of the Paramount Power to protect the States against rebellion or insurrection is derived from the clauses of treaties and sanads, from usage and from the promise of the King Emperor to maintain unimpaired the privileges, rights and dignities of the Princes... The

promise of the King Emperor to maintain unimpaired the privileges, rights and dignities of the Princes carries with it a duty to protect the Prince against attempts to eliminate him and to substitute another form of government."

(Report of the Indian States Committee, 1929, Sections 49 and 50)

What sort of regime was thus maintained by British power? Jawaharlal Nehru described in his autobiography his feeling of the general atmosphere of an Indian State:

"A sense of oppression comes: it is stifling and difficult to breathe, and below the still or slow-moving waters there is stagnation and putrefaction. One feels hedged, circumscribed, bound down in mind and body. And one sees the utter backwardness and misery of the people, contrasting vividly with the glarinng ostentation of the prince's palace. How much of the wealth of the State flows into the palace for the personal needs and luxuries of the prince, how little goes back to the people in the form of any service....

"A veil of mystery surrounds these States. Newspapers are not encouraged there, and at the most a literary or semi-official weekly might flourish. Outside newspapers are often barred. Literacy is very low, except in some of the Southern States—Travancore, Cochin, etc. —where it is far higher than in British India. The principal news that comes from the States is of a viceregal visit with all its pomp and ceremonial and mutually complimentary speeches, or of an extravagantly celebrated marriage or birthday of the Ruler, or an agrarian rising. Special laws protect the princes from criticism, even in British India, and within the States the mildest criticism is rigorously suppressed. Public meetings are almost unknown, and even meetings for social purposes are often banned."

(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography," p. 531.)

The special restriction of the Press in the Indian States was explicity imposed by the Government of India Notification of June 25, 1891: "No newspaper or other printed work, whether periodical or other, containing public news or comments on public news, shall without the written permission for the time being in force of the Political Agent be edited, printed or published after August 1, 1891, in any local area

administered by the Governor-General in Council, but not forming part of British India." This has been further supplemented by further special restriction of any criticism within British India on the conditions in the States, codified in the States Protection Act of 1934.

It is doubtful whether there has been any regime in history to parallel that of the Indian puppet Princes under British protection. There are a few of the Indian States which have been administered on levels above the low levels of British India, and which even carried out partially realised schemes of compulsory education or established very rudimentary forms of restricted advisory representative bodies. But these are exceptions. In the majority the servitude, despotism and oppression exceed description. Corruption and oppression have been sufficiently familiar in the history of Asiatic despotisms. But these have at any rate had to face the self-acting checks of the fear of external aggression or internal risings. Both these checks were removed by the British protection; the power of supervision to control or remove rulers in case of flagrant misgovernment was in practice used, not to check misgovernment, but to check disloyalty. The Princes were functionless puppets fulfilling a degraded role. Hence the notorious degradation and sufferings of the people in the Indian States under conditions of backwardness extreme even for India.

The declaration of the States Peoples' Conference (the organ of the popular democratic movement in the States) in 1939 summed up the character of the regime of these Princes:

> "In these States, big or small, with very few exceptions, personal, autocratic rule prevails. There is no rule of law and taxation is excessive and unbearable. Civil liberties are crushed. The privy purse of the Rulers is usually not fixed and even where it is fixed that is not adhered to. On the one hand there is the extravagance and luxury of the Princes, on the other the extreme poverty of the people.
>
> "With the hard-earned money of the poverty stricken and miserable people, enjoyment is bought and luxury is flaunted by their Rulers in foreign countries and in India. This system cannot continue. No civilised people can tolerate it. The whole argument of history is against it; the temper of the Indian people cannot submit to it."
>
> *(Statement of the Standing Committee of the All-India States Peoples' Conference, June, 1939.)*

The clearest indication of the character of the administration of these States is to be found in their budgets.

> "The King of England receives roughly one in 1,600 of the national revenue, the King of Belgium one in 1,000, the King of Italy one in 500, the King of Denmark one in 300, the Emperor of Japan one in 400. . . No king receives one in 17 like the Maharani of Travancore (which is the most progressive State in India), one in 13 as the Nizam of Hyderabad or the Maharaja of Baroda, or one in 5 as the Maharajahs of Kashmir and Bikaner. The world would be scandalised to know that not a few Princes appropriate one in 3 and one in 2 of the revenues of the State."
>
> *(A. R. Desai, "Indian Feudal States and the National Liberation Struggle.")*

Here is the budget for 1929-30 of the Bikaner State, which is especially praised and favoured by imperialism:

	Rupees
Civil List	1,255,000
Wedding of the Prince	82,500
Building and Roads	618,384
Extension of Royal Palaces ..	426,614
Royal Family	224,864
Education	222,979
Medical Service	188,138
Public Utility	30,761
Sanitation	5,729

Education, medical service, public utilities and sanitation thus receive less than one-fourth of what goes to the Prince, his family and palaces. In the case of Jamnagar, out of a total revenue of £1 million in 1926-27 no less than £700,000 went to the personal costs of the Prince, while expenditure on education was 1.5 per cent and on medical relief 0.9 per cent.

What are the conditions of the people who have the privilege to live under this administration? The Indian States represent the most backward agrarian economy of a feudal type. In only a few is there any industrial development. Slavery is rampant in many:

> "There are Slave Communities in many of the Rajputana States, and in various States of the Western India States Agency, including the States of Kathiawar. Ac-

cording to the Census Report of 1921, in Rajputana and Central India alone there were in all 160,735 slaves of the Chakar and Daroga classes."

(P. L. Chudgar, "Indian Princes under British Protection", 1929, p. 33.)

Forced labour, which may be imposed for any of a variety of services, with no remuneration other than food, is the regular rule.

"The system of what is known as Veth and Begar (meaning forced labour) prevails in almost all the Indian States; and all classes of labourers, workmen and artisans are compelled to work for the Princes and their officials, in many cases the only remuneration being the barest necessity of food. These subjects are compelled to work at any time and for any period that the State may require. . . . Even the women, young or old, married or widows, are not exempt. If any of these people, men or women, are infirm and cannot work properly, they are flogged or otherwise tortured.

"To the knowledge of the writer, poor old women of sixty have been severely flogged by constables. This was done with bamboo sticks in public streets, and that crime for which they were punished was merely that of pleading exemption from forced labour on the ground of their infirmity." *(Ibid,* p. 37.)

There are no civil rights.

"No subject has a right to seek redress for infringement of his rights by the Prince, the Prime Minister or State. The Prince can arbitrarily order the confiscation or forfeiture of the rights or property of any subject. He may impose fines to any amount, and may adopt every conceivable means of extorting payment. He can throw anyone into prison for any indefinite period without charge or trial." *(Ibid pp. 72-3.)*

Taxes are imposed at will, to grind even the poorest in order to provide the insatiable demands of the palace.

"The taxes as they obtain in the State of Nawanagar give a fairly accurate idea of taxes common to all States. The first list comprises taxes on professions and on persons, such as labourers and artisans, on cattle, on betrothals, marriages, births, deaths and funerals. It is to be noticed that there are also taxes on such small concerns

as the hand grinding mills of widows which provide the sole means of subsistence of these poor women. . . .

"To return to the land tax. . . in the case of payments in cash this tax is imposed in the proportion of four shillings per acre, if in kind, one fourth of the crops. In practice the rate increases. The State's share works out at about 40%. All other taxes . . . amount at a very modest estimate to about 10%. So that only 50% is left to the cultivator. . .

"In addition . . . he must also help to defray the cost of a Chief's marriage, or the marriage of a member of the Chief's family and pay toll on the birth of a son to the Chief and on such ceremonies as the funeral of a Chief's wife or mother." *(Ibid, pp, 45-47.)*

The regime of the Indian Princedoms provides the most extreme oppression and misery without parallel in the modern world precisely because it combines the most primitive feudal expression, including remnants of direct slavery below, with the highest imperialist power and exploitation above.

This is the regime which British rule not only preserved and artificially perpetuated over two-fifths of India, but in the modern period brought increasingly into the forefront and seeks to give added weight and prominence in the affairs of India as a whole. As the national movement of liberation advanced, so imperialism increasingly threw the weight of its policy on the alliance with the Princes, and sought to make the Princes its counter-force against the national movement. In 1921 the Chamber of Princes was instituted. The role of the Princes was the corner-stone of the Federal Constitution projected by the Act of 1935. The Princes were given over two-fifths of the representation in the Upper House, and one-third of the representation in the Lower House. The purpose was very clearly stated by Lord Reading in the parliamentary debates:

"If the Princes come into a Federation of All India . . . there will always be a steadying influence. . . What is it we have most to fear? There are those who agitate for independence for India, for the right to secede from the Empire altogether. I believe myself that it is an insignificant minority that is in favour, but it is an articulate minority and it has behind it the organisation of the Congress. It becomes important, therefore, that we should get what steadying influence we can against this

> view. . . There will be approximately 33 per cent of the Princes who will be members of the Legislature with 40 per cent in the Upper Chamber. There are of course large bodies of Indians who do not take the view of the Congress. So that with that influence in the federated Legislature I am not afraid in the slightest degree of anything that may happen, even if Congress managed to get the largest proportion of votes."

In the more recent period the advance of the national democratic movement began more and more powerfully to sweep past the rotten barriers of the puppet States. The States Peoples' Conference, which organised the popular movement in the States, rapidly grew in strength. Active struggles for elementary civil rights developed in a whole series of States.

This advance of the popular movement in the States was also reflected in changes in the policy of the National Congress. In the past the National Congress refrained from taking up directly agitation and activity in the Indian States. The policy of "non-interference" was deliberately followed, in the alleged hope of attaining some kind of solidarity with the puppet Princes instead of with the 80 million Indians oppressed under them. "Up to now", Gandhi declared at the Round Table Conference, "the Congress has endeavoured to serve the Princes by refraining from any interference in their domestic and internal affairs." And again: "I feel and I know that they have the interests of their subjects at heart. There is no difference between them and me, except that we are common people and they are, God has made them, noblemen, princes. I wish them well; I wish them all prosperity."

This disastrous policy was defeated by events. The Congress voluntarily limited its own jurisdiction to British India, and, although claiming to be an All-India national body, did not attempt to set up any parallel organisation under its leadership in the Indian States. But the violent repression conducted in the recent period by the Princes, including in the so-called most "progressive" States, like Travancore and Mysore, against the most elementary beginnings of a popular movement or sympathy with the national cause, aroused ardent demands that the National Movement should awaken and take up the fight. The question of the support of the civil disobedience movement in the States became a burning issue in the National Congress.

The Haripura Session of the National Congress in 1938 had declared the general principles of Congress policy in relation to the States:

> "The Congress stands for the same political, social and economic freedom in the States as in the rest of India and considers the States as an integral part of India which cannot be separated. The Purna Swaraj or complete independence which is the objective of Congress is for the whole of India, inclusive of the States, for the integrity and unity of India must be maintained in freedom as it has been maintained in subjection.
>
> "The only kind of federation that can be acceptable to Congress is one in which the States participate as free units enjoying the same measure of democracy and freedom as in the rest of India.
>
> "The Congress therefore stands for full responsible Government and the guarantee of civil liberties in the States and deplores the present backward conditions and utter lack of freedom and suppression of civil liberties in many of the States."

At the same time the Haripura resolution laid down a measure of self-limitation of Congress activity in the States:

> "The internal struggle of the people in the States must not be made in the name of the Congress. For this purpose independent organisations should be started and continued, where they exist already in the States."

By 1939 the Tripuri Session of the Congress partially revised this position:

> "The Congress is of the opinion that the resolution of the Haripura Session of the Congress relating to the States, has answered the expectations raised by it, and has justified itself by encouraging the people of the States to organise themselves and conduct their own movements for freedom. The Haripura policy was conceived in the best interests of the people in order to enable them to develop self-reliance and strength. This policy was dictated by the circumstances but it was never conceived as an obligation. The Congress has always possessed the right, as it is its duty, to guide the people of the States and lend them its influence. The great awakening that is taking place among the people may lead to

a relaxation or a complete removal of the restraint which the Congress has imposed upon itself, thus resulting in the ever increasing identification of the Congress with the States peoples."

Pursuant to this policy, national leaders took an active part in the States peoples' movements. The Ludhiana Session of the All-India States Peoples' Conference was held in February 1939 and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected as President and Pattabhi Sitaramayya as Vice-President. The Conference welcomed the progress made by the States people in their struggle for "responsible Government" and declared that :

"the time has come when this struggle should be coordinated with the wider struggle for Indian independence of which it is an integral part. Such an integrated all-India struggle must necessarily be carried on under the guidance of the Congress."

After the war, the All-India States Peoples' Conference met in Udaipur in December 1945 and adopted the goal of "attainment by peaceful and legitimate means of full responsible Government by the people of the States as an integral part of a free and Federated India". Nehru declared in his Presidential address :

"It is inevitable that the vast majority of States which cannot possibly form economic units, should be absorbed into neighbouring areas.... The rulers of such small States may be given some kind of pensions and may be further encouraged to serve in a different capacity if they are fit enough for this.

"Of other States, which may be fifteen to twenty in number and which will form autonomous units in the Federation, the Rulers *can remain as constitutional heads* under a democratic system of Government. Some of these Princes and Rulers belong to ancient Houses intimately connected with history and tradition."

This policy of compromise with the Princes placed the Congress leadership in opposition to the popular movement of revolt against princely rule which developed with overwhelming force in the revolutionary upsurge following the second world war. During these years the Indian States became storm-centres of the Indian political situation. Spontaneous struggles against feudal autocracy in the States

developed, and were met with the most violent repression, the high water mark being reached with the struggle of the people of Kashmir in 1946 against the Dogra dynasty under the clear and categorical slogan "Quit Kashmir".

In the Mountbatten Settlement of 1947 the Princes were placed in a specially privileged position. The doctrine of paramountcy was declared to have lapsed, so that the supposed transfer of power to the new Dominion Governments did not include transfer of control of the Princes. The Princes became in juridical form sovereign independent States, with perfect liberty to enter or not enter the new Dominions on their own terms. This formal independence could not in practice be maintained. Within a year all the States had acceded, on the basis of agreements negotiated by their rulers, to one or the other Dominion, with the exception of Hyderabad, which finally acceeded to the Indian Union after military operations; a conflict also continued between the two Dominions with regard to Kashmir. The majority of the smaller States were grouped together to compose larger units (a plan which had been already projected by iperialism); but the structure of the States as a special sector covering two-fifths of India, and cutting across all natural and national boundaries, remained, and the integrity of the major States was maintained.

Thus the Dominion Governments completed the policy of compromise with the Princes, and of maintaining the Princes at the head of their States, under cover of a facade of constitutional reforms. In a speech on March 16, 1948, V. P. Menon, Secretary to the States Ministry, outlining the policy adopted "to retain the Princely Order, functioning as Constitutional Rulers", declared:

> "Though the overwhelming majority of the people desired the Rulers to be eliminated, the States Ministry under Sardar Patel, guided by Gandhi's views, had agreed to accord to the Rulers this status."

In a further Press statement on March 28 he reiterated that there was no intention to "exterminate" the Princes, adding that in fact, should any of them die childless, the title would not be allowed to lapse, and that in such a case a relative, or a citizen of the State or Dominion distinguished by public service, would be "raised to the peerage". Thus the Princes were not only to be accepted as a temporary concession, they were to be maintained in perpetuity.

Such a policy runs completely counter to the necessities of democratic development in India.

The future of democracy in India requires ending once for all of the anomalous position of the Princes and of the arbitrary structure of the States. The Indian States can have no place in a free India. The maintenance of a separate sector of the Princes corresponds to no natural line of division, to no historic necessity and to no need or sentiment of the people but is an administrative manoeuvre of imperialism to hold the people divided. For the national movement, the only aim can be the establishment of democracy throughout India, with equal rights and equal citizenship.

The complete abolition of the Indian States, the wiping out of the relics of feudal oppression and the unification of the Indian people in a real Federation, based on the natural geographical-economic-cultural divisions and groupings of the people, is vital for the unity of the Indian nation, for the progressive development of India and for the realisation of democracy in India.

2. COMMUNAL DIVISIONS

The policy of division of the Indian people through the instrument of the Princes is closely paralleled by the policy in relation to the Hindus and Moslems.

It is necessary here to distinguish between the general question of communal divisions and the special political forms which this question has assumed in the recent period with the formation of the Dominion of Pakistan. The latter raises important political questions which will be considered in the next section; but it is first necessary to have some idea of the general problem of communal and especially Hindu-Moslem antagonism.

The type of question here arising, known as the "communal" problem or question of the relations between the different religious "communities", mainly the Hindus, representing nearly two-thirds of the population, the Moslems, representing nearly one-fourth of the population, and other minor religious groupings, totalling one-tenth of the population, has special features in India, and is a serious issue for the national movement. But it is by no means a type of question peculiar to India.

Under certain conditions the mingling of diverse races or religions in a single country can give rise to acute difficulties,

sometimes even riots and bloodshed. Orangemen and Catholics in Northern Ireland; Arabs and Jews in Palestine under the Mandate; Slavs and Jews in Tsarist Russia; so-called "Aryans" and Jews in Nazi Germany; these are familiar issues of the twentieth-century world, without needing to go back to earlier examples. Anti-semitism in Europe is to-day the sharpest expression of this type of racial-religious divisions and antagonism.

Historical experience makes it possible to define very precisely the conditions under which this type of problem arises.

In Palestine before the British Mandate, Arabs and Jews lived peacefully together for centuries. Since British rule was established, violent conflicts continuously grew and developed to the point of open war, with imperialist intrigues assisting now one side and now the other to maintain division and prevent common co-operation against imperialism.

In Tsarist Russia, especially during the later years of the decline and impending fall of Tsarism, pogroms of the Jews blackened the pages of its history and sickened the conscience of the world. These pogroms were widely regarded as uncontrollable outbreaks of the ignorant and savage Russian masses. Only the subsequent publication of the secret-police records, finally proved what had long been a matter of accusation, and had been sufficiently visible from the peculiar relations of the Government with the "Black Hundreds" or hooligan "patriotic" organisation, that the pogroms were directly inspired, initiated and controlled by the Government. From the day that the Russian people won power over their own country, the pogroms completely ceased. In the Union of Soviet Republics the most diverse races and religions live happily together.

In Germany under the Weimar Republic Germans and Jews lived peacefully together. Under Nazi Germany the pogrom regime transferred its old base from Tsarist Russia to Central Europe.

There is thus no natural inevitable difficulty from the cohabitation of differing races or religions in one country. The difficulties arise from social-political conditions. They arise, in particular, wherever a reactionary regime is endeavouring to maintain itself against the popular movement. They are the surest sign of the impending downfall of a regime.

In India we are confronted with a similar type of problem.

There are in India (1941 Census) over 254 million Hindus, representing 65.93 per cent of the population, of whom 190 millions are in British India, where they are 64.5 per cent of the population, and 65 millions (70.57 per cent of the States population) are in the States. There are 92 million Moslems or 23.81 per cent of the population of whom the proportions in British India are 79 millions or 26.84 per cent and in the States over 12 millions or 13.93 per cent.

Prior to British rule there is no trace of the type of Hindu-Moslem conflicts associated with British rule, and especially with the latest period of British rule. There were wars between States which might have Hindu or Moslem rulers; but these wars at no time took on the character of a Hindu-Moslem antagonism. Moslem rulers employed Hindus freely in the highest position, and vice versa.

The survival of this traditional character of pre-British India may still be traced in the Indian States, where the Simon Report had occasion to refer to "the comparative absence of communal strife in the Indian States to-day". Where communal strife has since been reported from Indian States in certain cases, as in Kashmir in 1931-32, this has commonly been a misdescription of an entirely different struggle unconnected with communal questions; thus in Kashmir the issue was that of a popular rising of a four-fifths Moslem population against a ruler who happened to be Hindu; this was misreported as a communal rising, although the British Press was compelled to admit that "paradoxical position" of "a 'communal rebellion' in which not a single Hindu has been killed" (*Daily Telegraph*, February 8, 1932). In fact, however, as the popular movement begins to extend and grow in strength in the Indian States, the familiar methods of reactionary division of the people have begun to show themselves also in the Indian States.

The Simon Report, as we have seen, in dealing with the Hindu-Moslem antagonism, had to refer to two peculiar facts: first, its predominance in directly ruled British territory and comparative absence in the Indian States, although the intermingling of populations occurs equally in both, and the boundaries between the two are purely administrative; second, to the fact that in British territory it has grown in the recent period and that "in British India a generation ago..., communal tension as a threat to civil peace was at a mini-

mum". *Communal strife is thus a special product of British rule, and, in particular, of the latest period of British rule, or of the declining imperialist ascendancy.*

The suggestion that British rule holds the primary responsibility (which is not to say that there are not also other responsibilities, as we shall see) for promoting communal strife in India commonly arouses shocked indignation in official quarters. Yet the facts are inescapable, alike in the testimony of witnesses and in the historical record. The shocked indignation is no argument; for imperialism is far from being Cæsar's wife; and the records of imperialist duplicity are far too abundant for world opinion to be convinced by sanctimonious posing in denial of obvious facts.

In the earlier period the principle of "Divide and Rule" used to be more openly proclaimed than in the more careful later days. As far back as 1821, a British officer writing under the name of "Carnaticus" in the *Asiatic Review* of May, 1821, was declaring that "*Divide et impera* should be the motto of our Indian administration, whether political, civil or military". Lieutenant-Colonel Coke, Commandant of Moradabad, laid down the principle in the middle of the nineteenth century:

> "Our endeavour should be to uphold in full force the (for us fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races, not to endeavour to amalgamate them. *Divide et impera* should be the principle of Indian government."[1]

In 1888, Sir John Strachey, leading authority on India, wrote:

> "The truth plainly is that the existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political position in India."[2]
>
> *(Sir John Strachey, "India", 1888, p. 255.)*

Gandhi has related how Hume, the joint founder of the Congress, frankly confessed to him that the British Government was "sustained by the policy of Divide and Rule" (quoted in J. T. Sunderland's "India in Bondage", p. 232).

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[1] Quoted in B. D. Basu, "Consolidation of the Christian Power in India," p. 74.

[2] In a subsequent edition of his book Sir John Strachey endeavoured to revise this too plain statement, but with indifferent success. The new version declared:

> "Nothing could be more opposed to the policy and universal practice of our Government in India than the old

In 1910 J. Ramsay MacDonald wrote with reference to the foundation of the Moslem League:

> "The All-India Moslem League was formed on December 30, 1906. The political successes which have rewarded the efforts of the League. . . have been so signal as to give support to a suspicion that sinister influences have been at work, that the Mohammedan leaders were inspired by certain Anglo-Indian officials, and that these officials pulled wires at Simla and in London and of malice aforethought sowed discord between the Hindu and the Mohammedan communities by showing the Mohammedans special favour."
>
> *(J. R. MacDonald, "The Awakening of India," 1910, pp. 283-4.)*

Subsequent evidence has become available which has more than confirmed the "suspicion".

In 1926 Lord Olivier, after he had held office as Secretary of State for India, and had had access to all the records, wrote in a letter to *The Times:*

> "No one with a close acquaintance with Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that on the whole there is a predominant bias in British officialism in India in favour of the Moslem community, partly on the ground of closer sympathy, but more largely as a makeweight against Hindu nationalism."
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> *(Lord Olivier, letter in "The Times", July 10, 1926.)*

In more recent times the same basic outlook has been expressed in a more subtle form. Thus *The Times* wrote in 1941:

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maxim of divide and rule; the maintenance of peace among all classes has always been recognised as one of the most essential duties of our 'belligerent civilisation'; but this need not blind us to the fact that the existence side by side of these hostile elements is one of the strong points in our political position in India. The better classes of Mohammedans are a source to us of strength and not of weakness. They constitute a comparatively small but energetic minority of the population, whose political interests are identical with ours, and who, under no conceivable circumstances, would prefer Hindu dominion to our own." (Sir John Strachey, "India", 1894, p. 241.)

The comparison of these two versions—"the plain truth" and the diplomatic correction—is instructive for the growth of imperialist apologetics. No less instructive is the fact that, behind the slightly more diplomatic form and patently hypocritical expression, the policy remains unchanged.

"To emphasise the essential importance of Hindu-Moslem agreement does not imply that the British are pursuing a policy of 'divide and rule'. *The divisions exist and British rule is certain as long as they do.*"

("The Times", Jan. 21, 1941.)

The evidence for the official policy is thus based on very authoritative statements of leading official representatives.

It is in the modern period, however, that this general policy has been turned into an administrative system. Parallel with the advance of the national struggle and the successive stages of constitutional reforms has gone the process of promoting communal divisions through the peculiar electoral system adopted in connection with the reforms. This new departure was initiated in 1906—that is, exactly at the time of the first wave of national unrest and advance.

In order to understand the background of this development it is necessary to recognise the seeds of social-economic rivalry which affect, not the Hindu and Moslem masses, but the rising middle class. The growth of trade, commerce and education had begun much earlier in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, that is, in the Hindu-majority areas, than in the Moslem areas of the North. The Hunter Commission Report in 1882 found that the Moslem average in University education was only 3.65 per cent. To this day the percentage of literacy is considerably higher among the Hindus than among the Moslems. Hence, with the rise of the Indian bourgeoisie conditions of sectional rivalry existed which could easily assume a communal guise. The great landlords who formed the main basis of the Moslem upper class, viewing with displeasure the advance of the trading and industrial bourgeoisie, regarded that advance as "Hindu"—the menace of the "Hindu bania" etc. In the rising middle class a basis for communal antagonism existed in the conflict between rival trading groups, with the greater backwardness of the Moslem sections; in the competition for administrative posts, based on educational qualifications, where the Moslems found themselves at a disadvantage; and, as the beginnings of representative institutions began to develop, in the restricted electoral qualifications, based on property and education, which weighted the balance against the Moslems and stimulated the demand for separate representation. This was the soil which made it easy for official policy to play on the latent antagonisms and build upon them a whole political system.

Already as far back as 1890 a Moslem group under the leadership of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, close to the Government, had made proposals for special privileges and places for Moslems. The project was, however, opposed by responsible Moslem opinion; the *Moslem Herald* condemned it as something sure to "poison the social life of districts and villages and make a hell of India." Nothing more was heard of the project at the time.

In 1906, however the British Government, in face of the first widespread popular national movement in India, took the responsibility of inaugurating a policy which was indeed destined to "poison the social life of districts and villages and make a hell of India". A Moslem deputation presented themselves to the Viceroy and demanded separate and privileged representation in any electoral system that might be set up. The Viceroy, Lord Minto, immediately announced his acceptance of the demand:

> "You justly claim that your position should be estimated, not merely on your numerical strength, but in respect to the political importance of your community and the service that it has rendered to the Empire. I am entirely in accord with you."
>
> *(Lord Minto, speech to Moslem deputation in 1906; "Life of Lord Minto", by John Buchan, 1925, p. 244.)*

It was subsequently revealed by the Moslem leader, Mohamed Ali, in the course of his Presidential Address to the 1923 National Congress that this Moslem deputation was "a command performance", arranged by the Government. That the scheme originated with the Government authorities was indicated by Lord Morley's letter to Lord Minto at the end of 1906:

> "I won't follow you again into our Mahometan dispute. Only I respectfully remind you once more that it was *your* early speech about their extra claims that first started the M. (Moslem) hare."
>
> *(Lord Morley, letter to Lord Minto, December 6, 1909: Morley, "Recollections", Vol. II. p. 325.)*

In this way the system of communal electorates and representation was inaugurated, striking at the roots of any democratic electoral system. To imagine a parallel it would be necessary to imagine that in Northern Ireland Catholics and Protestants should be placed on separate electoral registers and given separate representation, so that the members re-

turned should be members, not even with any formal obligation to the electorate as a whole, but members for the Catholics and members for the Protestants. It would be difficult to imagine a device more calculated to promote separatist communal organisation and antagonism. And, indeed, the organisation of the separate Moslem League dates from December, 1906.

The plea has been put forward that such separate electorates and representation were indispensable in order to prevent the Moslems being swamped by the Hindu majority. The falsity of this plea was sufficiently shown in the local government elections in the same period, where these were still conducted on the old basis of joint electorates. Thus in the United Provinces in 1910 the joint electorates, with the Moslems forming but one-seventh part of the population, returned 189 Moslems and 445 Hindus to the District Boards, and 310 Moslems and 562 Hindus to the Municipalities.

The purpose of driving a wedge between the two communities was most sharply shown, not only by the establishment of separate electorates and representation, but by giving specially privileged representations to the Moslems. A most elaborate system of weighting was devised. Thus, to become an elector under the Morley-Minto Reforms, the Moslem had to pay income tax on an income of 3,000 rupees a year, the non-Moslem on an income of 300,000 rupees; or the Moslem graduate was required to have three years' standing, the non-Moslem to have thirty years' standing. The volume of representation showed a similar method of weighting. By this means it was hoped to secure the support of a privileged minority, and to turn the anger of the majority against the privileged minority, instead of against the Government.

This system was successfully extended and elaborated in the subsequent constitutional schemes and reached the climax in the 1935 Constitution—the governing Constitution still at present (1946) under which the methods of indirect election for the proposed Constituent Assembly to prepare a new Constitution have been devised. By the 1935 Act separate representation was provided, not only for the Moslems, but for the Sikhs, the Anglo-Indians, the Indian Christians, and the Depressed Classes, as well as for Europeans, Landholders, Commerce and Industry, etc. In the Federal Assembly, out of 250 seats, 82, or one-third, were reserved for the Moslems, representing under one-fourth of the population, while the

"general seats" for the overwhelming majority of the population were cut down to 105 or two-fifths, and out of these 19 were reserved for the "scheduled castes" (depressed classes). Such was the apothesis of electoral gerrymandering devised by imperialism.

The effect of this electoral policy, expressing a corresponding policy in the whole administrative field, was to give the sharpest possible stimulus to communal antagonism.

Behind the communal antagonisms, which have been promoted to protect the system of exploitation and imperialist rule, lie social and economic questions. This is obvious in the case of the middle-class communalist competing for positions and jobs. It is no less true where communal difficulties reach the masses. In Bengal and the Punjab the Hindus include the richer landlord, trading and moneylending interests; the Moslems are more often the poorer peasants and debtors. In other cases big Moslem landlords will be found among Hindu peasants. Again and again what is reported as a "communal" struggle or rising conceals a struggle of Moslem peasants against Hindu landlords, Moslem debtors against Hindu moneylenders, or Hindu workers against imported Pathan strike-breakers. No less significant is the sinister appearance of communal riots (fomented by unknown hands) followed by police firing and deaths, in any industrial centre where the workers have achieved an advance, as in Bombay in 1929 after the great strike movement, or in Cawnpore in 1939 after the great strike victory of 1938. The weapon

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[1] It is worth noting that the Indian Christian leaders have strongly protested against the system of separate electorates which has been imposed on them by the Government for its own purposes and not to meet their wishes. Thus the Presidential Address of the All-India Christian Conference in 1938 declared:

> "My greatest objection to separate electorates is that it prevents us from coming into close contact with other communities. Under the guidance of our old leaders, some of whom have left us, we as a community have always opposed special electorates which were forced on us against our wishes. The existing system of communal electorates has turned India into a house divided against itself. My predecessors have pointed out year after year to what extent our community has been a loser by the adoption of this system of separate electorates. I think it desirable that we should go on appealing repeatedly to the leaders of all communities to put forth strenuous and united efforts to remove this blot on the fair name of the country at the very next opportunity."
>
> *(Dr. H. C. Mukherjee, President of the All-India Christian Conference, Madras, December 1938.)*

of reaction, and its social economic purpose to break the solidarity of the workers is visible.[1]

The Hindu and Moslem masses in India have not and cannot have different objectives. There is no such thing as a separate Moslem poverty and servitude and a Hindu poverty and servitude, but an Indian poverty and servitude. In the hundreds of thousands of Indian villages, the overwhelming majority of Hindus and Moslems live under the same burdens of landlordism, the same exactions of moneylenders, under the same grinding imperialism, and the attempt to promote divisions between them is only the attempt to protect this system of exploitation.

The final solution of the communal question lies along the lines of social and economic advance. In the trade unions and the peasant unions, Hindus and Moslems unite without distinction or difference (and without feeling the need of separate electorate); and common bonds of class solidarity, of common social and economic needs destroy the artificial barriers of communal as of caste divisions. Herein lies the final positive path to the solution of the communal question. Communal antagonisms will only be finally and completely overcome by the advance of the mass movement on the basis of the interests of the masses and by the advance of the general democratic movement.

The attempted artificial division of the Indian people into two "nations" on the basis of religion is in reality reactionary,

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[1] The connivance of the official authorities in relation to communal riots was noted by the Cawnpore Riots Enquiry Committee in 1931:

> "Every class of witness....agreed in this one respect that the police showed indifference and inactivity in dealing with various incidents in the riot. These witnesses include European business men, Moslems and Hindus of all shades of opinion, military officers, the Secretary of the Upper India Chamber of Commerce, representatives of the Indian Christian Community, and even Indian officials. It is impossible to ignore such unanimity of evidence....There is no doubt in our mind that during the first three days of the riot the police did not show that activity in the discharge of their duty which was expected of them....A number of witnesses have cited instances of serious crimes being committed within view of the police without their active interest being aroused....We are told by a number of witnesses and the District Magistrate also has said so in his evidence, that complaints about the indifference and inactivity of the police were made at the time. It is to be regretted that no serious notice was taken of these complaints.
>
> *(Cawnpore Riots Report, 1931, p. 89.)*

unpractical and contrary to the interests of democratic liberty. The fundamental policy of the national movement as laid down in the Declaration of Rights adopted by the National Congress in 1931 was correctly based on the foundation of equal democratic citizenship without distinction of caste, creed or sex, with cultural protection for all minorities and with freedom of conscience.

But at the same time a complete democratic solution requires to take into account the newly emerging questions of regional or national claims to autonomy or self-determination, which in the recent period become temporarily confused and entangled with the Hindu-Moslem issue. These questions are reflected in the modern growth of the Moslem League to a mass organisation and the emergence of the demand for a separate State of Pakistan, culminating in the partition of India by the Mountbatten Award and the formation of the Dominion of Pakistan. The problems here involved require separate examination.

3. MULTI-NATIONALISM AND PAKISTAN

Before coming to the latest questions of multi-nationalism and Pakistan, it will be necessary to examine shortly the background of the development of the Moslem League and of Congress-League relations.

The Moslem League was founded in December, 1906. As in the case of the original foundation of the National Congress, British official policy played a considerable part also in the foundation of the Moslem League. British official quarters hoped that alongside the institution of communal electorates, the foundation of a separate communal political organisation for Moslems would serve to disrupt the national movement and weaken the rising strength of the Congress. In the words of a British official reporting to the Viceroy, Lord Minto at the time:

> "I must send your Excellency a line to say that a very, very big thing has happened today. A work of statesmanship that will affect India and Indian history for many a long year. It is nothing less than the pulling back of 62 millions of people (Moslems) from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition (Congress)."
>
> *(Lady Minto, "India, Minto and Morley," 1934, p. 47.)*

Lady Minto adds that very much the same view was taken at Whitehall.

During its early years the Moslem League was a narrow communal organisation, appealing primarily to the upper-class Moslem landowners. But as in the case of the Congress, the currents of national anti-imperialist feeling soon began to make themselves felt also within the Moslem League. By 1913 the Moslem League had adopted the aim of "self-government within the Empire" for India and "co-operation with other communities" for this object. Negotiations between the Congress and the Moslem League were opened, and by 1916 the Lucknow Pact of Congress-League unity was signed. This Pact, while accepting the system of separate electorates, proclaimed the common aim of Dominion Status to be striven for by both organisations.

A joint session of the Congress and the League was held at Lucknow. At the Congress session the veteran leader Tilak declared:

> "It has been said, gentlemen, by some that we Hindus have yielded too much to our Mohammedan brethren. I am sure I represent the sense of the Hindu community all over India when I say that we could not have yielded too much....when we have to fight against a third party, it is a very great thing, a very important event, that we stand on this platform united, united in race, united in religion, united as regards all different shades of political creed."

Similarly the League leader, M. A. Jinnah, who had been most active in promoting Congress-League unity, presiding over the League session declared:

> "I have been a staunch Congressman throughout my life and have been no lover of sectarian cries. But it appears to me that the reproach of separatism sometimes levelled at the Mussalmans is singularly inept and wide of the mark when I see this great communal organisation rapidly growing into a powerful factor for the birth of a united India."

In the stormy upsurge following the first world war, the bonds of Hindu-Muslim unity were forged still closer. The alliance of the Congress led by Gandhi and the Khilafat Committee of the militant Moslem leaders with the Ali brothers in the forefront, developed a powerful joint front of struggle

against the Government for the aim of Swaraj. Enthusiastic crowds demonstrated in the streets hailing Hindu-Moslem unity. The official Government Report for 1919 was compelled to record the "unprecedented fraternisation between the Hindus and Moslems.... extraordinary scenes of fraternisation."

During this great period of national upsurge the Moslem leaders and masses proved their militancy alongside the Congress. The Moslem leaders, the Ali brothers and Hussein Ahmed Madani boldly preached sedition to the army and were sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment for it. The Moplah peasants of Malabar, rising spontaneously against landlord and imperialist oppression, battled fearlessly, showing marvellous heroism and capacity for struggle and sacrifice.

The Khilafat leaders were the first to demand that Swaraj be defined as complete independence. It was at Ahmedabad in 1921, that Maulana Hasrat Mohani made this demand. It is worth noting that it was Gandhi who led the opposition to it, saying that "the demand has grieved me because it shows a lack of responsibility."

Similarly the Moslem League at its Amritsar Session as early as 1919 passed a resolution calling on the Moslems in India not to join the Indian army.

In June 1922 a joint session of the Khilafat and the Jamiat-ul-Ulema at Lucknow passed a resolution that the best interests of India and the Moslems demand that in the Congress creed the term "Swaraj" be substituted henceforth by the term "complete independence".

Unfortunately the Congress leadership in those days opposed this proposal on the ground that it involved a "fundamental change in the Congress constitution."

The unity achieved in the Congress-Khilafat struggle was not maintained. The abrupt calling off of the struggle by the Congress under Gandhi's leadership led to a rift. When Gandhi called off the Non-co-operation movement in February, 1922, all the Khilafat leaders protested against this abandonment of the struggle.

The subsequent period of frustration opened the way for the renewal of Congress-League separation and Hindu-Moslem antagonism. The imperialists utilised this favourable development to the full. In the succeeding years formidable communal riots replaced the previous united mass struggle for freedom. Communal reaction came to the forefront. In

opposition to the Moslem League, the Hindu Mahasabha was organised on an all-India basis in 1925 under the presidency of Lajpat Rai. The National Congress and the Moslem League united in boycotting the Simon Commission in 1927; but renewed attempts to reach an agreement in the All-Parties' Conference of 1928 ended in failure.

Thus, the 1937 elections, the first elections under a relatively wider franchise for the Provincial Assemblies under the new Constitution of 1935, found the Congress and the Moslem League in full opposition. The Congress won an overwhelming majority in the general seats and nearly half the total of all the seats in the Provincial lower houses (711 out of 1,585 seats) but made little headway in Moslem seats, contesting only 58 of the 482 Moslem seats and winning 26 (15 in the North-West Frontier Province and only 11 in all the rest of the country). On the other hand owing to the sharp division among different sections and groups, the Moslem League made a very poor show and won only 4.6 per cent of the total Moslem votes (total Moslem votes 7,319,445: Moslem League votes 321,772).

Following the 1937 elections the Moslem leadership made unofficial approaches to the leadership of the Congress for an agreement in relation to the Provincial ministries to be formed and the allocation of seats. The Congress, however, at this point felt in a strong position to reject the Moslem League approach, repudiate its claims to any political role and establish the claim of the Congress to represent the Indian nation as a whole. In a letter to Jinnah in January 1937 Nehru declared:

> "In the final analysis there are only two forces in India to-day—British imperialism and the Congress representing Indian nationalism....the Moslem League represents a group of Moslems, no doubt highly estimable persons, but functioning in the higher regions of the upper-middle classes and having no common contact with the Moslem masses and few with the Moslem lower middle class."

From this stage conflict between the Congress and the Moslem League became increasingly sharp. The Moslem League under the skilful leadership of Jinnah set itself to strengthen its organisation, extend its basis of support among the Moslem masses and consolidate the various dissident Moslem groups and organisations so as to make the Moslem

League the main organisation of the Moslems in India. Nor was this policy without success. During the period 1937-45 a decisive change took place in the position and relative strength of the Moslem League as it won increasing mass support among the Moslems. The membership of the Moslem League which had only totalled 1,330 by 1927 increased in 1938, according to its claim, to hundreds of thousands, and by 1944 to an officially claimed figure of some 2 millions. The 1946 elections reveal the changed position. In the Central and Provincial Legislative Assembly elections the Moslem League won 460 out of the 533 Moslem seats. There can be no doubt that during this period the Moslem League had established its position as the major political organisation among the Moslems in India.

What were the reasons which led to the mass growth in the following of the Moslem League during this period? Several factors may be discerned.

First, the political ferment of the past decade had drawn new masses, including previously backward sections, into the first forms of political consciousness. Both the Congress and the Moslem League grew rapidly in strength during this period. Between 1935-36 and 1938-39 the Congress membership multiplied ninefold to 4.4 millions. But only a small proportion of these were Moslems. In January, 1938, according to a press statement issued by Nehru, out of 3.1 million members of the Congress only 100,000 or 3.2 per cent were Moslems. The overwhelming majority of the newly awakened sections of the Moslems turned to the Moslem League as their political organisation.

Second, within the Moslem League there developed a younger, radical section, pressing forward a democratic programme against the resistance of the older reactionary leadership on top. In certain districts and provinces, as in the Punjab and Bengal, these younger sections conducted an active campaign for social and economic mass issues, winning mass support among the poorer Moslems. The success of this policy was demonstrated in the 1946 elections in the Punjab, with the collapse of the old previously dominant Unionist Party before the assault of the Moslem League.

Third, this mass growth of the Moslem League and poor representation of the Moslems in the Congress undoubtedly also reflected certain political, organisational and tactical weaknesses in the Congress approach. It had been the original aim of the Congress to include equally Hindus and

Moslems. But in practice this aim was never realised in the proportions of membership won. We have already seen how the abandonment of the mass Non-co-operation movement in 1922 at the height of the struggle dealt a blow to the unity which had been forged in the Congress-Khilafat alliance. In the period of the Congress provincial ministries the rejection of the Moslem League offer for an agreement represented an underestimation of its strength on the part of the Congress and provided a lever for the subsequent intense anti-Congress agitation of the League. In the complex situation during the war and immediately preceding it, the degree of confusion, conflicting trends and vacillation of the political leadership of the Congress during this period (election of Bose as President and expulsion of Bose; passivity during the imperialist phase of the war; policy of neither helping nor opposing the war effort; individual satyagraha; the ill-starred August Resolution at the moment of the Japanese advance, followed by arrest of the leadership; difficult conditions of illegality, and sporadic disorders, disclaimed at the time by the leadership and subsequently acclaimed as a national struggle) and neglect of leadership in the war conditions of economic difficulty and famine, led to a measure of political disorganisation and demoralisation during the later stages of the war, weakening the appeal of a united national movement during this period.

Above all, the growth of the Moslem League reflected the failure of the Congress to make any serious consistent effort to reach out and appeal to the Moslem masses. The complete contrast of the situation in the North-West Frontier Province where the Khudai Khidmatgars led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan conducted serious mass work among the Moslems and held them firmly for the Congress, illustrated this. The Moslem masses were not attracted by the undeniably strong Hindu religious flavour of much Congress propaganda, especially of the Right-wing leadership and Gandhi, despite the public non-communal platform of the Congress and the presence of outstanding patriotic Moslems in its ranks.

Here a serious share of responsibility has to be laid at the door of the dominant leadership of the national movement. We have already seen how, in the first great wave of national awakening in the pre-war years, the leaders of the militant national movement, Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose and others, sought to build on a basis of Hindu religion for their agitation and to identify the national awakening with a revival

of Hinduism. By this act they cut off the Moslem masses from the national movement, and opened the way to the Government's astute counter-move with the formation of the Moslem League in 1906.

Nor was this disastrous error confined to the Nationalists or so-called "Extremists" of the older period. It continued in the modern period, and was most prominent in the entire agitation and propaganda of Gandhi. In all Gandhi's propaganda the preaching of Hinduism and his religious conception and preaching of the general political aims were inextricably mixed. At the very height of the national Non-co-operation movement of 1920-22 when Gandhi stood as the leader of the united national movement and had the responsibility to make his every utterance as the leader of a united movement, he was publicly proclaiming himself "a Sanatanist Hindu" (a kind of extremist, as it were "ultra-montane" Hindu):

> "I call myself a Sanatani Hindu, because—
>
> 1) I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name Hindu scriptures, and therefore in avataras and re-birth.
> 2) I believe in the Varnashrama Dharma, in a sense in my opinion strictly Vedic, but not in its present popular and crude sense.
> 3) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular.
> 4) I do not disbelieve in idol-worship."
>
> *(Gandhi, in "Young India," October 12, 1921.)*

In order to understand what the term "Sanatanist" conveys to a wider public, it is sufficient to recall Nehru's description:

> "The Hindu Mahasabha is left far behind in this backward moving race by the Sanatanists, who combine religious obscurantism of an extreme type with fervent or at any rate loudly expressed loyalty to British rule."
>
> *(Jawaharlal Nehru, "Autobiography," p. 382.)*

Even when appealing for Hindu-Moslem unity, Gandhi made the appeal not as a national leader appealing to both sections, but as a Hindu leader: the Hindus were "we"; the Moslems were "they":

> "We shall have to go in for tapasya, for self-purification, if we want to win the hearts of Mussalmans."
>
> *(Gandhi, "Young India," September 1924.)*

At any moment throughout the modern national struggle Gandhi could pass from Congress politics to a Hindu reform movement (as in the crisis of the struggle in 1932-33) and vice versa.

Thus the chosen leader of the National Congress and its principal representative in the public eye, appeared throughout as the active leader of Hinduism and of Hindu revival. Is it any wonder that under these conditions (and while the principal crime in this respect has been that of Gandhi, the same methods have been characteristic of a host of lesser lights in the Congress camp, especially those belonging to the Gandhist inspiration and tendency), with such an officially recognised leadership and propaganda, the National Congress should be widely stigmatised, not only by enemy critics, but even by a considerable body of general opinion, as a "Hindu movement"? It spoke much for their national devotion that a select body of Moslem leaders faithfully stood by the Congress under these conditions. But these methods could not win a mass Moslem following.

The British Government, in its exploitation of communal divisions, undoubtedly used an infamous weapon against the people's movement. But Tilakism and Gandhism helped to place that weapon in its hands.

There was, however, a further special factor which needs to be recognised in the growth of the mass following of the Moslem League especially after the adoption of the programme of Pakistan from 1940 onwards. The programme of Pakistan, which it will be necessary to consider in detail later, originally called for the establishment of separate sovereign states in Moslem-majority regions in north-western and north-eastern India. Subsequently the demand was developed to a claim for a separate sovereign Moslem State in six provinces. There were very strong grounds for criticism of this programme. But the emergence of this programme to the political forefront during the most recent period, and the wide mass support which it won among Moslems in these regions, revealed that it was to some extent reflecting, in however confused a form, genuine mass sentiments and aspirations. Behind the programme of Pakistan and the mass support which it obtained could be discerned a new element appearing in Indian national life.

The wider mass expansion of the national movement was bringing to the surface new forms of national consciousness

reflecting the varying national elements of the Indian p
In the case of those national groups, especially in north
and north-east India where the Moslem religion had a p
minant position among the population, the slogan of Pak
to a certain extent reflected, although in a distorted form,
gathered up this newly developing national consciousn
This clearer emergence of the multi-national character of
Indian people, with the advance of the national movem
had been foreseen by Stalin when he wrote in 1912:

> "In the case of India, too, it will probably be found that innumerable nationalities, till then lying dormant, would come to life with the further course of bourgeois development."

Unity of the Indian people in their struggle for freedom against imperialism and the undeniably progressive aim of economic and political unity of a future free India does not mean that the Indian people must therefore be regarded as a single homogeneous whole. On the contrary, there are strong grounds for recognising the multi-national character of the Indian people. The National Congress had already partially recognised these groupings with its demarcation of the cultural, linguistic groups of the Indian people in place of the existing arbitrarily divided provinces and with its recognition of the fullest autonomy for these groupings in the Constitution of a future free India. But the Congress during this period stopped short of recognising the national character of these groupings and opposed the full right of self-determination.

It is, however, necessary to draw a sharp distinction between this question of the multi-national character of the Indian people and the programme of Pakistan as put forward by the Moslem League.

The demand for Pakistan (though not yet the name) was originally adopted by the Moslem League in 1940. Previously, when the proposal had been originally put forward by a few individuals during the thirties (the poet Iqbal in 1930 and some students at Cambridge in 1933) the political leaders of the Moslem League, in their evidence to the Joint Committee on Constitutional Reform in 1933, had rejected it as a "student's dream" and "chimerical and impracticable." As late as 1937 the annual session of the Moslem League proclaimed the aim of "the establishment in India of full inde-

pendence in the form of a federation of free democratic states". But the Lahore session of the Moslem League in 1940 adopted the resolution:

> "Resolved that it is the considered view of this session of the All-India Moslem League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Moslems unless it is designed on the following basic principles: viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into Regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Moslems are numerically in a majority as in the north-western and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign."

Subsequently this very vague resolution received sharper definition. In an interview on December 10, 1945 Jinnah defined the Moslem League claim in the following terms:

> "The deadlock in India is not so much between India and the British. It is between the Hindu Congress and the Moslem League....Nothing can or will be solved until Pakistan is granted....There will have to be not one, but two constitution-making bodies—one to frame and decide on the constitution of Hindustan and the other to frame and decide on the constitution of Pakistan.
>
> "We could settle the Indian problem in ten minutes if Mr. Gandhi would say: 'I agree that there should be Pakistan. I agree that one-fourth of India, composed of six provinces—Sind, Baluchistan, the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Bengal and Assam—with their present boundaries, should constitute the Pakistan State.'
>
> "It is possible there will have to be an exchange of populations if it can be done on a voluntary basis. There will also doubtless have to be frontier adjustments.... All that can come, but first it is necessary to take the present provincial borders as boundaries of the future Pakistan. Our Pakistan Government will probably be a Federal Government modelled on the lines of autonomous provinces.....
>
> "I personally do not doubt the sincerity of the British Government. But I do doubt the sincerity of those

who profess to see any hope of a settlement outside the granting of full Pakistan to the Moslems of India."

Finally the Moslem Legislators' Convention in April, 1946, defined Pakistan in the following terms:

> "That these zones comprising Bengal and Assam in the North-East and Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan in the North-West India, namely Pakistan zones where the Moslems are in a dominant majority be constituted into a sovereign independent State."

The theory of Pakistan was based on the conception of Hindus and Moslems as two "nations." Hindus and Moslems might be intermingled all over India and in every region of India; Hindus and Moslems might be members of a single family; but they were proclaimed to be two "nations." It is obvious that this attempt to base nationality on religion (together with the degree of common culture associated with religion) runs contrary to every accepted historical and international experience of the character of a nation. It would be as practical to regard the Catholics of Europe as a "nation". And indeed the logic of this argument would imply that, if the definition of a nationality coincides with being a Moslem, then all Moslems from North Africa to India would be a single "nation" and the theory of Pakistan would find its final completion in Pan-Islamism.

The teaching of Marxism on the question of what constitutes a nation was summarised by Stalin in the well-known definition in his "Marxism and the National and Colonial Question": "A nation is a historically evolved stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture." To this Stalin added the important negative point: "It must be emphasised that none of the above characteristics is by itself sufficient to define a nation. On the other hand it is sufficient for a single one of the characteristics to be absent and the nation ceases to be a nation."

By this test it is evident that the Moslems of India could not be called one "nation". Their languages are different, territories are different and cultures are different. Ethnically they are different. Between the Pathan and the Bengali Moslem, the only common feature is religion and some relics of old culture. But this is not sufficient to constitute a nation. The Jews in the old Russian empire inhabited different

territories and spoke different languages, Stalin refused to call them a nation on the following grounds:

> "If there is anything common to their life, it is their religion, common origin and certain relics of national character. All this is beyond question; but can it be seriously maintained that petrified religious rites and fading psychological relics affect the fate of these Jews more powerfully than the living social, economic and cultural environment that surrounds them?"

The question here involved is not a mere formal question of the definition of a nation. If it were merely a question of terminology, the controversy would be profitless. But the false starting-point of the attempt to base a nation on religion leads to a very serious political significance. Since in hard prosaic fact a nation can only exist on a definite territory, this theory created by political theorists and not sprung from the soil, resulted in the attempt artificially to carve out a territory for the supposed "nation". As soon as the geographical character of the original Pakistan demand of the Moslem League is examined, the weakness of this theory becomes manifest.

The six provinces designated to constitute Pakistan, "with their present boundaries" included a total population of 107 millions. Of these the Moslems constituted 59 millions or 55% and the non-Moslems 48 millions or 45%. Thus the non-Moslems would constitute nearly half of this Moslem State, while some 30 million Moslems, or nearly two-fifths of the Moslems in India would remain outside it. This illustrates the obvious limitations of any attempt to settle the communal question of the closely intermingled Hindu-Moslem population on the arbitrary territorial basis.

When the Dominion of Pakistan was established by the Mountbatten Award in 1947, the partition of India which it carried out involved also the partition of the Punjab and Bengal. Even so some 20 millions, or between one quarter and one-third of the new "Moslem State," were non-Moslems, while some 30 million Moslems, or nearly two-fifths of the total number of Moslems in the previous undivided territory outside the States, remained outside Pakistan. This situation gave rise to murderous conflicts and massacres on both sides of the new frontiers, and to mass migrations resulting in millions of refugees.

The partition of India into the Dominions of the Indian

Union and Pakistan was, therefore, in no sense a step forward of national liberation or national self-determination. Both States represented in fact a compromise of the national bourgeois leadership, in the one case, of the Congress, and in the other, of the Moslem League, with imperialism. The device of partition served to weaken and divide the democratic movement in India, to exacerbate communal antagonism throughout both Dominions, and to establish two satellite Governments weakened by mutual antagonism and competing for the favour of imperialism.

These considerations should not, however, blind us to the degree of genuine national content which lay concealed behind the original Pakistan demand. The wide measure of popular support won for the Pakistan demand, and expressed in acclamation of the establishment of the Pakistan Dominion, revealed, not only response to communal agitation or the distortion of social and economic issues of mass discontent into communal forms, but also the emergence of new forms of national consciousness with the wider mass development of the national movement. The issue of Pakistan brought to the forefront the necessity of recognising the national question within India in the general programme of Indian liberation.

Any final solution of this question will need to be along democratic lines. The democratic principle of self-determination recognises that, where there exists a clear national demand in a given territory for self-determination, that is, where the majority of the people of a given territory clearly demand separate political institutions on the ground of their distinctive national character and culture, then, provided this is geographically and economically possible, they have a right to such separate political institutions, since it would be indefensible to attempt to impose on them political institutions against their will. The consistent application of this democratic principle of self-determination offers the most fruitful lines for solving the multi-national problem of India and would provide the most favourable conditions for a voluntary Union. Such a solution would conform to that already demonstrated with signal success in the treatment of the national question within the multi-national Soviet Union.

The recognition of this principle would mean that every section of the Indian people which has a contiguous territory, has its common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological make-up and common economic life would

be recognised as having a just claim to play its part within a free India as a distinct nationality, with the right to exist as an autonomous state if it so wishes within the free Indian Union, or Federation (including the right to secede).

Thus, the free India of tomorrow might take the form of a federation or union of autonomous states of the various nationalities such as the Pathans, Punjabis, Sindhis, Hindustanis, Rajasthanis, Gujeratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Beharis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamils, Kannadigas, Maharashtrians, etc. Where there are interspersed minorities in the new states thus formed, their rights regarding their culture, language, education and so on would be guaranteed by statute and their infringement would be punishable by law. All disabilities, privileges, and discriminations based on caste, race or community would be abolished by statute and the infringement would be punishable by law.

The recognition of the right of self-determination, including secession, does not imply the desirability of separation. On the contrary, the interests of progressive democratic development in India powerfully require the unity of India. The unity of India is especially important for the most rapid advance of all its parts through common co-operation, and for adequate all-India economic planning and development and the raising of social standards. But the union needs to be a voluntary union.

This policy has been put forward by the Communist Party of India, originally in a resolution of 1942 which represented the first serious study of the new problems of the multi-national character of the Indian people, and more recently in the Memorandum submitted to the British Cabinet Mission in 1946:

> "The acute difference between the Congress and the League on the issue of Constituent Assembly can only be settled by the just application of the principle of self-determination.
>
> "We suggest that the provisional Government should be charged with the task of setting up a Boundaries Commission to redraw the boundaries on the basis of natural ancient homelands of every people, so that the redemarcated Provinces become as far as possible linguistically and culturally homogeneous National Units, e.g., Sind,

Pathanland, Baluchistan, Western Punjab, etc.[1] The people of each such unit should have the unfettered right of self-determination, i.e., the right to decide freely whether they join the Indian Union or form a separate sovereign state or another Indian Union.

"The elections to the Constituent Assembly should, therefore, be based on recognition of this fundamental right and during the elections the question of separation or union should be put by the political parties to the people. The delegates elected from each National Unit shall decide by a majority whether they will join the all-India Constituent Assembly to form an Indian Union or remain out and form a separate sovereign state by themselves or join another Indian Union.

"The Communist Party stands for a free voluntary democratic Indian Union of sovereign units. It is firmly convinced that the best interests of the Indian masses will be served by their remaining together in one common Union in a common brotherhood to defend the freedom and solve the problems of poverty which require the co-operation of all. It is only on the basis of the application of the principle of self-determination as indicated above that Indian unity can be preserved."

This line of approach offers the most favourable path towards a solution of these problems.

[1]The following is the comprehensive list of the National Units that will come into existence as suggested above and after the dissolution of the Indian States as contemplated: Tamilnad, Andhradesha, Kerala, Karnatak, Maharashtra, Gujerat, Rajasthan, Sind, Baluchistan, Pathanland, Kashmir, Punjab, Hindustan, Bihar, Assam, Bengal and Orissa.

Part V

IMPERIALISM AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

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Chapter XIV

CONSTITUTIONAL BATTLEGROUND

> "To propose that Great Britain should voluntarily give up all authority over her colonies and leave them to elect their own magistrates, to enact their own laws and to make peace and war as they might think proper, would be to propose such a measure as never has and never will be adopted by any nation in the world. No nation ever voluntarily gave up the dominion of any Province."—**Adam Smith, "Wealth of Nations", 1776, Part IV, chapter vii.**

OVER THE PAST HALF CENTURY, as the national liberation movement of the Indian people has swept forward with ever-increasing strength of mass support, shaking the foundations of imperialist power, so the successive political moves and manoeuvres of imperialism have developed to meet the changing conditions, head off and divide the rising movement by winning over its leadership, find allies among upper-class sections against the popular revolt, and thus maintain the essence of its domination and exploitation under new political forms.

This process of tenacious adaptation by imperialism, and of differentiation within the national movement, passing through an endless variety of forms and phases, has characterised the political and constitutional development in India during the past half century. It has found its expression in the long series of successive constitutional reforms, projects, plans and awards which have filled the record of modern imperialism in India, alongside the violent measures of repression. This developing series may be traced from the early timid Councils Acts of the later nineteenth century and the Morley-Minto Reforms of the first decade of the twentieth

century right down to the culminating outcome of the Mountbatten Award of 1947 and the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan which has been widely proclaimed as the fulfilment of Indian freedom.

Throughout this protracted development these successive constitutional reforms and awards have never constituted a solution of the Indian problem. Even the Mountbatten Award, which under conditions of extreme crisis represented the boldest departure and for the first time drew in the leadership of the Indian bourgeoisie as junior partners of imperialism, entrusting them with the responsibility of maintaining political rule over the Indian masses, at the same time as they were closely bound to imperialism in practice by economic and military ties, did not in reality break finally the continuity of the record, but represented rather the last of the long series of constitutional compromises between imperialism and sections of Indian upper-class interests, and not yet the realisation of Indian freedom.

These successive constitutional reforms and awards have thus represented, not landmarks of the Indian advance to freedom, but stages in the long battle of imperialism and Indian nationalism—a battle which has still to reach its conclusion. It is in the light of this basic historical understanding that these successive constitutional experiments and compromises need to be examined in greater detail.

I. IMPERIALISM AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

The suggestion is sometimes put forward in official apologetic quarters to-day that the real purpose of British rule in India has been to train the Indian people for self-government.

This was not the view of the early British rulers of India. Until the strength of the national movement for liberation forced the issue of self-government into the political arena, any possibility of such a development was rejected by British ruling opinion with contempt.

Not only Conservative opinion, but Liberal opinion right through the classic period of British supremacy concurred in this view. Macaulay declared in 1833:

> "In India you cannot have representative institutions. Of all the innumerable speculators who have offered their suggestions on Indian politics not a single

one, as far as I know, however democratical his opinion, has ever maintained the possibility of giving at the present time such institutions to India."

(T. B. Macaulay, speech in the House of Commons, July 10, 1833.)

John Stuart Mill, the accredited prophet of philosophic liberalism and champion of representative institutions, was no less emphatic in denying such institutions to India. In the same speech Macaulay quoted Mill's view:

"He (Mill) has written strongly—far too strongly, I think—in favour of pure democracy....But when he was asked before the Committee of last year whether he thought representative government practicable in India, his answer was: 'Utterly out of the question'!" *(Ibid.)*

A dialogue between Gladstone and Bright illustrates the bankruptcy of nineteenth-century liberalism before the problem of India:

"I have had a very long conversation with Bright this evening on India....He admits the difficulty of governing a people by a people—i.e. India by a pure Parliamentary Government."

(Gladstone, letter to Sir James Graham, April 23, 1858: "Life and Letters of Sir James Graham," Vol. II, p. 340.)

But there is no trace that to either of these leaders of nineteenth-century liberalism (and Bright performed important services with his agitation against misgovernment in India) the possibility of the solution occurred that the Indian people might govern themselves.

The standpoint of imperialism on the eve of the first world war was expressed in emphatic terms by Lord Cromer:

"To speak of self-government for India under conditions such as these is as if we were to advocate self-government for a united Europe...The idea is not only absurd; it is not only impracticable. I would go further and say that to entertain it would be a crime against civilisation, and especially against the voiceless millions in India whose interests are committed to our charge."

(Lord Cromer, "Ancient and Modern Imperialism", 1910, p. 123.)

No less definite was the expression of the Liberal Lord Morley in the same period, who, while introducing the constitutional reforms known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, was most insistent that they should not be regarded as in any sense preparing the way for parliamentary institutions:

> "If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or indirectly to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it."
>
> *(Lord Morley, speech in the House of Lords, December 17, 1908.)*

Such was the consistent standpoint of imperialism in relation to India up to 1917. If since 1917 a sudden change in expression appeared, and the "crime against civilisation" became the formally proclaimed aim, it is evident that this abrupt transformation in policy, or in professed policy, could by no means be derived from the original intentions, but could only be derived from the sharp impact of external events.

How far has a real change now taken place?

Or how far is the apparent change in policy and outlook since 1917 fundamentally a tactical adaptation to force of circumstances, with the basic aim of continued British supremacy still tenaciously held and by no means abandoned?

This is the question which it is now important to examine.

2. PRE-1917 REFORM POLICY

Up to the war the proclaimed aim of imperialism was the successively extended drawing of Indians into association in the imperialist administration machine. This aim, which is indispensable for the successful working of any imperialist system, (of the 1½ million in government service in India it was practically impossible for more than a fraction to be English), had been consistently proclaimed, and, with due caution to maintain hold of all strategic positions of control, continuously pursued for over a century. This aim should not be confused with the aim of self-government, which is in reality its contrary, and which up to 1917 was no less consistently repudiated. Confusion between these two aims has often led to a misleading picture of a supposed gradual advance towards the objective of responsible government.

The Charter of 1833 laid down:

> "No Indian by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them, shall be disabled from holding any place, office or any employment under the said Government."

The Court of Directors issued their interpretation of this clause:

> "The Court conceives this section to mean that there shall be no governing caste in British India; that, whatever other tests of qualification should be adopted, distinction of race or religion should not be of that number."

The Queen's Proclamation of 1858, which has been commonly presented as the starting point of a new policy, in reality only amplified the above:

> "It is our will that, so far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and imparitally admitted to office in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity duly to discharge."

These pledges or promises to India of complete equality and disappearance of distinction between rulers and ruled were not, of course, intended to be fulfilled in the broad sense in which they appeared to be made. Hence the famous words of Lord Lytton, Viceroy in 1876-80, in his "confidential" letter to the Secretary of State, Lord Cranbrook, about the policy of the British Government in India as being one of "breaking to the heart the words of promise they have uttered to the ear":

> "We all know that these claims and expectations never can or will be fulfilled. We had the choice between prohibiting them and cheating them, and we have chosen the least straightforward course...This I am writing confidentially, I do not hesitate to say that both the Government of England and of India appear to me up to the present moment unable to answer satisfactorily the charge of having taken every means in their power of breaking to the heart the words of promise they have uttered to the ear."

Lord Salisbury, in his downright fashion, characterised the British pledges to India as "political hypocrisy." (What Lord Salisbury would have had to say to the Baldwins, Lloyd

Georges, MacDonalds and Chamberlains of the present epoch would be an interesting speculation.)

The real aim, expressed in misleadingly flamboyant form in these pledges and proclamations of a bygone era (yet with their lesson for to-day, when we have advanced a stage further in a parallel process), was the gradual extension of a carefully controlled subordinate association of Indians in the imperialist administrative machinery, so as to have the support of a trained stratum of upper-class and middle-class Indians to assist in holding the masses in subjection.

In pursuance of this aim, alongside the cautious widening of the number of posts of Indians in the civil service (but *never in the decisive position*), *a series of reform measures* were carried from 1861 onwards.

In 1861 the Indian Councils Act provided for the addition of six nominated non-official members to the Viceroy's Legislative Council; and some of these nominated members were carefully selected Indians. It is worth noting that like every subsequent reform measure, the "reform" was accompanied by a new repressive weapon: the Viceroy was given the power to issue Ordinances having for six months at any time the force of law— a power freely used in the modern period.

In 1883-84 the Local Self-Government Acts introduced the elective principle into municipal government, and established Rural Boards and District Councils.

In 1892 the Indian Councils Acts added a few indirectly elected members (actually recommended for approval, not formally elected, by the local government and other bodies) to the Provincial Legislative Councils, and through them, at a further stage of indirectness, to the Viceroy's Legislative Council.

In 1909 the Indian Councils Act, better known as the Morley-Minto Reforms, introduced an elected majority into the Provincial Legislative Councils (in part indirectly, and in part directly elected), and an elected minority (indirectly elected except fo rthe landowners' seats and the Moslems' seats) into the Viceroy's Legislative Council. The functions of these Councils remained severely restricted, with no control over administration or finance; their legislation could be vetoed, if disapproved; the franchise was extremely narrow and to the existing multiplication of electing bodies was added the system of separate Moslem electorates.

The Morley-Minto Reforms were the first reforms to be carried in the midst of, and as a result of widespread national agitation and demand for self-government, and with the avowed political aim to defeat that agitation and, in Morley's phrase, "rally the Moderates". The Reforms were first projected in 1906, following the great upswing of the national movement in 1905, the boycott and Swadeshi campaign which was launched in 1905, and the Russian Revolution of 1905, which had shaken the other great oriental despotism of the Tsar. In this situation these minute Reforms were presented with a great beating of the drums as the beginning of a new era. In the dry words of the subsequent Montagu-Chelmsford Report (which was itself to repeat the same process on an extended scale): "Excessive claims were made for them in the enthusiasm of the moment...These sanguine expectations were shortlived."

Lord Morley's calculations to defeat the movement for self-government by his Reforms were openly expressed. He analysed the situation in the following instructive terms:

> "There are three classes of people whom we have to consider in dealing with a scheme of this kind. There are the Extremists who nurse fantastic dreams that some day they will drive us out of India...The second group nourish no hopes of this sort, but hope for autonomy or self-government of the colonial species and pattern. And then the third section of this classification ask for no more than to be admitted to co-operation in our administration.
>
> "I believe the effect of the Reforms has been, is being and will be to draw the second class, who hope for colonial autonomy, into the third class, who will be content with being admitted to a fair and full co-operation."
>
> *(Viscount Morley, speech in the House of Lords, February 23, 1909.)*

Thus, "co-operation in our administration", along the path of constitutional reforms, was the chosen method of imperialism by which it hoped to defeat the national aim of self-government.

There was no question at this time of presenting the Reforms as "a step to self-government". As we have seen, Lord Morley made it perfectly plain that the Reforms were not to be regarded as leading "directly or indirectly to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India." Similarly Lord Morley wrote to Lord Minto, accepting and emphasising the

latter's claim that there was to be no question of any advance, then or in the future, to responsible government in India:

> "Your Excellency's disclaimer for your government of being 'advocates of representative government for India in the Western sense of the term' is not more than was to be expected. Some of the most powerful advocates of the representative system in Europe have learned and taught from Indian experiences of their own that, in Your Excellency's words, 'it could never be akin to the instincts of the many races comprising the population of the Indian Empire'....While repudiating the intention or desire to attempt the transplantation of any European form of representative government to Indian soil, what is sought by Your Excellency in Council is to improve existing machinery, or to find new, for 'recognising the natural aspirations of educated men to share in the government of their country'. I need not say that in this design you have the cordial concurrence of His Majesty's Government.
>
> "One main standard and test for all who have a share in guiding Indian policy, whether at Whitehall or Calcutta, is the effect of whatever new proposal may at any time be made upon the strength and steadiness of the Paramount Power."
>
> *(Lord Morley to Lord Minto, quoted in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, p. 64.)*

Up to this point the policy of imperialism is clear and unmistakable. There is no question of any advance to self-government. The interests of the Paramount Power are decisive. The purpose of constitutional reform is to enlist the support of the upper-class minority in the interests of imperialism.

3. THE QUESTION OF DOMINION STATUS

Then came the war of 1914-18, the weakening of the foundations of imperialism, the awakening of India, as of all the colonial peoples, Hindu-Moslem unity and the Congress-League scheme of 1916 for self-government, and the Russian Revolution of March, 1917, opening the wave of popular advance in all countries and launching the slogans of national self-determination throughout the world.

On August 20, 1917, the British Government met this situation with a new Declaration of Policy, which has since been regarded as the keystone of modern imperialist constitutional policy. The essential passages of this Declaration ran:

> "The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing the association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible.... Progress in this policy can only be achieved by successive stages. The British Government and the Government of India, on whom the responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian peoples, must be judges of the time and measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the co-operation received from those upon whom new opportunities of service will thus be conferred and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility."

This Declaration is generally known as the Montagu Declaration, from the name of the Secretary of State, E. S. Montagu, through whom it was issued. Its drafting was largely the work of the veterans of Die-Hard British imperialism, Curzon and Austen Chamberlain. Lord Curzon inserted in the document the reference to "responsible government" (Ronaldshay, "Life of Curzon," Vol. III, p. 167). It may be recalled that Lord Curzon, on leaving India in 1905, had declared in his farewell speech: "I earnestly hope that the Viceroy of India will never cease to be Head of the Government of India in the fullest sense of the term."

The haste with which this Declaration was issued is self-evident from the fact that only after it was issued was an elaborate and prolonged process of governmental enquiry, instituted to find out what it was proposed to do, resulting finally in the Government of India Act of 1919.

The meaning of the Declaration, whether it was intended to imply Dominion Status (the term is not used in the Declaration) in the same sense as the self-governing Dominions, and if so, whether it was intended to imply the reaching of such a goal in any measurable term of time, has remained a subject of controversy.

The key to the policy was the conception of "stages" for which the British ruling authorities were to be the "judges of the time and measure of each advance." The first stage took two years to reach. This was a lightning speed compared to the second stage. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report had contemplated ten-year intervals for periodic review and revision to advance to a new stage. The second stage, however, took sixteen years to reach, with the Government of India Act of 1935 after seven years of exhaustive enquiry. The Simon Report recommended dropping of the ten-year intervals as far too short. "Ten years is not long enough to see the real effect on administration of the new 'system'" (Simon Report, Vol. II, p. 7).

MacDonald, as Prime Minister in 1924, admirably caught the spirit of evolutionary enquiry and cautious step-by-step advance of the new imperialist policy in India (less evolutionary and dilatory when it came to practical measures such as the Bengal Emergency Ordinances imposed by him at the same time and establishing the system of imprisonment without trial), when he made his appeal to India in his speech at York in April of that year:

> "Keep your faith in British democracy, do keep your faith in the Labour Government. An enquiry was being held by the Indian Government, and the Labour Government meant that enquiry to produce results which would be the basis of a consideration of the Indian Constitution, its working and its possibilities, which they hoped would help Indians to co-operate on the way, on the journey toward the creation of a system which would be self-government."

The hopeful precision of this programme and pledge has here embodied the essence of modern imperialist policy towards India in the classic form of that inimitable style of which MacDonald was the peculiar master.

Two legislative measures were enacted at an interval of one and a half decades to implement the new policy.

The first, the Government of India Act of 1919, established the system known as Dyarchy. No change was made in the Central Government; but in the Provincial Government certain subjects, such as Health, Education and similar constructive subjects for which there was no money, were "transferred" to Indian Ministers responsible to the Provincial Legislatures, while the other more strategic subjects, such as Police

and Land Revenue, were "reserved" in the hands of Ministers responsible to the Governor. The Provincial Legislatures were established with a majority of elected members, on the basis of a restricted property franchise representing (apart from Burma) 2.8 per cent of the population. The Provincial Governors had power both to veto legislation and to "certify" legislation they wished adopted, if not accepted by the legislature. At the Centre two Chambers were established: a Council of State, nearly half nominated and the rest elected from the narrowest upper circle (less than 18,000 electors for the whole country); and a Legislative Assembly, with an elected majority on the basis of a franchise even more restricted than that for the Provinces (less than half of 1 per cent of the population). The Governor-General had unlimited overriding powers to veto or certify legislation.

Dyarchy was universally condemned, not only by Indian opinion, but also after a few years' experience by ruling imperialist opinion; and it is unnecessary for present purposes to analyse its glaring limitations. The Secretary of State for India described it in 1925 as "the kind of pedantic hidebound constitution to which Anglo-Saxon communities had not generally responded, and ....unlikely to make a successful appeal to a community whose political ideas were....so largely divided from Anglo-Saxon models" (Lord Birkenhead in the House of Lords, July 7, 1925). The "responsibility" of the Indian Ministers was admittedly a farce. The Simon Report unsparingly exposed the defects of the system, by which the Indian Ministers were in practice "largely dependent on the official bloc" and regarded as "Government men"; the "almost irresistible impulse towards a unification of Government" defeated the paper plans of divided responsibility. Indeed, nothing is more striking than the impartial justice with which each successive stage of imperialist constitution-making has exposed the pretensions of its predecessor. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report was merciless to the illusory claims of the Morley-Minto Reforms. The Simon Report was no less unsparing in pointing out the shortcomings and failure of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. The latest Constitution was, however, as always, assumed to be a paragon, condemned only by the short-sightedness of Indian opinion.

The Government of India Act of 1935 represented the second constitutional enactment following that of 1919. This Constitution came into force in 1937 (with the exception of the Federal section, which remained indefinitely suspended

and never came into operation), and remained in force up to and during the war and until the Mountbatten Award and "Independence of India Act" of 1947. The character of this Constitution is examined in detail in the next section.

The two decades between the wars thus saw a continuous process of experiment and constitution-making. At the end of the two decades the power of imperialism still remained absolute.

Throughout these years "Dominion Status" was widely proclaimed to be the goal of imperialist policy in India. But in what sense was left unclear. Was it to be in the same sense as Canada or Australia? Or was it intended in some peculiar sense, such as that with which the Indian Secretary of State, Wedgwood Benn, in 1929 startled his hearers by announcing that India already enjoyed "Dominion Status," since "India" was independently "represented" at the League of Nations and had independently signed the Versailles Treaty? And in what period of time was this unknown goal to be reached? On all these questions there were the most diverse answers and contradictory expressions. The whole issue was wrapped in an impenetrable fog of diplomatic verbiage.

The Declaration of 1917 contained no mention of Dominion Status. Nor did the Government of India Act of 1919. The first approach appeared in the Royal Instrument of Instructions to the Viceroy, referring to the new Act, in March, 1921, which declared the aim "that British India may attain its due place among our Dominions." This might evidently mean anything—or nothing. The demand for a Preamble to the Government of India Act of 1935, to contain explicit reference to the promise of Dominion Status, was refused.

Apart from the legal documents, there were from time to time various statements in speeches of varying degrees of importance or definiteness, all without binding power. In 1928 MacDonald, when out of office, declared:

> "I hope that within a period of months rather than of years there will be a new Dominion added to the Commonwealth of our Nations, a Dominion of another race, which will find self-respect as an equal within the Commonwealth. I refer to India."
>
> *(J. R. MacDonald, speech at the British Commonwealth Labour Conference, July 2, 1928.)*

What followed "within a period of months rather than of years" was a reign of terror in India and the imprisonment of

some 100,000 Indians by MacDonald for the crime of agitating for self-government.

In 1929 the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, issued a statement which was intended to prepare the ground for the Round Table Conference. He said:

> "I am authorised on behalf of His Majesty's Government to say that in their judgement it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status."
>
> *(Lord Irwin, statement on October 31, 1929.)*

This statement aroused a storm of protest from all the Elder Statesmen in the British Parliament; and it was only justified on the ground that it had produced an "excellent effect" in a difficult diplomatic situation in India. But the Secretary of State steadily refused all attempts to cross-examine him to what it meant: "the declaration of the Viceroy stands as it stands, and I must ask the right honourable gentleman not to cross-examine me with a view to making difficulties."

What was the meaning of "Dominion Status"? Here the answers were no less varying. As we have seen, the Indian Secretary of State in December, 1929, produced the ingenious argument that Dominion Status had already been achieved by India for a decade, ever since "India" signed the Versailles Treaty and became a member of the League of Nations. The compatibility of this frequently favoured line of argument with the simultaneous promise of Dominion Status as the future goal of India's constitutional progress, as in the Viceroy's declaration, was not explained.

Alternatively, the argument was favoured that Dominion Status was, after all, impossible to define (although the Statute of Westminster appeared to have defined it). Thus *The Times* wrote in 1935 with reference to the demand for the inclusion of the aim of Dominion Status in a preamble to the Government of India Bill:

> " 'Dominion Status' is not susceptible of definition in precise constitutional document .... 'Dominion Status' has carried so many different shades of meaning at different times, and is applied to-day to so many varieties of Government, that it would be hopeless to attempt to define the phrase with common agreement even in the preamble to a Parliamentary Bill."
>
> *("The Times" editorial, January 25, 1935.)*

So the glittering goal vanished into the realm of the unknown and the unknowable. This was written after the Statute of Westminster had very precisely defined Dominion Status in terms of a "constitutional document" and a "Parliamentary Bill." But then that was for Canada, Australia or South Africa—not for India.

How far off was this goal of an undefined and undefinable "Dominion Status"? Nobody knew. No date was assigned. But the leading responsible statesmen of imperialism did not fail to make clear their conviction that it was very far off.

Lord Birkenhead, former Secretary of State for India, declared in 1929:

> "No sane man could assign any approximate period for the date on which we could conceive India attaining Dominion Status. No one had the right to tell the people of India that they were likely in any near period to attain to Dominion Status."
>
> *(Lord Birkenhead, speech in the House of Lords, November 5, 1929.)*

Similarly Baldwin was no less emphatically negative:

> "None can say when responsible government will be established; none can say what shape it will take....Nobody knows what Dominion Status will be when India has responsible government, whether that date be near or distant."
>
> *(Stanley Baldwin, in the House of Commons on November 7, 1929.)*

Thus the unknown goal disappeared into the impenetrable distance of an unknown future.

Since the outbreak of the war in 1939, the question of the goal of Dominion Status was again brought to the forefront, as the government spokesman once again sought to hold out this as the alternative to the demand for independence. On October 17, 1939, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, declared:

> "The intention and anxiety of His Majesty's Government is, as stated in the Instrument of Instructions to the Governor-General, to further the partnership between India and the United Kingdom within the Empire to the end that India may attain her due place amongst the great Dominions."

What that "due place" would be was not vouchsafed. In the Parliamentary debate which followed the Viceroy's declaration, Sir Samuel Hoare on behalf of the Government affirmed that the aim was "the Dominion Status of 1926":

> "There are no two kinds of Dominion Status as some people seem to think. The Dominion Status that we contemplated was the Dominion Status of 1926."
>
> *(Sir Samuel Hoare, House of Commons, October 26, 1939.)*

But he went on at once to add a new mystification:

> "Dominion Status is not a prize that is given to a deserving community, but is the recognition of facts that actually exist. As soon as these facts exist in India—and in my own view the sooner they exist the better—the aim of our policy will be achieved."

What lay behind that oracular dictum was not in fact so mysterious. Sir Samuel Hoare continued with a statement which once again provided the familiar joker in the pack of promises:

> "If there are difficulties in the way, they are not of our making. They are inherent in the many divisions between classes and communities in a great sub-continent ....The Princes are afraid of domination by British India; Moslems are firmly opposed to a Hindu majority at the centre; the Depressed Classes and other minorities genuinely believe that responsible government, meaning a Government dependent upon a Hindu majority, will sacrifice their interests. These anxieties still exist. I wish that they did not. But as long as they do exist it is impossible for the Government to accept a demand for immediate and full responsibility at the centre on a particular date."

Thus the manoeuvre was once again the familiar one. On the one hand the promise of Dominion Status was held out in general terms without any specific proposal or date. On the other hand the plea of the "divisions" of the Indian people was brought into play to defeat any question of its realisation. The promise of Dominion Status was used as a diplomatic pawn to meet a critical situation and counter the demand for independence; but the promise was hedged round with such qualifications as would safely leave its realisation as an unknown question for an unknown date.

In contrast to these shifting fogs of limitless uncertainty when it was a question of fulfilling the pledge of 1917 or of

the prospect of India attaining "responsible government," the scene changed and gave place to the solidest rock of certainty when it came to affirming the unshakable maintenance of British rule in India in the visible future. Here we are on firm ground; here the tone becomes vibrant and confident.

Thus Lloyd George, as Prime Minister, in his famous "steel frame" speech in 1922, declared:

> "That Britain under no circumstances will relinquish her responsibility in India is a cardinal principle, not merely of the present Government, but of any Government which will command the confidence of the people in this country....
>
> "I can see no period when India can dispense with the guidance and the assistance of this small nucleus of the British Civil Service.... They are the steel frame of the whole structure."
>
> *(Lloyd George, in the House of Commons on August 2, 1922.)*

Similarly Churchill declared in 1930:

> "The British nation has no intention whatever of relinquishing effectual control of Indian life and progress.
>
> "We have no intention of casting away that most truly bright and precious jewel in the Crown of the King, which more than all our other Dominions and Dependencies constitutes the glory and strength of the British Empire."
>
> *(Winston Churchill, speech to the Indian Empire Society, December 11, 1930.)*

In no less definite language Baldwin, speaking as Prime Minister, declared in 1934:

> "It is my considered judgement in all the changes and chances of this wide world to-day, that you have a good chance of keeping the whole of that sub-Continent of India in the Empire for ever."
>
> *(Stanley Baldwin, speech to the Central Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, December 4, 1934.)*

Similarly, he explained the purpose of the constitutional reforms, speaking in 1931:

> "So far from contemplating any weakening of the bonds that unite Great Britain and India, we wish to

bring about a closer union that we have ever had before. It is upon this task of closer union that we are now engaged."

(Stanley Baldwin, speech at Newton Abbot, March 6, 1931.)

The conclusion from this survey is inescapable. It is impossible to survey the cumulative effect of these and countless similar statements, alike of ironic scepticism and elusiveness on the prospect of responsible government in India, and of positive certainty and dogmatism on the enduring maintenance of British power in India, in conjunction with the realities of the various constitutional schemes and projects, which left every strategic point with triple safeguards in British hands, without reaching the inexorable conclusion of the real character of British policy in India in the post-1917 period. There is no excuse for blindness or uncertainty or credulous illusions.

The basic imperialist policy did not change. There was only a change of tactics.

The mirage of a hypothetical undefined, unknown and undated "Dominion Status" was the golden vision to draw on those Indian politicians who might thus be caught into co-operation. But the reality of the constitutional reforms was profoundly different in character.

The basic aim of the maintenance of imperialist domination continued in the inter-war period, as in the preceding period. The path of the reforms was the continuance of the pre-1917 path of the reforms, developing into more difficult conditions and a more advanced stage of imperialist decline. The aim remained not the aim of the progressive liquidation of imperialism in India, and handing over of the government of India to the Indian people, but the saving of imperialism in India by seeking to draw into collaboration, under careful safeguards, an upper-class minority of the Indian people to assist in holding the Indian people in subjection for the maintenance of imperialist rule and exploitation. This was the essential strategic purpose of the loudly boosted constitutional reforms and "new angle of vision." In the words of Baldwin, the author of the Constitution of 1935:

"Our Viceroys and our Governors in India, and under them the Services that will be recruited by the Secretary of State and safeguarded by parliament, will have the duty and the means to ensure, if need be, that

that political power is exercised by Indian Ministers and Legislatures *for the purposes that we intend.*"

(Stanley Baldwin, broadcast on the Government of India Bill, Feb 5, 1935—italics added.)

4. THE CONSTITUTION OF 1935

The Constitution embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935, and brought into force in 1937, twenty years after the Montagu Declaration, was the third imperialist Constitution devised for India in the modern period—if we treat the Morley-Minto Reforms as the first. It was elaborated after a prolonged gestation of over seven years, from the first appointment of the Simon Commission, with considerable controversy in Britain and conflict in India.

This Constitution was commonly treated in British expression as a virtual realisation of self-government, subject to a few necessary transitional safeguards, or at any rate a very large and generous instalment of self-government. In consequence its unanimous rejection by Indian opinion, not only by the National Congress, but even by Indian Liberal or Moderate opinion, was often regarded with surprise as unreasonable even by many who normally hold liberal democratic views when they are dealing with other than colonial peoples.

A more careful examination of its actual provisions will reveal the reasons for this opposition, and will make clear why the Indian political leaders, while recognising and utilising to the full the undoubted facilities provided by its machinery, especially in the provincial sections, for the development and extension of the national movement, nevertheless rejected and opposed the Constitution as a whole, and especially its federal sections, seeing in it, not a scheme of self-government, but a scheme for strengthening the imperialist hold in India.

The Constitution consisted of two main sections: the Federal section, for the Central Government of the projected All-India Federation of British India and the Indian States; and the Provincial section, for the Provinces in British India. The Provincial section came into operation in 1937; the Federal section was never brought into operation (although the existing Government already partially operates under its provisions), and the National Congress which took office in

the majority of Provinces under the Provincial section, opposed the coming into operation of the Federal section.

The key to the Constitution was the conception of Federation. Herein lay its distinctive new departure; and herein lay concealed its profoundly reactionary character.

The political unification of India is essential to Indian advance, political, social or economic. This is recognised by every representative of every school and tendency. The senseless checkerboard division of India into hundreds of mainly petty States; the complete division of the unity of India into two entirely different administrative systems, covering 45 per cent and 55 per cent of the territory respectively, with an incredible criss-cross intersection of boundaries following no conceivable reason or justification, geographical, economic, racial, linguistic or cultural: all this is an anachronism which should have been long ago overcome, and whose maintenance is a measure of the maintenance of every reactionary form under British rule in India. For, as we have seen, the Indian "States" had been artificially maintained in existence, and saved from collapse, solely by the strong arm of the British power, not for any needs of the Indian people, but as reactionary buttresses of British rule—"friendly fortresses in debatable territory," in the words of the official Government spokesman.

But the Federal proposals were by no means proposals to overcome this division, to end these obsolete petty despotisms or establish a uniform administrative system even in the barest elements. They were only proposals to increase the power of these reactionary anachronisms, and to bring them into the heart of the central government of India in order to strengthen the weakening imperialist hold in British India and to counter the national movement—that is, the movement which stands for real national unification.

What is Federation? What are the elementary principles of any genuine Federation? It is only necessary to examine the great historical examples of Federation, such as the United States of America, the Swiss Republic or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, to answer this question.

A Federation is the voluntary union of independent sovereign units, impelled by the common political aims, ideals or external needs, to establish a sovereign central organ based on the units and responsible to them or to their populations, and establishing a restricted measure of common organisation, falling short of full centralisation, but such as to insti-

tute within the voluntarily agreed limitation a single federal law for all the citizens of the Union.

Judged by all these tests the proposed "Federation" for India was a complete misnomer—a trick of language to describe an arbitrary despotic dictatorship, with certain special reactionary buttresses introduced into its structure.

First, sovereignty did not lie in the Federation. Sovereignty was explicitly laid down by the Act to lie in the British ruling power outside the Federation, with the British Crown, with the British Governor-General appointed from London, responsible solely to the British Government and exercising in fact despotic power, with the British Secretary of State responsible to the British Parliament, and finally with the British Parliament as the ultimate authority. There was no sovereignty within the Federation or the members composing the Federation. In other words, it was not a Federation, but a certain administrative device of a despotic rule.

Second, the union was not a voluntary union of sovereign elements. Even if the adherence of the puppet Princes, who are compelled in practice to act as Britain decrees and are only stage mouthpieces of Britain's will, may be diplomatically treated as a "voluntary" act (with no part or say of the 90 millions composing their territories), the adherence of the Provinces of British India, composing three-fourths of the Federation, was a compulsory act imposed from outside, and not a voluntary act.

Third, and most extraordinary of all for any conception of "Federation," there was no system of federal law, law-making or administration established for the Federation as a whole. There was no fundamental Declaration of Rights of the citizens of the Federation. The subjects of the Princes remained without rights, unaffected by Federation. But the despotic Princes were to take part in the Federal Chambers to make laws for the semi-enfranchised citizens of British India. The Federal Legislature was to make laws, not for the Federation, but for a section, for British India. Was there ever such a contradiction of the very conception of Federation? Once again it is obvious that this so-called "Federation" did not represent a change or closer union for India as a whole, but only the bringing in of new reactionary elements into British India.

It is thus necessary to understand at the outset that the question of Federation was not the question of the political unification of India, which is necessary, which is recognised

by all as necessary, and which is bound to come, and is likely, when it does come, to take the form of a genuine political Federation. The question of the so-called "Federation" of this Constitution was the question of an anti-democratic device, which, while leaving all the evils of the existing political division and despotic States system untouched, sought to introduce a new reactionary force into that portion of India which had succeeded in winning certain limited semi-democratic institutions and where the national movement had made advance.

The scheme for so-called "Federation" should therefore be correctly termed the scheme to give the despotic Indian Princes, responsible to nobody save their British masters, power to legislate for the 270 millions of British India. When "Federation" is hereafter referred to, in dealing with the question of the Constitution and the opposition of the National Congress, it should be remembered that this is what is meant.

This actual objective of "Federation," to increase the weight of the reactionary forces in British India, was shown by the special representation and weighting given to the Princes in both Chambers of the proposed Federal Legislature.

The Federal Legislature was to consist of two Chambers, an Upper Chamber or Council of State, and a Lower Chamber or Federal Assembly. The Princes were not only to be represented in both Houses, but over-represented in both Houses, out of all proportion to the size of their States.

In the Council of State, out of 260 seats, 104, or two-fifths, were allocated to the Princes.

In the Federal Assembly, out of 375 seats, 125, or one-third, were allocated to the Princes.

The proportion of the population of the Indian States to the whole of India is 24 per cent, or less than one-quarter.

This disproportion is still more obvious if a financial basis is taken. It was estimated that 90 per cent of the Federal revenues would be drawn from British India and only 10 per cent from the States. Yet the Princes were to have two-fifths of the representation in the Upper House and one-third in the Lower.

Thus the so-called "representative" system was nullified at the outset by the insertion of a solid non-elected non-representative reactionary bloc in each House, replacing the old "official bloc"—but more reactionary and constituting a much

larger proportion than under the old Montagu-Chelmsford Constitution (the non-elected official bloc in the old Legislative Assembly was 40 out of 145 members, or a little over one-quarter).

We have still to come to the "powers" of these precious Assemblies, and the last rudimentary figment of "responsible" government at the Centre, said to have been conceded by the Constitution, dwindles away.

A Council of Ministers chosen by and responsible to the Governor-General was to be set up but their competence was strictly limited. Four departments — namely, Defence, External Affairs, Ecclesiastical Affairs and Excluded Areas— were under the sole control of the Governor-General. Special authorities were to be separately appointed to deal with several other subjects — a Financial Adviser for safeguarding financial stability and credit, an Advocate-General for legal matters and others for the Federal Bank and Railways. The Civil Service and Police were under the sole appointment of the Secretary of State. A host of other special provisions prevented infringement of the basic laws of British power or any action deterimental to British economic interests or the rights of minorities or the rights of the States. Over all ran the general over-riding power of the Governor-General. What remained within the competence of the Ministers it is difficult to determine. It is probable, however, that they would have been free to supervise the efficient running of the Post Office.

There was nothing in the Act requiring the Ministers to be responsible to the Legislature. Their salaries were not to be voted by the Legislature and they were not required to resign if a majority voted no confidence in them. Only the Instrument of Instructions to the Governor-General recommended the selection of Ministers likely to command a stable majority in the Legislature. But it also recommended the inclusion of representatives of the States and the minorities.

What of the powers of the Legislature? The first key to control by a representative body is finance. What was the position in regard to finance?

The Budget was divided into two parts: "Expenditure charged upon the revenues of the Federation" and "other expenditure." The first included all the heavier and principal expenditure, defence costs, debt interest, the major official salaries and pensions, etc., which were not to be put to the vote of the Legislature. These "non-votable" items con-

stituted from three-fourths to four-fifths of the total expenditure; 75 per cent according to the estimate of Professor G. N. Joshi in his *Indian Administration* (p. 69); 80 per cent according to the estimate of the National Congress. The Governor-General could in his discretion determine whether any item of expenditure fell into the "non-votable" class.

There remained the 20 per cent or 25 per cent of minor expenditure on which the Legislature could express an opinion. But only an opinion. Even within this minor sphere of expenditure the Legislature had no control. No financial bill or proposal for a grant could be introduced unless it had first received the recommendation of the Governor-General. If the Assembly refused or reduced a grant the Governor-General could declare the grant to be necessary for the discharge of his special responsibilities and authorise the expenditure in spite of the vote of the Legislature. *Thus the first elementary condition for any responsible representative organ of finance was completely absent.*

The second key to control by a representative body is the control of the State machine of the military power and bureaucracy.

Defence was reserved outside the purview of the Legislature. The Civil Services and Police were to be appointed by the Secretary of State. Their rights and conditions of service were protected by special provisions. The Rules for the Police were in the hands of the Governor-General who controlled absolutely the Secret Police or Political Police.

The third key to control is the law-making, power of passing laws or refusing consent to proposed laws.

There is no doubt that the Legislature could pass laws of which the Government approved within a restricted sphere of subjects. The sphere was restricted by a long series of provisions. It could not touch or even discuss financial measures, unless these had received the prior approval of the Governor-General. It could not touch legislation affecting any of the basic foundations of British power, military questions, the rights of the civil services, of the States, of minorities, British economic interests, etc. In particular it was not open to the Federal Legislature to pass any measure which

> *(a)* imposes any restriction on British subjects domiciled in the United Kingdom in regard to their right of entry into British India, or travel, residence, the acquisition, holding or disposal of property, the holding of pub-

lic office, or the carrying on of any occupation, trade, business or profession;

(b) discriminates against any British subject domiciled in the United Kingdom or any Company incorporated in the United Kingdom in respect of taxation in India;

(c) discriminates against ships registered in the United Kingdom, their crew, passengers, cargo, etc.;

(d) discriminates against Companies incorporated under the laws of the United Kingdom and carrying on business in India, in respect of any grant, bounty or subsidy payable out of the revenues of the Federation.

These "capitulations," which veto any attempt to promote specially or give special concessions or subsidies to Indian industry, trade or shipping (in the same way as is done by the British Government in Britain to British industry, trade or shipping), unless similar concessions were granted at the same time to British commercial and industrial interests in India, reveal the concern to secure the ironclad safeguarding of the interests of British finance-capital in India.

Within the remaining permitted sphere of legislation, the Legislature had still no independent powers. If the Legislature should happen to pass any bill which the Government did not wish, and assuming that the super-reactionary Council of State had also passed it, the Governor-General could then "withhold" his assent altogether. Alternatively, he could "reserve" it for further consideration, and if he reserved it for twelve months, it dropped. Alternatively, if he should happen to have given his assent, and later change his mind, he could then "disallow" it, and it became null and void.

On the other hand, if the Legislature failed to pass a measure which the Government considered necessary, the Governor-General could then pass it as "a Governor-General's Act," and it would have the force of ordinary legislation. Alternatively, the Governor-General could issue Ordinances with the force of law for six months at a time.

Such were the "powers" of this "Legislature." The laborious care in its selection might have seemed superfluous.

But all this by no means exhausted the anxious precautions of the imperialist authorities, who were manifestly concerned to make assurance trebly sure that there should be no hint of a possibility of a whisper of self-government reach-

ing through the padlocked doors of the system. We have still to examine more fully the final charmed realm of reserved powers and "safeguards."

When we pass from the "powers" of the Legislature to the powers of the Governor-General, we pass from the region of night into the region of daylight.

No less than ninety-four sections of the Act conferred special discretionary powers on the Governor-General. Thus the Governor-General could at his discretion (that is, independently of any advice of Ministers or opinion of elected bodies)

(1) Appoint or dismiss Ministers.
(2) Veto legislation passed by the Legislature.
(3) Pass legislation rejected by the Legislature.
(4) Prohibit the discussion of legislation.
(5) Issue Ordinances.
(6) Instruct Provincial Governors to issue Ordinances.
(7) Veto Provincial legislation.
(8) Issue Rules for the Police.
(9) Control the use of the armed forces.
(10) Dissolve the Legislature.
(11) Suspend the Constitution.

That is only a selection of his discretionary powers.

Alongside this came the reserved powers. As Reserved Departments he had under his exclusive control Defence, External Affairs, Ecclesiastical Affairs and Excluded Areas.

Finally come the special powers and responsibilities designed to stop up the last loopholes, if any such might be imagined to exist. The Governor-General had eight "special responsibilities" in pursuance of which he could take any action that he individually decided to be necessary for their discharge. These "special responsibilities" (commonly referred to as the "safeguards," although the safeguards really ran right through the Act) covered:

(1) "prevention of any grave menace to the peace or tranquillity of India or any part thereof";

(2) "safeguarding of the financial stability and credit of the Federal Government";

(3) "safeguarding of the legitimate interests of minorities";

(4) protection of the rights and "legitimate interests" of members and ex-members, or their dependants, of the public services;

(5) prevention of commercial or financial discrimination against British individuals or companies operating in India, whether the companies are incorporated in India or in the United Kingdom;

(6) prevention of discrimination against British imports into India;

(7) protection of the rights of the States and Princes;

(8) a grand final omnibus safeguard, "securing that the due discharge of his functions with respect to matters with respect to which he is by or under this Act required to act in his discretion, is not prejudiced or impended by any course of action taken with respect to any other matter."

To pursue the special (and lengthiest) sections of the Act, in which the direct interests of British finance-capital, of trading and investment, of British companies operating in India, of debt, of the railways, of banking, were specifically protected or placed under independent authorities, would take too long for the purpose of any general survey of the constitution as a whole. But it must be said that these were the most illuminating sections of the Act for revealing the true function of the entire Constitution as an elaborate mechanism for the protection of British finance-capitalist exploitation in India.

The Provincial sections of the Constitution were subordinate to the reactionary, and in effect virtually autocratic, machinery at the Centre. In general, the provincial machinery reproduced the appropriate part of the central machinery in a slightly milder form. The Provincial Governor had corresponding over-riding powers, powers to veto legislation or pass independent legislation, effective control of police, law and order and finance, and his own set of seven special responsibilities. The Legislatures were similarly composed on a communal basis; and Upper Chambers, which did not previously exist in any Province, were thrust on all the leading Provinces, Bengal, Bombay, Madras, United Provinces, and Bihar.

Nevertheless, the machinery was more elastic in the Provinces than in the Centre, and even susceptible to a popular movement, for the following reasons.

First, there was no element of the Princes in the Provinces. The Legislatures were entirely elected, and were directly elected although the Upper Chambers were reactionary based on a very restricted franchise.

Second, there were no Reserved Departments in the same way as at the Centre, although there were special provisions with regard to Police. The Governor had under his individual control the Rules for the Police; the Secret Police or Political Police were protected by special regulations, and even their records were not allowed to be accessible to Indian Ministers; to counter any movement which might be deemed to have the aim "to overthrow the government as by law established," the Governor might assume sole control in any direction he thought fit, if he considered that "the peace or tranquillity of the Province is endangered." Subject to these very heavy limitations in respect of the real machinery of power, the Provincial Ministry functioned for the administration as a whole, and could develop a certain degree of collective responsibility.

Third, there were not the same elaborate restrictions upon legislation, not because the powers of legislation were broader, but because they were narrower; the more important issues of an All-India character, affecting British special interests or the economic-financial regime, could not arise for the Provinces.

Within narrow limits, therefore, there was the scope and possibility for popular Ministries to perform, not a governing role, but a restricted useful role in the Provinces.

The electorate for the Provincial Legislative Assemblies consisted of 30.1 million voters in the eleven Provinces of British India, or 11 per cent of the population (as against 2.8 per cent in the Montagu-Chelmsford Constitution). This compares with 67 per cent of the population enfranchised in Britain. The qualification was mainly on the basis of property, taxpaying, tenancy-holding of a certain value, with an additional literacy qualification. The number of women electors was 4.3 millions. The number polling in contested constituencies in the 1937 elections was 15.5 millions, or 55 per cent of the electorate in those constituencies.

. In the eleven provincial Legislative Assemblies the 1,585 seats were divided as follows:

General seats (open)	657
Moslems	482
Scheduled castes	151
Commerce and Industry	56
Women	41
Labour	38
Landholders	37
Sikhs	34
Europeans	26
Backward areas and tribes	24
Indian Christians	20
Anglo-Indians	11
University	8
	1,585

It will be seen that despite the still heavy and reactionary sub-division, the possibilities were relatively far more favourable than in the Federal Assembly.

These were the conditions which made possible the formation of Congress Ministries in the majority of the Provinces. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that these Provincial Congress Ministries had more than the most limited powers, or could touch the vital problems which await the realisation of self-government.

The controlling power of the autocratic Centre in British hands, the statutory limitation on any action or interference in any important issue affecting British interests or basic organisation of the regime, the lack of finance, and the overriding powers of the Provincial Governors in the background left a very restricted sphere for the Provincial Ministries. This was especially conspicuous in relation to finance. The expanding sources of revenue, such as income tax and customs, were allocated (subject to certain provisions for partial re-allocation under the Niemeyer Award) to the Centre, 80 per cent of whose budget was not subject to vote by Indian representatives. On the other hand, all the constructive forms of expenditure, such as health and education, were handed over to the Provinces, while for their main source of revenue they were given the burdensome, inelastic and unpopular land revenue, which urgently needed to be reduced. The purpose of this division, to shackle the Provincial Minis-

tries, and at the same time pass on to them the discredit for the imperialist neglect of health and education and all necessary social services or constructive development, is obvious.

The Provincial Ministries could not in consequence be regarded as in any sense a realisation of self-government, not only because of their heavily shackled powers in their limited spheres, but above all because they could not touch the basic urgent issues before the Indian people. The formation of Congress Ministries in the leading Provinces represented an important step forward of the national movement to an improved strategic position in the fight for self-government. But the battle for self-government, for real national freedom, had still to be fought.

The Constitution as a whole, especially in respect of its decisive Federal Centre, stood revealed, the more closely it was examined, not only as a denial of democracy, but as a mechanism for strengthening the imperialist hold on India, and for strengthening the weight of the reactionary forces within the structure of imperialist rule. The "responsibility" was a mockery. The power of imperialism was confirmed and hardened. The real fight for self-government could not take place within the limits of this Constitution. Although auxiliary and preparatory work had been achieved through its machinery, the decisive battle could only be fought outside the Constitution and against it.

The final verdict of every democrat on that Constitution can only coincide with the verdict of the leading constitutional authority in Britain, Professor A. B. Keith, who frankly described it in merciless terms:

> "It is difficult to resist the impression that either responsible government should have been frankly declared impossible or the reality conceded; it is not surprising that neither gratitude nor co-operation is readily forthcoming for a hybrid product such as is the system of special responsibilities and acts to be done according to individual judgement.
>
> "For the federal scheme it is difficult to feel any satisfaction. The units of which it is composed are too disparate to be joined suitably together, and it is too obvious that on the British side the scheme is favoured in order to provide an element of pure conservatism in order to combat any dangerous elements of democracy contributed by British India...It is difficult to deny

the contention in India that federation was largely evoked by the desire to evade the issue of extending responsible government to the central government of British India. Moreover, the withholding of defence and external affairs from federal control, inevitable as the course is, renders the alleged concession of responsibility all but meaningless."

(Professor A. B. Keith, "A Constitutional History of India 1600-1935," 1936, pp. 473-4.)

Chapter XV

THE NATIONAL STRUGGLE ON THE EVE OF THE WAR

"It is unfortunate the Congress spokesmen have made a fetish of the word 'independence'" — **THE MARQUIS OF ZETLAND**, Secretary of State for India in a Press Interview, February 11, 1940.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF Indian Nationalism since the great mass struggles of 1930-34 up to the second world war falls into three clearly marked stages. First, there was the rebuilding of organisation after the heavy blows of repression, and the hammering out of new lines of policy, followed by the advance through the election victory of 1937, to a commanding position greater than any previously reached, which was utilised by the Right-wing leadership to establish Congress Provincial Ministries in the majority of the Provinces of British India. This was the achievement of the years 1934-37. Then followed growing crisis, sharp differentiation of Right and Left, consequent on disillusionment with the experience of the Congress Provincial Ministries, and the advance to new struggles, already visible in preliminary forms in the years 1938-39. This was accelerated and complicated by the conditions of the war and the profound crisis which the war brought for India and for the Indian national movement, and culminated in the great revolutionary upsurge after the second world war.

1. THE NEW AWAKENING

When the National Congress met at Lucknow in the spring of 1936, it was still recovering its forces from the effects of the heavy struggle and Government repression which had

reached a climax in 1934. Membership stood at below half a million, registering 457,000. The period 1934-36 had not been a happy period in the life of the Congress. The immediate effect of the defeat of 1934 had not yet given place to new advance. The reactionary constitution which was the parting legacy of Gandhi, and which had been adopted at the Bombay Congress in 1934, had undoubtedly a restricting effect (it had to be partially modified at Lucknow). The centre of activity had been transferred to the parliamentary field, with the participation in the elections for the Legislative Assembly at the end of 1934; but the parliamentary activity bore a humdrum character and aroused no mass interest. The presidential addres of Nehru at the Lucknow Congress unsparingly criticised the weakness of the existing position, and declared that "we have largely lost touch with the masses."

The presidential address of Jawaharlal Nehru at the Lucknow Congress was memorable for its proclamation of the socialist aim, for its focussing of the Indian struggle in the context of the gathering world struggle against fascism and reaction, and for its demand for a broad mass front or "joint popular front" of all the anti-imperialist forces, uniting the workers and peasantry with the middle-class elements dominantly represented in the Congress. New stirrings were visible on all sides. The socialist wing was advancing in the Congress. Already representing an important, though small, grouping at Lucknow, by the Faizpur Congress in December, 1936, it numbered one-third of the Congress Committee. The proposal put forward by Nehru at Lucknow for the collective affiliation of the workers' and peasants' organisations to the Congress was not adopted, being defeated on the Congress Committee by 35 votes to 16, and giving place to the formation of a Mass Contacts Committee for further consideration of the question. But the idea of closer effective contact with the masses, and with the social and economic interests of the masses, was making itself felt on all sides. Attempts were being made to elaborate a concrete agrarian programme of real demands of the peasants, in place of the previous concentration on advocacy of hand-spinning and uplift; and at Faizpur a provisional agrarian programme of thirteen points was adopted embodying demands with regard to the reduction of rents and land revenue, annulment or scaling down of debts, abolition of forced labour and feudal dues, a living wage for agricultural labourers, and rights for peasants' unions, though still in a very general form.

From the Lucknow session of April, 1936, a new phase in the history of the National Congress opened. From this point a rapid advance took place. By the Faizpur Congress in December, 1936, membership had reached 636,000. By the end of 1937, after the elections and the formation of the Provincial Congress Ministries, it leapt up to over 3 millions, totalling 3,102,000 at Haripura in February, 1938. By the end of 1938 it had passed the 4 million mark, with 1¼ million members in the United Provinces alone; and by the Tripuri Congress in 1939 it touched 5 millions.

2. THE ELECTION VICTORY OF 1937

The attitude of the National Congress to the [illegible] Constitution had already been declared in princi[illegible] 1934, when the demand for the Constituent A[illegible] had been adopted. The Lucknow Congress approv[illegible] decision to contest the elections under the new [illegible] in the coming year. In August, 1936, the Election M[illegible]ifesto was issued, and was endorsed at Faizpur. The r[illegible]olution of the Faizpur Congress in December, 1936, proclaimed the definite standpoint of the Congress in contesting the election:

> "This Congress reiterates its entire rejection of the Government of India Act of 1935 and the Constitution that has been imposed on India against the declared will of the people of the country. In the opinion of the Congress any co-operation with this Constitution is a betrayal of India's struggle for freedom and a strengthening of the hold of British Imperialism and a further exploitation of the Indian masses who have already been reduced to direst poverty under the imperialist domination. The Congress therefore repeats its resolve not to submit to this Constitution or to co-operate with it, but to combat it, both inside and outside the legislatures, so as to end it. The Congress does not and will not recognise the right of any external power or authority to dictate the political and economic structure of India, and every such attempt will be met by organised and uncompromising opposition of the Indian people. The Indian people can only recognise a constitutional structure which has been framed by them and which is based on the independence of India as a Nation and which allows them full scope for development according to their needs and desires.

"The Congress stands for a genuine democratic State in India where political power has been transferred to the people as a whole and the Government is under their effective control. Such a State can only come into existence through a Constituent Assembly, elected by adult suffrage, and having the power to determine finally the Constitution of the country. To this end the Congress works in the country and organises the masses, and this objective must ever be kept in view by the representatives of the Congress in the legislatures....

"The question of acceptance or non-acceptance of office by Congress members elected to the legislatures under the new Constitution will be decided by the A.I.C.C. as soon after the provincial assembly elections as is practicable."

On the question of acceptance of office there was a division of opinion at Faizpur, the majority favouring postponement of the decision. An amendment moved by the Communist representative, Dange, for the preparation of mass struggle in order to make possible the realisation of the Constituent Assembly was defeated by 83 to 45 votes on the Congress Committee, and by 451 to 62 votes in the full Congress. An amendment for definitive refusal to accept office was defeated on the Congress Committee by 87 votes to 48.

The National Congress entered the elections as the only organisation contesting them on an All-India basis. Against the motley array of communal fractions and mushroom "parties" and groupings hastily created, often with thinly concealed official encouragement, in the different provinces to fight the Congress, the National Congress stood out as the representative of the united national front. This national unity, the uncompromising proclamation of the aim of complete national independence, and the record of the years of struggle, of wholesale arrests and extra-constitutional mass struggle, was the first factor in the election victory of the Congress.

The Congress Election Manifesto was a document which placed in the forefront the aim of complete national independence and of the Constituent Assembly, condemned without reservation the imperialist Constitution and explained the purpose of sending representatives to the legislature "not to co-operate in any way with the Act, but to combat it and seek to end it." At the same time the Election Manifesto did not

rest on the basis of general principles. It set out also a concrete immediate programme, both of democratic demands for civil liberties and equal rights, and also a social and economic programme capable of appealing to the broadest masses of the people. This was the second factor in the election victory of the Congress.

The social and economic programme of the Congress in its Election Manifesto is of especial importance to note as laying down the lines for the subsequent Congress Ministries. The effective passages ran:

> "The Congress realises that independence cannot be achieved through these legislatures, nor can the problems of poverty and unemployment be effectively tackled by them. Nevertheless the Congress places its general programme before the people of India so that they may know what it stands for and what it will try to achieve, whenever it has the power to do so.
>
> "At the Karachi session of the Congress in 1931 the general Congress objective was defined in the Fundamental Rights resolution. That general definition still holds. The last five years of developing crisis have however necessitated a further consideration of the problems of poverty and unemployment and other economic problems.
>
> "The most important and urgent problem of the country is the appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry, fundamentally due to antiquated and repressive land tenure and revenue systems, and intensified in recent years by the great slump in prices of agricultural produce.
>
> "The Congress reiterates its declaration made at Karachi—that it stands for a reform of the system of land tenure and revenue and rent, and an equitable adjustment of the burden on agricultural land, giving immediate relief to the smaller peasantry by a substantial reduction of agricultural rent revenue now paid by them and exempting uneconomic holdings from payment of rent and revenue.
>
> "The question of indebtedness requires urgent consideration and the formulation of a scheme including the declaration of a moratorium, an enquiry into and sealing down of debts and the provision for cheap credit facilities by the State. This relief should extend to the agri-

cultural tenants, peasant proprietors, small landholders and petty traders.

"In regard to industrial workers the policy of the Congress is to secure to them a decent standard of living, hours of work and conditions of labour in conformity, as far as the economic conditions in the country permit, with international standards, suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen, protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness and unemployment and the right of workers to form unions and to strike for the protection of their interests.

"The Congress has already declared that it stands for the removal of all sex disabilities whether legal or social or in any sphere of public activity. It has expressed itself in favour of maternity benefits and the protection of women workers. The women of India have already taken a leading part in the freedom struggle, and the Congress looks forward to their sharing, in an equal measure with the men of India, the privileges and obligations of a free India.

"The stress that the Congress has laid on the removal of untouchability and for the social and economic uplift of the Harijans and the backward classes is well known. It holds that they should be equal citizens with others with equal rights in all civic matters.

"The encouragement of khadi and village industries has also long been a principal plan of the Congress programme. In regard to larger industries, protection should be given, but the rights of the workers and the producers of raw materials should be safeguarded, and due regard should be paid to the interests of village industries."

This broad democratic programme, with its direct voicing of the immediate demands of the peasants and industrial workers, played a big part in mobilising the overwhelming mass support (far beyond the actual electorate) won the Congress in the election campaign.

The election results showed a sweeping victory of the National Congress to an extent that startled the Government and official opinion and afforded a powerful demonstration of the united national will for independence. The Government had done all in its power to mobilise all possible forces against

the Congress. According to the report of the General Secretary of the National Congress after the campaign, the Government actively used its influence to endeavour to defeat the Congress:

> "The Government was wide awake. It knew that the success of the Congress would augur ill for the new Constitution. Despite protestation to the contrary, they throughout continued exercising their influence directly and indirectly. They helped in the creation of parties. The National Agriculturist Party in the United Provinces, the Unionist Party in the Punjab and other such parties elsewhere had all the backing of the Provincial Governments."
>
> *(General Secretary's Report to the Haripura National Congress. 1938.)*

In the United Provinces an official circular was issued by the Secretary of the Court of Wards:

> "*It is essential in the interest of the class which the* Court of Wards especially represents and of the agricultural interest generally to inflict as crushing a defeat as possible on the Congress.... The Court has therefore decided to support the candidate who will actively oppose the Congress candidate.... The District officers are instructed to engage themselves in the systematic survey of the Province, constituency by constituency, and prepare themselves in support of the loyalist candidate in each constituency."

An official apology had to be issued for this circular; but there is no doubt that, if not always with such glaring openness, every possible influence was brought to bear.

The extent of the Congress victory can be measured from the results. The significance of the Congress total of 715 seats is the more marked when it is remembered that out of the nominal total of 1,585 seats, there were in reality only 657 seats open to general competition and not earmarked for some special section.

RESULTS OF PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, 1937

Province	*Total Seats*	*Open "General" Seats*	*Congress*	*Moslem League*	*Moslem Independent*	*Others*
Madras	215	116	159	11	—	45[1]
Bombay	175	99	88	20	10	57
Bengal	250	48	50	40	43	117[2]
United Provinces	228	120	134	27	30	37[3]
Punjab	175	34	18	1	—	156[4]
Bihar	152	71	98	—	15	39
Central Provinces	112	64	71	—	14	27
Assam	108	40	35	9	14	50
N. W. Frontier	50	9	19	—	2	29
Orissa	60	38	36	—	—	24
Sind	60	19	7	—	—	53
Total	1,585	657	715	108	128	634

The Congress won absolute majorities in Madras (also in the Upper Chamber), Bombay, the United Provinces, Bihar (also in the Upper Chamber), Central Provinces and Orissa. In Bengal and Assam it came out as the strongest single party. The Liberals (i.e., Moderates) were everywhere eclipsed. The officially favoured "Justice Party" (former "Non-Brahmin Party"), once all-powerful in Madras, was wiped out with less than one-twelfth of the seats. The officially favoured "Nationalist Agriculturist Party" fared even worse in the United Provinces. Only in the Punjab and Sind did the Congress do badly.

The seats won by the Congress were almost entirely the "general" seats. Of the 58 Moslem seats contested, 26 were won (15 in the North-west Frontier Province). A few Labour, Sikh and Christian seats were also won, 4 Landholder seats and 3 Commerce and Industry seats.

The significance of the Congress election victory created a profound impression on imperialist opinion. The London *Times*, compelled once and for all to abandon the old pretence

[1] Including Justice Party 17.
[2] Including Proja Party, 38.
[3] Including National Agriculturist Party, 16.
[4] Mostly Unionist Party.

of treating the National Congress as representative of only an "insignificant minority," wrote:

> "Once again the Indian elections have shown that the Congress Party alone is organised on more than a Provincial basis. Its record of successes has been impressive...Altogether the Congress has done well, and, though it owes much to its excellent organisation and to the divisions and lack of organisation of the more Conservative elements, these factors alone do not explain its numerous victories...The Party's proposals have been more positive and constructive than those of most of its opponents. In the agricultural constituencies, where it has been unexpectedly successful, it has put forward an extensive programme of rural reform....The party has won its victories.... on issues which interested millions of Indian rural voters and scores of millions who had no votes."
>
> *("The Times," March 9, 1937.)*

The last point is of especial importance. The verdict of the 15½ million electors who recorded their votes, and the overwhelming majority given to the Congress, in spite of the utmost shackling and limitations of an indefensible compartmentalised electoral system, constituted a veritable referendum of the national will for independence and for social advance. Yet there is no question how far more overwhelming the results would have been had the broad masses, to whom, as *The Times* admits, the programme made its strongest appeal, been free to vote.

3. CONGRESS PROVINCIAL MINISTRIES

Following the elections, the question of the formation of Ministries in the Provinces where the Congress held a majority had to be finally decided. In March, 1937, a formula was at length reached and adopted by the All-India Congress Committee authorising acceptance of office subject to certain conditions:

> "The All-India Congress Committee authorises and permits acceptance of offices in the Provinces where Congress commands a majority in the legislature, provided that ministership shall not be accepted unless the leader of the Congress Party in the legislature is satisfied and

able to state publicly that the Governor will not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of Ministers in regard to their constitutional activities."

This formula had been elaborated by Gandhi and was adopted by 127 votes to 70. The majority of the socialists and Left-wing generally opposed acceptance of office, seeing in it a concession to co-operation with imperialism and fearing it would represent an alternative to the path of mass struggle. Their amendment against acceptance of office was rejected by 135 votes to 78. This opposition was largely actuated by lack of confidence in the moderate constitutionalist elements of the leadership who, it was feared, would turn the policy into one of increasing compromise with imperialism.

Three months' delay followed after the decision in favour of conditional acceptance of office before the Congress Ministries were inaugurated. The Congress stood out for its demand that a prior declaration must be made by the Government that the special powers of the Governors would not be used in such a way as to hamper the constitutional activities of the Ministries. Meanwhile on April 1, All Fools' Day (what wag in the offices of imperialism selected this date for the purpose is unrecorded), the new Constitution was inaugurated. It was met by a universal hartal of impressive completeness. Since negotiations between the Congress and the authorities were still at a deadlock, interim Ministries without majorities were constituted. The deadlock was finally resolved after the Viceroy's declaration on June 22 that all Governors would be anxious "not merely not to provoke conflicts with their Ministers to whatever party their Ministers belong, but to leave nothing undone to avoid or resolve such conflicts." On this understanding the Congress accepted office, although making clear in the final resolution of the Working Committee that the declaration of the Viceroy and others "though they exhibit a desire to make an approach to the Congress demand, fall short of the assurances demanded in terms of the A.I.C.C. resolution."

In July, 1937, Congress Ministries were formed in the six Provinces where the Congress held absolute majorities in the Lower House: Bombay, Madras, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces, and Orissa. Soon after, the access of a group of eight non-Congress members in the North-west Frontier Province to co-operation with the Congress and acceptance of Congress discipline (in a signed declaration) gave the Con-

gress an absolute majority there also, leading to the formation of a Congress Ministry. Thus Congress Ministries were established in seven of the eleven Provinces of British India, with an aggregate population of close on 160 millions, or three-fifths of the population of British India, and over two-fifths of the total population of India. Congress Coalition governments were later formed in Assam and Sind.

The Congress Provincial Ministries were in office for over two years until, with the war crisis and the rupture with the Central Government, they resigned in November 1939. The character of their record during these two years provoked sharp and increasing controversy within the national movement.

The Congress Ministries in the Provinces were not in any modern parliamentary sense Governments. Gandhi, in an article in the *Harijan* in August, 1938, made clear the extreme limitations of their powers and their consequent special role as instruments in the real struggle for liberation:

> "Democratic Britain has set up an ingenious system in India which, when you look at it in its nakedness, is nothing but a highly organised military control. It is not less so under the present Government of India Act. The Ministers are mere puppets so far as the real control is concerned. The Collectors and Police may at a mere command from the Governors unseat the Ministers, arrest them and put them in a lock-up. Hence it is that I have suggested that Congress has entered upon office, not to work the Act in the manner expected by the framers, but in a manner so as to hasten the day of substituting it by a genuine Act of India's own making."

Such a policy could, however, only be carried out by a revolutionary leadership. The dominant moderate leadership in control of the Ministries carried out in fact a very different policy. In practice the Congress Ministries settled down to "working the Act in the manner expected by the framers"; and the representatives of imperialism did not conceal their satisfaction at the "success" of the experiment. Certain limited achievements, especially in the earlier period, were recorded, in the sphere of civil liberties, agrarian legislation and some attempts at social, educational and health reforms. These reforms did not and could not touch the main bases of imperialist power and exploitation or the main causes of the poverty of the masses. As the price of these reforms, the Con-

gress Ministries remaining in office acted more and more openly as organs of imperialist administration against the masses of the people.

The most important achievement of the Congress Ministries was in the sphere of civil liberties. The advance here was especially marked in the earlier period. Step by step, nearly all political prisoners were released. This extended to prisoners still suffering sentence for actions as far back as Chauri Chaura in 1922 and the Moplah rising of 1921. The Garhwali riflemen were also released. Bans on scores of political organisations were removed (but the ban on the Communist Party, imposed by the Central Government, remained). Restrictions on the movement of political workers were lifted. Securities taken from newspapers were returned, and blacklists of newspapers to be excluded from government printing or advertising on account of their political opinions were cancelled. The partial extension of freedom of press and publication in the Congress Provinces was reflected in an enormous growth of literature on political enlightenment.

Nevertheless, the role of the Congress Ministries as organs of the policy administration of imperialism was revealed from an early date. Already in the first few months a shock was created by the sentence of a leading Congress Socialist under the Madras Government to six months' imprisonment for sedition. Cases occurred of the employment of the hated Section 124A (against seditious propaganda) and Section 144 (for the prohibition of meetings) of the Penal Code—the very measures of repression which the Congress had previously denounced in unmeasured terms. Sharp controversy over these developments followed within the Congress organs. The doctrine of "non-violence," with its usual amazing elasticity, was extended to include police action and imprisonment against those considered guilty of "propaganda of violence"—a term which was in fact used in a very free-and-easy manner to cover opinions hostile to the existing regime and advocating the normal forms of mass struggle. Behind this controversy lay the growing alarm of the upper class and moderate elements in the Congress against the rapid advance of the working calss and peasant movement.

In the social and economic field the new Ministries attempted a very limited programme. They did not attempt to tackle the heavy obstacles represented by the existing land-system and the economic regime under imperialism. They acted with great consideration for the landlord and moneyed

elements which had influence with the moderate wing of the Congress leadership.

Certain immediate measures of legislation were carried out, especially in relation to the peasants. On the urgent question of debt, measures were adopted for cancelling a proportion of old arrears, as in the Madras Agriculturists' Debt Relief Act, for an immediate moratorium, as in the United Provinces and Bombay, for scaling down of debts and for limitation of the rate of interest, usually to a figure of 6-9 per cent. Tenancy legislation was carried, aimed to afford a certain degree of protection against ejectment, to cancel enhancements of rent, to remove irregular additional dues and charges and to limit interest on arrears of rent. In some cases remission of land revenue were granted. The 40,000 Dublas or tied serfs in Bombay were liberated.

The extent of the agrarian legislation, and the scope it covered was very limited; it had to be pressed by very strong agitation and demonstrations of the peasants; and it encountered obstinate opposition of the landlords, who used their influence to whittle it down. The actual debt reductions achieved were a very small proportion of the total volume of debt. The tenancy legislation only assisted a minority of tenants (thus the Bombay Tenancy Bill, according to the statement attached to the Bill, was only expected to affect 4 per cent of the tenants), and did not touch the main burdens of rent. The agricultural labourers were unaffected; though numbering 42 per cent of the population in Madras, they were excluded from the Agriculturists' Debt Relief Act. These limitations were conspicuous in all the agrarian legislation, and emphasised the fact that, while small immediate concessions could be won in this way, any more serious relief and wider approach would necessarily require far more radical measures. Peasant agitation in Bihar, Orissa and the United Provinces was widespread owing to dissatisfaction with the weakness of the Minister in failing to withstand the opposition of the landlords, and the so-called "Congress-Zemindar Pact" in Bihar was denounced. In general, the tenancy legislation was of very limited effectiveness and aimed at protecting the larger peasant cultivator rather than the sub-tenant and dispossessed agriculturist.

On the side of the industrial working class, the formation of the Congress Ministries encouraged a rapid advance of activity, wage demands and trade union organisation. The total of strikes in 1937 rose to 9 million working days, or more than previous three years combined and the highest since 1929, the

number of workers involved being 647,000, or the highest on record. The Congress Ministries, while seeking to promote industrial conciliation, and utilising the Trade Disputes Act for this purpose, exercised their influence to improve the conditions of the workers and secure wage increase. The Bombay Textile Labour Enquiry Committee granted a wage increase for the mill-workers, and its finding was carried out, in the face of some protest from the mill-owners. The United Provinces Congress Government assisted the settlement of the Cawnpore strike on the basis of an increase in wages and the recognition of the union; and when the owners sought to oppose the findings in 1938, the unity of the Congress and the workers secured a victory.

Sharp issues arose in relation to the strike movement, the question of the right to strike and trade union recognition. In Madras intervention by the Government was constantly directed against the workers in cases of disputes. Acute difficulties arose with the Bombay Government with reference to the use of Section 144 (prohibiting processions, or meetings of more than five persons) in Sholapur, and other administrative measures against the strike movement and freedom of working-class activity, and rose to a sharp point over the Bombay Industrial Disputes Bill in the latter part of 1938. This Bill seriously limited the right to strike by imposing a four months' interim period for the operation of conciliation machinery, durring which strikes were illegal; it also imposed complicated regulations for the registration of unions in a way that could favour company unions or unions favoured by the employers. Some modifications were made in the Bill in response to trade union representations; but the main principles remained, and the Bombay Provincial Trade Union Congress Committee called a protest strike against it on November 7. This protest strike, which won a powerful response, was met with police action, leading to casualties and one death.

In the sphere of social reform the Congress Ministries concentrated their main attentions on the development of prohibition of drink and drugs on an extending local basis (the sale of drinks and drugs was promoted by the imperialist Government, through agencies under its control, as a source of revenue; and prohibition meant a heavy financial loss). Attempts were also made to develop an educational reform programme; but any serious educational programme required finance, and finance was lacking. Some beginnings of social legislation were attempted, as in the provision for maternity benefit for

women workers in factories in the United Provinces. Within the limits of finance, measures of public hygiene were initiated, especially in the villages for the extension of rural water supply and sanitation.

The all-pervading problem confronting and shackling the work of the Congress Ministries at every turn, and in fact revealing their real impotence under the control of imperialism, was the problem of finance. The limitations imposed by lack of finance may be seen when examining the budgets of the Provincial Governments. It will be seen how little was actually accomplished.

EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION

(in thousands of rupees)

	1937-38	1938-39	1939-40
United Provinces	20,615	20,852	21,242
Bombay	16,805	19,064	20,017
Madras	25,796	26,198	26,357

EXPENDITURE ON PUBLIC HEALTH

(in thousands of rupees)

	1937-38	1938-39	1939-40
United Provinces	2,252	2,458	2,365
Bombay	2,406	2,754	2,810
Madras	4,407	2,657	2,730

The experience of the formation and early period of the Congress Provincial Ministries led, not so much by the actions of the Ministries as by the hopes aroused and impetus given, to an enormous advance of the national movement, of confidence and mass awakening. But the negative side of the account was heavy. The experience of the two years of Congress Ministries demonstrated with growing acuteness the dangers implicit in entanglement in imperialist administration under a leadership already inclined to compromise. The dominant moderate leadership in effective control of the Congress machinery and of the Ministries was in practice developing to increasing co-operation with imperialism, was acting more and more openly in the interests of the upper-class landlords and industrialists, and was showing an increasingly marked hostility to all militant expression and forms of mass struggle. As the practical experience of the Ministries developed, discontent grew. It became more and more obvious

that the decisive tasks of the national struggle for independence were in front and could not be solved through the machinery of the Congress Ministries. Hence a new crisis of the national movement began to develop.

4. THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION AND DEVELOPING CRISIS

The Haripura National Congress in February, 1938, defined the policy of the Congress in relation to the Federal section of the Constitution and the moves developing to bring it into force. The resolution unanimously adopted declared:

> "The Congress has rejected the new Constitution and declared that a Constitution for India which can be accepted by the people must be based on independence and can only be framed by the people themselves by means of a Constituent Assembly without interference by any foreign authority. Adhering to this policy of rejection, the Congress has, however, permitted the formation in provinces of Congress Ministries with a view to strengthen the nation in its struggle for independence. In regard to the proposed Federation, no such considerations apply even provisionally or for a period, and the imposition of this Federation will do grave injury to India and tighten the bonds which hold her in subjection to imperialist domination. This scheme of Federation excludes from the sphere of responsibility vital functions of government....
>
> "The Congress, therefore, reiterates its condemnation of the proposed Federal scheme and calls upon the Provincial and local Congress Committees and the people generally, as well as the Provincial Governments and Ministries, to prevent its inauguration. In the event of an attempt being made to impose it despite the declared will of the people, such an attempt must be combatted in every way, and the Provincial Governments and Ministries must refuse to co-operate with it. In case such a contingency arises the All-India Congress Committee is authorised and directed to determine the line of action to be pursued in this regard."

It will be seen that the rejection of the Federal section of the Constitution in this resolution was absolute, and did not leave the door open to negotiations. This absolute rejection was based on the viewpoint that the Federal provisions repre-

sent, not a possible step on the path to self-government, but a strengthening of the hold of imperialism.

What was to be the positive policy and line of action of the Congress in the event of imperialism endeavouring to impose the Federal Constitution? On this crucial question, raising the whole issue of the new stage of struggle and the forms of action, no specific answer, other than the answer in principle, was yet given by the Haripura Congress.

In Government circles the view was held that this absolute rejection was a preliminary gesture, and would give way eventually to some form of acceptance, as in the case of the Provinces. Although this estimate completely undervalued the strength of national opposition, it was not without a basis, in view of the lack of preparations for the alternative of a new and heavy struggle, and in view of the known tendencies of the moderate elements in the dominant leadership to consider the possibilities of a bargain on the basis of modifications in the terms of practical working of the Act.

During 1938 various conversations took place between prominent representatives of imperialism and individual Congress leaders, and rumours began to be spread that a compromise was in prospect. There was no basis in any official declaration for such rumours. It was true, however, the individual Right-wing leaders had made statements which implied a possible compromise on the basis of a modified Federal Constitution; and many Left-wing elements, already alarmed at the "drift to constitutionalism," and knowing that the Right-wing was dominant in the "High Command," feared that, despite brave words, a surrender would follow.

In reality the deeper issue behind these controversies lay in the question of the mass basis of the Congress and its relation to the developing mass struggle of the workers and peasants. Only in proportion as the Congress deepened and strengthened its mass basis and its organic relation to the mass struggle could it develop the strength to be capable of defeating Federation and imposing its own terms on imperialism. The alarm expressed by the dominant elements of the leadership with regard to the rapid advance of the workers' and peasants' movement, the deprecation of class struggle as a violation of "non-violence," and increasing readiness to use or defend police coercive measures against strikes and unrest, meant inevitably that they were travelling along a path which led to increasing compromise with imperialism.

It was in this situation that Subhas Chandra Bose, who

had been nominated President the previous year without a contest, decided to contest the Congress Presidential election in 1939 for re-election, on the basis of posing the political issue of launching a nation-wide struggle against Federation and resisting the tendencies, which he described as existing in the Right-wing leadership, towards compromise. For the first time the presidential election was contested. The key importance of the contest lay in the fact that the Working Committee, or ruling organ of the Congress, is not elected but nominated by the President; thus the election of the President is the constitutional opportunity for the voice of the membership to be expressed with regard to the character of the leadership of the Congress. The opposing candidate to Bose was supported by Gandhi and the majority of the members of the old Working Committee. Bose was supported by the Left Nationalists, Socialists and Communists. In the contest Bose was elected by 1,575 to 1,376 votes.

The election of Bose, in the face of the opposition of the official machine, led to a sharp inner crisis. In fact the result of the personal election of a President, while having its importance as a barometer of feelings among the rank and file, could by no means be regarded as a definite political judgement or indication of an effective Left majority in the membership. The subsequent proceedings at Tripuri were to prove this. But the result did undoubtedly indicate the growing movement of opinion to the Left. Gandhi himself treated the result as a personal defeat and declared: "It is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand." The *Times of India* recorded its verdict: "Mr. Bose's election does represent a Congress trend to the Left." The *Bombay Chronicle* commented: "The election clearly indicates a trend towards radicalism and mass assertiveness." It is noticeable that in the elections to the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee Communists were prominently returned, the former Meerut prisoner, Adhikari, receiving the highest number of votes secured by any candidate in the city; while in the Bombay municipal election which followed the four Communist candidates who stood topped the polls.

This outcome of the presidential election was a disappointment to Gandhi and the dominant moderate leadership, who did not conceal their discontent with the result. Gandhi issued a statement accusing the Congress of becoming "a corrupt organisation" with "bogus members," and held out the threat that the Right wing, if they disapproved of the policy of the

majority, might leave the Congress: "Those who, being Congress-minded, remain outside it by design, represent it most. Those, therefore, who feel uncomfortable in being in the Congress may come out."

Twelve of the fifteen members of the Working Committee resigned, in order, as they explained, to leave a free field for Bose, and also on the grounds that they felt that in his election campaign he had cast aspersions on their *bona fides*. Jawaharlal Nehru also resigned from the Working Committee, though with a separate statement explaining his special view-point (more fully explained in the booklet issued by him in connection with the crisis, entitled "Where Are We?").

The Tripuri session of the National Congress, which met in March, 1939, was able to maintain the unity of organisation of the Congress, but was not able to resolve the controversy. The main resolution on the "National Demand" reaffirmed the Congress declaration of uncompromising opposition to the Federal part of the Government of India Act and determination to resist its imposition.

On the division of leadership which had arisen a resolution moved by the supporters of Gandhi was finally carried after sharp controversy. This resolution reaffirmed confidence in the leadership and policies of Gandhi and required the President to nominate his Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhi. It thus established in effect a personal dictatorship of Gandhi, who was not a member of the Congress. This resolution was carried in the Subjects Committee by 218 to 135 votes and was adopted by the Congress.

Experience after the Tripuri Congress showed that no solution of the controversy had in fact been reached. Negotiations between Bose and Gandhi regarding the composition of the Working Committee to be nominated ended in a breakdown. In April, 1939, Bose resigned the presidency, and a new president, Rajendra Prasad, was elected by the All-India Congress Committee. Bose proceeded to organise the opposition elements supporting him in a new association within the Congress, the "Forward Bloc," the aim of which was declared to be to "rally radical and anti-imperialist elements within the Congress."

The Forward Bloc did not make any fundamental criticism of the constitution, creed, policy and programme of the Congress, but expressed dissatisfaction with the existing

leadership and called for preparations for active struggle for independence and against Federal Status. In the summer of 1939 the controversy reached a sharper phase. A meeting of the All-India Congress Committee adopted resolutions to tighten up the constitution of the Congress, to restrict the powers of the Congress Provincial Committees in relation to the actions of Congress Ministries and to prohibit Congressmen from leading movements of passive resistance without sanction of the appropriate Congress Committees. The last of these resolutions was intended to check the growing independence of the workers' and peasants' movements from the control of the Congress, and was widely interpreted as a restriction on the day-to-day struggles of the workers and peasants. In protest against this resolution, Bose and the "Left Consolidation Committee," representing a coalition of opposition elements, called public demonstrations on July 9. This action represented an infringement of Congress discipline, and Bose was thereon disqualified from the presidency of the Bengal Congress Committee and from holding office in the Congress for a period of three years.

The increasing sharpness of these divisions within the Congress was a sign of the growing crisis in the country. It was increasingly evident that the possibilities of advance through the utilisation of the Congress Ministries had reached exhaustion and that a major struggle was impending between imperialism and the National Movement. While the divisions within the upper Congress leadership, which were mixed with personal issues, did not yet represent a clear political alignment, there was no question of the ferment which was developing in the Congress membership and in the masses of the people. As between the dominant Gandhist leadership and the "Forward Bloc" in the Congress, there was still no basic division on the programme, creed and policy of the Congress. The "Forward Bloc," in Bose's words, "while cherishing the highest respect for Mr. Gandhi's personality and his political doctrine of non-violent non-co-operation will not, however, necessarily have confidence in the present High Command of the Congress." The basic programme and leadership of the mass movement had still to develop. But the facts showed that the conditions were ripening for an advance to a new stage in the national movement.

This was the situation when the outbreak of war at once brought to a head the gathering conflict between imperialism and the national movement and raised new issues.

Chapter XVI

INDIA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

> "We shall seek the cooperation and the active participation of all nations large and small whose peoples in heart and mind are dedicated as are our own peoples to the elimination of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance. We will welcome them as they may choose to come into a world family of democratic nations" — **TEHERAN DECLARATION, December, 1943.**

THE COURSE OF the second world war brought India into the full stream of international politics. The war of 1914 had been relatively remote from India, despite the use of Indian troops and resources overseas. But in 1942-44 war and invasion overran the closest neighbours of India and reached the borders of India. The war of 1914 had laid a heavy economic strain on India. But the second world war brought not only far heavier economic exactions: it brought extreme inflation, economic disorganisation and famine. The war of 1914 had stimulated and sharpened political questions for India. But the second world war brought the fundamental question of Indian independence to the forefront of Indian politics. It brought new issues and problems and conflicts into the heart of Indian politics, and affected all political alignments.

Prior to 1914 the question of India's role in world politics might have appeared primarily a question of British strategy and policy. The attention of the national movement was concentrated and naturally concentrated on the struggle within India. Until India was free it appeared illogical to ask the Indian people to aspire to any independent role in world politics.

But since the world fascist offensive from 1931 onwards the position changed. Questions of foreign policy came into the forefront within the national movement.

Before coming to the special questions of the second world war it will be useful to touch briefly on the previous development and the role of India in British world strategy and the attitude of the national movement to questions of foreign policy.

1. BRITISH WORLD STRATEGY AND INDIA

In the broadest sense the question of India under British rule has always been a world political question, and a major question of world politics.

The concentration of British world strategy around the pivot of the domination of India can be traced with increasing clearness through the past two centuries. The eighteenth-century wars of Britain and France revolved primarily, not so much around the kaleidoscope of the shifting European constellations which appeared as their immediate cause, but around the struggle for the New World and for the domination of India. The loss of the United States increased the importance of India. When Napoleon directed his expeditions to Egypt and the Near East, he had before him visions of the advance to India. Through the nineteenth century Russia appeared as the bogey extending ever farther over Asia and threatening India. When Britain abandoned isolation at the beginning of the twentieth century, the first step in the abandonment of isolation was the alliance with Japan, and the revised Anglo-Japanese Treaty, when it was renewed, contained the formula for Japanese assistance in maintaining British domination in India. The conflict with Germany turned especially on the control of the Middle East, opening up the way to India.

India has throughout provided the inexhaustible reservoir for Britain, alike of material and of human resources, not only for its own conquest, but for the whole policy of Asiatic expansion. A great part of the public debt of India has been built up on this basis through wars conducted for the aims of British policy in other Asiatic countries, or even beyond the confines of Asia, and charged to India. A British military officer wrote in 1859:

> "Most of our Asiatic wars with countries beyond the limits of our Empire have been carried on by means of the military and monetary resources of the Government of India, though the objects of those wars were, in some

instances, purely British, and in others but remotely connected with the interests of India."

(Major Wingate, "Our Financial Relations with India," 1859, p. 17.)

Wars were conducted on this basis in Afghanistan, Burma, Siam, China, Persia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt and Abyssinia.

The limitless calculations and aspirations of the British military authorities, during the nineteenth-century period of extending power, to achieve world dominion on the basis of India were illustrated in the outburst of Charles Napier, who was Commander-in-Chief under Lord Dalhousie before the Revolt of 1857:

"Would that I were King of India! I would make Moscow and Pekin shake.... The five rivers and the Punjab, the Indus and Sind, the Red Sea and Malta, what a chain of lands and waters to attach England to India! Were I King of England, I would, from the palace of Delhi, thrust forth a clenched fist in the teeth of Russia and France. England's fleet should be all in all in the West, and the Indian Army all in all in the East."

The size of the Indian Army and the enormous scale of expenditure upon it have been largely governed, not only by the needs of holding in subjection the people of India, but by the calculations of its use for wars and expansion beyond the frontiers of India. In 1885 Sir Courtenay Ilbert, of the Viceroy's Council, explained in a minute of dissent to the existing policy:

"A standing army which is larger than necessary for home requirements will be a temptation as an almost irresistible weapon of offence beyond the frontier."

(Sir Courtenay Ilbert, minute of dissent, August 14, 1885.)

This prophecy was fulfilled in the conquest and annexation of Burma which followed immediately after.. Then came the Chitral Expedition of 1895, the inglorious campaign of Tirah, the annexation of the North-west Frontier regions under Curzon in 1900 and the Tibet Expedition of 1904.

In the discussions on the budget of 1904-5 Sir E. Ellis defended the policy of expansion against the criticisms of the Indian national leader, Gokhale:

"Are we to be content to hide ourselves behind our mountain barriers under the foolish impression that we

should be safe, whilst theabsorption of Asiatic Kingdoms is steadily in progress....It is, I think, undoubted that the Indian Army in the future must be the main factor in the maintenance of the balance of power in Asia. It is impossible to regard it any longer as a local militia for purely local defence and maintenance of order."

Lord Curzon was even more explicit in his statement in relation to the same discussion:

> "India is like a fortress with the vast moat of the sea on two of her faces and with mountains for her walls on the remainder. But beyond these walls which are sometimes of by no means insuperable height and admit of being easily penetrated, extends a glacis of varying breadth and dimension. We do not want to occupy it, but we also cannot afford to see it occupied by our foes. We are quite content to let it remain in the hands of our allies and friends; but if rival and unfriendly influences creep up to it and lodge themselves right under our walls, we are compelled to intervene because a danger would thereby grow up that might one day menace our security. This is the secret of the whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet and as far eastwards as Siam."

The conception of Lord Curzon, whose governing influence may be traced in the whole subsequent policy down to the present day, can be found more fully expounded in his book "Problems of the Far East":

> "The Indian Empire is in the strategic centre of the third most important portion of the globe.... But her central and commanding position is nowhere better seen than in the political influence which she exercises over the destinies of her neighbours near and far, and the extent to which their fortunes revolve upon an Indian axis."
>
> *(Rt. Hon. G. N. Curzon, "Problems of the Far East," 1894, pp. 9-10.)*

The Army in India Committee in 1913 laid down that India was "not called upon to maintain troops for the specific purpose of placing them at the disposal of the Home Government for wars outside the Indian sphere, although—as has happened in the past — she may lend such troops if they are otherwise available."

The war of 1914-18 illustrated to the full this use of India. Nearly 1 million troops, of whom over half a million were combatants, were drafted overseas to France, East Africa, Egypt, Mesopotamia, etc., while hundreds of millions of pounds were extracted from India. India was made the base for the conquest of the new Middle Eastern Empire, although the subsequent revival of Turkey and the strength of Ibn Saudi Arabia diminished the completeness of the victory.

The Esher Committee Report of 1920 laid down in far more uncompromising terms than the 1913 Army in India Committee the official conception of the Indian Army as the weapon of the British Empire for use outside India:

> "We cannot consider the administration of the Army in India otherwise than as part of the total armed forces of the Empire."

In accordance with this principle, the Army in India was reorganised in three categories, as laid down by Lord Rawlinson, Commander-in-Chief after the last war, in 1921, and subsequently elaborated in the official handbook "The Army in India and its Evolution," published in 1924:

(1) the Field Army, for major war outside India;

(2) the Covering Troops, for frontier warfare, and, in the event of major war, to form a screen behind which mobilisation can proceed undisturbed;

(3) Internal Security Troops, for garrison purposes within India.

The Field Army consisted of four Divisions and four (later mechanised) Cavalry Brigades, and was described as India's striking force in a major war.

The extent to which the weight of Empire military burdens was increasingly thrown on India in the post-1918 period was shown in the proportionate figures of military expenditure. The following table shows the proportionate increase in military expenditure in Britain, India and the Dominions between 1913 and 1928:

MILITARY EXPENDITURE, 1913-28

	(in £ millions)		Increase,
	1913	1928	per cent
Great Britain ..	77	115	49
India ..	22	44	100
Dominions ..	9	12	33
Total ..	108	171	57

(Eastern Economist, Armaments Supplement, Oct. 19, 1929.)

The burden on India (which had no say in the matter) had been doubled, while that on Great Britain had been increased by less than half, and that on the Dominions by one-third Military expenditure before the war of 1914 accounted for two-fifths of the budget: 41 per cent in 1891-92 and 42.6 per cent in 1913-14. It rose from the pre-1914 average of 300 million rupees to 874 million in the inflated prices of 1920-21, or 51 per cent of the budget; was reduced, with lowered prices and economies, to 560 million by 1925-26, or 39 per cent; by 1928-29 had climbed again to 45 per cent. In 1936-37 it totalled, according to the official estimate, 54 per cent of the Central Budget and 29 per cent of the combined Central and Provincial Budgets.

The strategic importance of India to Britain increased in the period between the two world wars. The new Middle Eastern Empire and system of influence was built up on the basis of India. The concentration on the Cape route with the new naval base of Simonstown, to balance the possible loss of effective control of the Mediterranean, and on the supposedly impregnable naval base of Singapore to command the gateway from the Pacific into the Indian Ocean, alike reflected the central concentration on the control of India and of the roads to India as the pivot of the Empire. As the passage through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal became increasingly precarious, the Imperial Air Line uniting Britain with Australia through Baghdad, Karachi, Calcutta and Singapore, and with the Far East through India and Siam, became increasingly important as the lifeline of the Empire. As Japan extended its hold on the Pacific and on the coast and riverways of China, the land route through Burma assumed a new importance.

The vulnerability of all these preparations was revealed in the second world war. Not the strength of British imperialism in Asia, but the world victory of the United Nations against the Axis, through the combined strength of the United States, Soviet Union and Britain, and with the decisive battles fought in Europe, thus facilitating the ultimate concentration of power against Japan, led to the final reversal of the disasters and losses suffered by the British Empire in Asia. But the attempts to re-establish the old colonial system after the war met with powerful resistance in face of the enormous advance of the colonial liberation movements in Asia.

Nevertheless, there is no question that India continues to occupy a position of decisive importance for British world

strategy after the second world war. Between the two key areas of British imperialist domination and influence, the Middle East and South-East Asia, India represents the pivot, and, from the standpoint of British policy, the indispensable base. Lord Pethick Lawrence, the chief Labour Party spokesman quite frankly stated in the House of Commons debate in July, 1944, that—

> "Many things had happened to cast some doubt on the power of Britain alone to keep the peace in the seven seas, and in no part of the world was that more the case than in the neighbourhood of the great sub-continent of India. As I see it, India is a great strategic bastion."
>
> *(Indian Annual Register, 1944, Volume II, p. 298.)*

In its critical battle against the colonial movements in Asia, British imperialism used India as its main military base, its source of supplies and even its recruiting ground for troops (until resistance of the national movement brought this to an end in the case of the war on Indonesia) for the purposes of reimposing colonial rule and suppressing the liberation movements in the neighbouring Asiatic countries in Burma, Malaya and Indonesia. Following the Mountbatten award and establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan, British military strategic control did not come to an end in India. While British troops were withdrawn, British Commanders-in-Chief and British officers continued with the armies of India and Pakistan; and arms, training, equipment and strategy continued to be linked with Britain. Alike in foreign policy and in strategic alignment India under the new formally "independent" Governments was drawn into close association with the Anglo-American Bloc of imperialism.

2. NATIONALISM AND FOREIGN POLICY

In considering the strategic significance of India in the past for British world policy and for British internal politics, the role of India has been that of a pawn, playing a part and even a major part in the balance of world forces and world conflicts but not of its own choosing or under its own control.

Prior to the war of 1914 the Indian national movement did not attempt to take up any active role in relation to world political questions, save in respect of the special question of Indians abroad and the disabilities under which they suffered in the other countries of the Empire.

This sense of impotence in relation to the major world political issues of the epoch should not be mistaken for indifference or deliberate isolation. Within the political movement and even in sections of the population far beyond, there was intense interest in foreign political events, in so far as these might be felt to bear on the prospects of Indian liberation. Every sight of weakening of British imperialism, as in the South African War, was followed with eager hopefulness. The victory of Japan in 1905 was hailed with enthusiasm and a new sense of confidence as the first victory of an Asiatic Power against the hitherto supposed invincible forces of Western imperialism. The struggle of Egypt and Ireland against British domination, of the threatened Turkish Empire against the predatory scheme of the Powers, or of Persia against the Anglo-Russian plans for partition, aroused passionate sympathy. The Russian Revolution of 1905, the Turkish Revolution and the Chinese Revolution awakened answering echoes. All these were indications of the first beginnings of a wider international consciousness.

The war of 1914 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 brought a new situation.

In the war of 1914 the upper leadership of the national movement gave its full support to British imperialism in the hope of thereby earning the reward of democratic advance in India. The National Congress deputation in London at the time of the outbreak of war, consisting of Lajpat Rai, Jinnah, Sinha and others hastened to proclaim co-operation for "speedy victory for the Empire." The role of Gandhi has already ben recounted. In the earlier years of the war, the National Congress became the scene of ovations to the leading Government representatives who attended it.

A small group of militant nationalists represented by Hardayal, Barkatulla and others entered into relations with Germany and formed an Indian Committee in Berlin. These, however, exercised no very great influence.

Within India militant struggles were conducted by the Left-wing of the national movement.

At the close of the war the National Congress still entertained the hope that the widely current promises of self-determination might be applied to India. Tilak was deputed to represent the Congress to the Peace Conference at Versailles, and, after the refusal of his passport by the British Government had prevented his attendance, he wrote a letter to Clemenceau as President of the Peace Conference to press

the claims of India. In the course of this letter he wrote:

> "It is unnecessary for me to dwell upon the imperative importance of solving the Indian question for the purpose of ensuring the future peace of the world and the progress of the people of India. India is self-contained, harbours no design upon the integrity of other States and has no ambition outside. With her vast area, enormous resources and prodigious population, she may well aspire to be a leading Power in Asia. She could therefore be a powerful steward of the League of Nations in the East for maintaining the peace of the world and the stability of the British Empire against all aggressors and disturbers of the peace, whether in Asia or elsewhere."

This document of 1919 is the first document of the Indian national movement in the sphere of world policy and reflects the outlook then prevailing.

These hopes were destined to be dashed. "India" was made an original member of the League of Nations. The anomaly of such a "membership," when the control of India, and therefore of the representation and policy, was entirely in British hands, has been sharply expressed by Professor A. B. Keith:

> "The fundamental mistake was that of 1919, when India was given a place in the League of Nations at a time when her policy, internal and external, was wholly dominated by the British Government. The justification for League membership was autonomy: it could fairly be predicted of the Great Dominions: of India, it had no present truth, and it could hardly be said that its early fulfilment was possible. In these circumstances, it would have been wiser candidly to admit that India could not be given then a place in the League, while leaving it open for her, when autonomous, to be accorded distinct membership.... As it is, in the League India's position is to remain determined indefinitely, by the British Government."
>
> *(Sir A. B. Keith, "Constitutional History of India," 1936, pp. 472-3.)*

While the older leadership of the national movement as illustrated in Tilak's letter of 1919 still looked to British imperialism as their natural leader and could publicly offer India as "a powerful steward for maintaining the stability of

the British Empire," new currents were developing from the end of the first world war. The Russian Revolution of 1917, the world revolutionary wave which followed at the conclusion of the war and the advance of the colonial liberation movements in all subject countries led to a new world situation in which India was vitally concerned. Against the old reactionary camp of Western imperialism, the broad common interests of the Soviet Union, the international working-class movement and the national movement in the colonial countries now provided the basis for a new world alignment. To this new world front all the progressive currents of Indian nationalism eagerly responded.

The advance of the Chinese National Revolution during 1925-27 awakened enthusiastic response in India. In 1927 the National Congress carried a resolution of protest against the dispatch of Indian troops to Shanghai for use against the Chinese Revolution. In the same year the National Congress took part in the foundation of and affiliated to the International League of the Oppressed Peoples Against Imperialism, being represented at the Brussels Conference by Nehru. This was an important landmark in the development of the common front of the world anti-imperialist forces linking up the colonial peoples and the international working class.

This awakening swept forward with the development of the fascist war offensive and in face of the complicity of British imperialism in assisting fascist aggression and thus hastening the advance to a world war. The National Congress took its stand with the Abyssinian people and with Spanish democracy and gave them practical aid. It was represented at the World Peace Congress which met at Brussels in September 1936 and affiliated to the International Peace Campaign, subject to the Indian viewpoint that no stable peace could be built up on the basis of imperialist exploitation, that no sanctity of treaties could be recognised which maintained imperialist domination, and that India required freedom to act as a free member of the League of Nations.

In 1936, at a time when the British and French Governments were supporting "non-intervention" in relation to the German-Italian war of aggression against Spanish Democracy, the Indian National Congress proclaimed at its session at Faizpur in December 1936:

> "Fascist aggression has increased, the Fascist Powers are forming alliances and grouping themselves together for

war with the intention of dominating Europe and the world and crushing political and social freedom. The Congress is fully conscious of the necessity of facing this world menace in co-operation with the progressive nations and the peoples of the world."

In February 1938, the Haripura session declared for support of "collective security" and condemned the policy of complicity with fascist aggression which was bringing nearer the menace of war. In 1938 a boycott was proclaimed against Japanese goods. In the spring of 1938 the Tripuri session of the National Congress explicitly dissociated India from the Munich Policy:

"The Congress records its entire disapproval of the British foreign policy culminating in the Munich Pact, the Anglo-Italian Agreement and the recognition of Rebel Spain. This policy has been one of deliberate betrayal of democracy, repeated breaches of pledges, the end of the system of collective security, and cooperation with Governments which are avowed enemies of democracy and freedom.... the Congress dissociates itself entirely from the British foreign policy which has consistently aided Fascist Powers and helped the destruction of democratic countries."

Thus the Indian people through their national leaders had declared their opposition to fascism and their alignment with the democratic and progressive forces of the world against fascism long before the British declaration of war against Germany in 1939, during the critical preceding years when the British Government was giving practical and diplomatic assistance to fascist aggression.

3. INDIA AND THE WAR (1939-1942)

When Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, British policy in relation to India sought to follow the same lines as in 1914. India was to be a passive pawn of British policy, automatically dragged behind Britain without any attempt at consultation of its people.

Within a few hours of the declaration of war, the Viceroy, without any consultation with the representatives of the Indian people, proclaimed India as a belligerent. A Government of India Amending Act was hurried through the British

Parliament in eleven minutes, empowering the Viceroy to over-ride the working of the Constitution also in respect of Provincial Autonomy. The Defence of India Ordinance of September 3, 1939, established the power of the Central Government to rule by decree, to promulgate "such rules as appear to it to be necessary for securing the defence of British India, public safety, maintenance of public order, or the efficient prosecution of the war, or for maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community," to prohibit meetings and other forms of propaganda, and to arrest without warrant, and impose penalties for breaches of regulations, to include death or transportation for life.

On September 11, the Viceroy announced the suspension of the preparations for Federation. Autocratic government was to continue in India, without any constitutional fig leaf and reinforced by the most far-reaching Extraordinary Powers. Once again, as a quarter of a century before, the Indian people were to be dragged at the heels of the British Government into a war in whose making they had had no choice, and in regard to which they had continuously protested at the policy which had made it inevitable.

Events soon showed the difference of the situation in India from 1914.

On September 14, the Working Committee of the National Congress issued its statement on the war. This statement laid down that

> "the Committee cannot associate themselves or offer any co-operation in a war which is conducted on imperialist lines and which is meant to consolidate imperialism in India and elsewhere."

The resolution set out the claim:

> "The Indian people must have the right of self-determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference, and must guide their own policy."

Accordingly the National Congress posed the direct challenge to the British Government:

> "The Working Committee, therefore, invites the British Government to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and to be

given effect to in the present. Do they include the elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people?"

To this direct question of the National Congress the British Government issued a reply which was in fact a negative. Under cover of a repetition of the old promises of some future concession of "Dominion Status" at an unknown date (promises which had been offered under similar conditions in the last war, twenty-two years ago and had still remained unfulfilled) the British Government proposed for its immediate programme, a "Consultative Committee" of Indians to assist the Viceroy in holding India in subjection and promoting the prosecution of the war.

This preliminary diplomatic clash between the leadership of the National Congress and the British Government was only the first symptom of the deeper struggle that was preparing. While the leadership of the Congress was engaged in these diplomatic interchanges with the Viceroy, the masses were already entering into movement. On October 2, 90,000 Bombay workers carried out a one-day political strike against the war and the repressive measures of imperialism. This was the first anti-war mass strike in any of the countries involved in the war. The resolution unanimously passed at the mass meeting on the Kamgar Maidan at the close of the strike proclaimed:

> "This meeting declares its solidarity with the international working class and the people of the world, who are being dragged into the most destructive war by the imperialist Powers. The meeting regards the present war as a challenge to the international solidarity of the working class and declares that it is the task of the workers and people of the different countries to defeat this imperialist conspiracy against humanity."

In this resolution of the Bombay millhands the struggle of the Indian working people found expression as a part of the struggle of the international working class against imperialism.

The negative reply of the Viceroy to its approach led to the resigning of all the Congress Ministries in October, 1939. In the spring of 1940 the Congress meeting at Ramgarh declared its view that

> "the recent pronouncements made on behalf of the Bri-

tish Government in regard to India demonstrate that Great Britain is carrying on the war fundamentally for imperialist ends.... Under these circumstances it is clear that the Congress cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, be a party to the war."

In the summer of 1940 following the Nazi advance in Europe, the collapse of France and the deepening crisis of the war, the Congress made a new offer of co-operation, conditional on the recognition of Indian independence and the establishment of "a Provisional National Government at the Centre, which, though formed as a transitory measure, should be such as to command the confidence of all elected members in the Central Legislature.... if these measures are adopted, it will enable the Congress to throw in its full weight in the efforts for the effective organisation of the defence of the country." This offer which entailed the explicit rejection of Gandhi's line of non-violence in relation to external defence, was carried by a two-thirds majority at Poona in July 1940. The voting showed 91 to 63 for the rejection of non-violence, and 95 to 47 for the offer of conditional co-operation.

Once again, however, this offer met with a negative reply from the British Government. The Viceroy's statement of August 8, 1940 (commonly referred to as the "August Offer" and constituting the basis of the subsequent Cripps Plan, and other statements of policy) declared that the British Government "could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life," i.e. that the Moslem League and Princes should be empowered to veto the formation of any Indian National Government. As an alternative it proposed:

(1) The post-war establishment "of a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life in order to devise the framework of the new Constitution";

(2) the enlargement of the Viceroy's Executive Council by the inclusion of additional nominated Indians;

(3) the appointment of a "War Advisory Council" of representatives of the Indian States and other Indians.

The unsatisfactory character of this reply led the Congress to adopt an individual civil disobedience campaign

under the leadership of Gandhi, which was inaugurated in October, 1940.

The greater growth of the forces pressing for a decisive struggle against imperialism found its reflection not only in the ruthless Governmental attack on working-class and peasant forces and the radical nationalist elements from 1939-40 but also in the extremely limited and severely circumscribed nature of the struggle started by Gandhi. It was to be no struggle for freedom but a symbolic satyagraha for asserting the right of free speech! Lists of civil resisters were to be sent to him for scrutiny and sanction. Persons approved by him were required to inform the police beforehand when and where they proposed to offer this symbolic opposition to the war. Despite this, extensive arrests and imprisonments followed in the succeeding months (12,000 in the United Provinces alone by May 24, 1941, according to an official statement and estimated to have reached 20,000 for all India including 398 members of Provincial Legislative Assemblies, 31 ex-Ministers and 22 members of the Central Legislature).

Such was the situation of deadlock when the events of the latter half of 1941, the German attack on the Soviet Union, the British-Soviet Pact and the Japanese attack in the Far East and the extension of the British-Soviet Alliance into the alliance of the United Nations under the leadership of Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and China brought a profound change in the character of the war.

Indian national opinion was quick to respond to this transformation of the war and its significance for India. As Jawaharlal Nehru declared in December 1941: "The progressive forces of the world are now aligned with the group represented by Russia, Britain, America and China."

Not all sections of the national movement adopted at once such a definite response to the changed character of war. Some sections still followed the "non-violent" pacifist outlook of Gandhi. Others sought to pursue a manoeuvring line between the fascist and anti-fascist war camps with a view to extracting the maximum immediate advantage. Others covertly sympathised with the role of Bose in joining the fascist war camp. Others were suspicious of any cooperation with the United Nations which would involve alignment alongside the enemy of the Indian nation, British imperialism. But the official policy of the national movement, represented by the President of the Congress, Maulana Azad, and Jawaharlal Nehru with majority support, sought to find the basis of co-operation as

an equal ally of the United Nations. It was clearly in the interests of Britain and the United Nations to endeavour to reach a basis of agreement with these forces. Thus a favourable situation confronted the British Government from the second half of 1941 provided there was readiness to meet the new situation in a new spirit.

The first reaction of the British Government was negative. The Atlantic Charter in August, 1941, 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."

But in a speech on September 9, 1941, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill in an official statement on behalf of the Government specifically excluded India, Burma and other parts of the 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 national life of the States and nations of Europe now under the Nazi yoke."

This revision angered Indian national opinion and strengthened the tendencies hostile to the United Nations.

Nevertheless, the Government's release of the principal Congress leaders in December, 1941, represented a first step which opened the way to the possibility of a new orientation and the advance to a basis of co-operation.

By the end of December, 1941, the Bardoli resolution of the National Congress (ratified in January, 1942) declared for the principle of armed resistance to the Axis as an ally of the United Nations, provided India could mobilise under a National Government. The resolution stated:

> "While there has been no change in British policy towards India, the Committee must nevertheless take into consideration the new world situation which has arisen by the developments of the war and its approach to India. The sympathies of Congress must inevitably lie with the peoples who are subject to aggression and are fighting for their freedom; but only a free and indepen-

dent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis."

Following the adoption of this resolution, Gandhi was relieved of the leadership of the National Congress, because of his disagreement with the abandonment of non-violence.

The *Times of India* commented on the resolution:

"The resolution re-opens the door to agreement with the British Government, thereby giving a valuable lead which we hope will be reciprocated."

The way was open, given only a minimum of statesmanship and favourable response from the side of Britain.

Additional pressure for such an agreement was provided by the visit in February, 1942, of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to India with his simultaneous public appeal to India and to Britain. He emphasised to Indian opinion that there was "no middle course" between "the two camps of aggression and anti-aggression". To Britain he made the plea to give "as speedily as possible real political power" to the people of India in order to enable them to participate with full strength in the war. It will be noted that he urged "real political power" for the Indian people to enable them to strengthen their participation in the war, i.e. as a war measure, not as a post-war promise. This viewpoint corresponded to that of the Indian national movement.

Similarly the Australian Minister for External Affairs expressed the same viewpoint in February, 1942, urging self-government for India now, during the war in order to strengthen Indian participation in the war:

"We sympathise with the aspirations of the Indian people to become one of the self-governing nations, and as such to take part in the defence of the Allied cause in Asia."

(Dr. H. V. Evatt, Australian Commonwealth Minister for External Affairs, speech in the Australian Parliament, February 27, 1942.)

On February 22, 1942, President Roosevelt explicitly declared that the Atlantic Charter applied to "the whole world" (thus tacitly correcting Mr. Churchill's statement of September 1941):

"The Atlantic Charter applies not only to the parts of the world that border the Atlantic, but to the whole world."

(President Roosevelt, Broadcast, February 22, 1942.)

Alongside this broadcast statement, President Roosevelt made direct communications to the British Government in support of Indian independence. The former American Secretary of State Sumner Welles revealed this fact in 1946:

> "In 1942 when the Japanese menace was at its height and when unrest in India was acute, President Roosevelt urged Mr. Churchill to agree that Indian independence should be no longer delayed and that the Indian leaders should be given the chance to frame a national constitution patterned upon the American Articles of Confederation. It was the President's belief that the establishment of such an interim government would have encouraged the Indian leaders to work together and would have given them the chance to learn from practical experience the kind of permanent constitution best fitted to the peculiar needs of the people of India. Such a solution would have probably then been accepted by the Indian leaders. The present British Government which is now making a similar proposal, may well regret Mr. Churchill's angry refusal to consider it four years ago."
>
> *(Sumner Welles in the "Christian Science Monitor", June 1946.)*

It is important to recognise this role of American-Australian-Chinese pressure in order to understand the context of the Indian national demand and the relative isolation within the United Nations of the British official viewpoint which still rejected a responsible National Government in India during the war.

By the spring of 1942, a favourable situation had thus been created. The ball was at Britain's feet. If there was still reluctance and resistance from British official quarters, the arrival of the Japanese at Rangoon in March helped to supply the necessary impetus.

On March 8, Rangoon fell.

On March 11, the Cripps Mission was announced.

The Cripps Mission to India in March and April, 1942, proved the turning point in the crisis of British-Indian relations during the war. The Cripps Plan or constitutional proposals for India drafted by the British War Cabinet and brought by Sir Stafford Cripps to discuss with Indian political leaders as a basis for a settlement consisted of two main parts:

1. Post-war proposals:

   (a) Dominion Status for "a new Indian Union with the power to secede if it chooses from the British Commonwealth";

   (b) a "Constitution-making Body" to be set up immediately after the war, partly elected by the membership of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies to be elected after the war on a basis of proportional representation and partly nominated by the princes in proportion to the population of their States to frame a new Constitution for India;

   (c) right of any Province of British India or any State to remain outside, and either continue on the present basis or frame a new Constitution as a separate Dominion with equal rights;

   (d) treaty between British and the "Constitution-making Body, to "make provision, in accordance with the undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities."

2. Immediate proposals during the war:
   Retention of power by Britain with consultative co-operation of Indian representatives.

The last point—the refusal of war-time National Government with powers—is the crucial point of the proposals and caused the breakdown.

It will be seen that the Cripps Plan, despite the skilful press publicity given to it as a new and epoch-making offer, represented no basic change of policy, but repeated the familiar lines of the "August Offer" of the Viceroy in 1940 which had already been rejected by all sections of Indian opinion. The semi-official historian of the Cripps Mission admits the truth of this:

> "The Draft Declaration did not represent a drastic change of policy...In principle, in fact, the Draft Declaration went no further than the 'August Offer'."
>
> *(Professor R. Coupland, "The Cripps Mission," Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 30.)*

Further:

> "The Draft Declaration implicitly ruled out any major change in the form of the Constitution during the war." *("Ibid", p. 31.)*

In the negotiations the Congress went to considerable lengths of concessions in the hope of reaching a positive settlement, offering to serve under a British Viceroy, provided they had real responsibility and powers, and to accept a British Commander-in-Chief not only for the control of military operations, but as a member of the Cabinet

In vain. They were told that British power must remain absolutely dictatorial, that an Indian Minister of Defence might at the most control canteens and stationery. When they tried to negotiate in order to narrow the margin of disagreement, they were told: "Take it or leave it." This "take it or leave it" attitude gave the impression that there was no real intention to negotiate, but rather to prepare the grounds for a future conflict.

This impression was strengthened by the unfortunate speech of Lord Halifax on April 7, while the negotiations were still in progress, already anticipating failure and declaring that the British Government would in that event maintain power alone and that the Cripps Mission would have served its purpose in establishing an unanswerable case against future critics of British power in India.

The Cripps Plan encountered opposition of the entire range of Indian opinion including the most moderate opinion. Not only the Congress but every important Indian organisation turned down the Cripps Proposals.

On the breakdown, the Calcutta *Statesman* gave its verdict:

> "So long as the India Office and the Government of India draft the proposals, no emissary can succeed, and no effort will be made to cope with the hourly increasing danger to this country...
>
> "The blame lies with the India Office and the official section of the Government of India."

4. THE AUGUST RESOLUTION AND AFTER (1942-1945)

Deterioration in the political situation rapidly followed the breakdown of the Cripps negotiations.

The British Government declared that nothing more could be done and embarked on a campaign of extremely partisan propaganda to blacken the Indian national movement, and to prove to world opinion all the age-old arguments: the

supposedly unrepresentative character of the Congress, the hopeless political divisions of the Indian people and their incapacity for self-government.

The National Congress, frustrated in its desire to co-operate, after a period of hesitancy and divided counsels, slid down the inclined plane toward non-co-operation as the weapon to enforce the national demand.

A plea was put forward by a section of Congress opinion, represented by the Madras ex-Premier, C. Rajagopalachariar for a more positive policy, despite the British rejection of the Indian national claim, to endeavour to build up a National Front in agreement with the Moslem League and all the other organisations, on the basis of national self-determination in Moslem-majority regions, for the sake of organising united national resistance in the hour of danger against Japan. This proposal was rejected by the All-India Congress Committee in May by 120 votes to 15, although the Congress President, Maulana Azad, made clear that the Congress would be prepared to nominate a delegation to negotiate with the Moslem League in order to reach a common basis. Mr. Rajagopalachariar resigned from the Congress to pursue the advocacy of his policy.

Direct leadership of the Congress passed back into the hands of Gandhi, who had been removed from leadership since December, 1941. Gandhi was preaching his pacifist doctrine of: 1) non-violent resistance to Japan; 2) non-co-operation with the British authorities; 3) moral sympathy for the Allied cause against fascism; 4) endeavour to keep India out of the conflict and opposition to Nehru's advocacy of armed resistance, the formation of guerillas and a "scorched earth" policy. The Congress did not agree with Gandhi's pacifism but moved over to regard his proposals of non-co-operation as the only remaining weapon to win Indian freedom and thus make possible the effective defence of India. Conversations between Gandhi, Nehru and Azad in June resulted in a basis of agreement being reached, which found fruit in the non-co-operation resolution adopted by the Working Committee on July 14. Serious anti-fascist leaders and advocates of co-operation with the United Nations thus passed into the wake of Gandhi and his dangerous proposals for a non-co-operation campaign at the moment of the threatening Japanese attack.

Axis propaganda was delighted and applauded the Congress. The followers of Subhas Chandra Bose who was conducting propaganda under the aegis of the Axis Powers,

found favourable ground for extending their penetration, which the Congress noted with alarm ("this frustration has resulted in a rapid and widespread increase of ill-will against Britain and a growing satisfaction at the success of Japanese arms; the Working Committee view this development with grave apprehension" — Congress Working Committee resolution of July 14).

Unscrupulous reactionary propaganda in British official circles also utilised the new opportunity to blacken the Congress. In place of recognising the bankruptcy of a policy which had thus driven the principal anti-fascist leaders and advocates of co-operation with the United Nations, like Nehru and Azad, into the wake of Gandhi and non-co-operation, this outcome was treated as triumphant vindication of official policy. The opportunity was seized to parade every characteristic utterance of Gandhi advocating pacifism and appeasement, with the widest publicity throughout India and the world, in order to brand the whole national movement as capitulationist and ready to make peace with Japan. The bombshell publication of documents seized in a police raid in order to expose facts already well-known from Gandhi's public articles illustrated this technique of preparations for future conflict.

Undoubtedly the resumption of leadership by Gandhi as "Generalissimo" of the Congress (the title accorded him) was a heavy liability for the Indian national movement, and did grave harm in the eyes of world opinion, which inevitably confused the pacifist and appeasement views of Gandhi with the viewpoint of Indian nationalism. But it is fair to recognise that the personal viewpoint of Gandhi in respect of non-violence and appeasement had been explicitly repudiated by every official Congress statement and resolution.

The Congress resolution on non-co-operation was put out in July and finally adopted in an amended form on August 8 (against an opposition vote of 13, led by the Indian Communist Party, whose restoration of legal rights on July 22 was a sign of its growing influence and strength).

This resolution reaffirmed sympathy for the United Nations and the demand for recognition of India as a free ally under a National Government for armed resistance to fascism in co-operation with the United Nations:

> "An immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity both for the sake of India and the success of the cause of the United Nations.

"On the declaration of India's independence a Provisional Government will be formed, and 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.

"A provisional Government can only be formed by co-operation of the principal parties and groups in the country...Its primary function must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed, as well as the non-violent forces at its command together with Allied Powers...

"Future relations between India and the Allied Nations will be adjusted by the representatives of all these free countries conferring together for their mutual advantage and for their co-operation in the common task of resisting aggression...

"The Committee is anxious not to embarrass in any way the defence of China or Russia, whose freedom is precious and must be preserved, or to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations."

So far the resolution was one which could carry the support of all democratic and anti-fascist opinion both in India and throughout the world. But the concluding section laid down the programme of non-co-operation in the event of refusal of the national demand:

"The All-India Congress Committee would yet again at this last moment in the interests of world freedom renew this appeal to Britain and the United Nations.

"But the Committee feels that it is no longer justified in holding the nation back from endeavouring to assert its will against the imperialist and authoritarian Government which dominates it and prevents it from functioning in its own interests and in the interests of humanity.

"The Committee resolves, therefore, to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on the widest possible scale so that the country may utilise all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last 22 years of peaceful struggle.

"Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji, and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken."

The August Resolution was the outcome of the frustration following the failure of the Cripps Mission negotiations. That frustration was expressed by Nehru when he declared On April 18 :

> "I do not know what to do but am moving fast impelled by a sense of restlessness, feeling oppressed with the idea that while India is being attacked by an enemy and America and Britain and other nations are taking part I myself feel helpless."

Intense controversy has raged around the August Resolution. Before any criticism is made of it, it is necessary to understand the dilemma which led those sections of the national leadership which had previously shown a generally progressive internationalist and anti-fascist record to accept this desperate course. They felt driven to it, against their wishes, because every effort to win co-operation on a free basis had failed, and they could see no alternative policy remaining to mobilise the Indian people and ensure the effective defence of India in the urgent war crisis.

Nevertheless, the August Resolution must be judged a disastrous blunder alike in its effects within India and in its effects on world democratic opinion. Politically the resolution revealed a fatal contradiction which betrayed the confusion of purpose that had led to its adoption. Between the preamble and the conclusion, there was a clear discord which no explanation could bridge. On the one hand, the character of the war since 1941 was recognised as no longer an imperialist war of rival imperialist camps, the outcome of which could be regarded with indifference, but as a war in which India was vitally concerned in the success of the camp of the United Nations, so that the aim of the resolution was declared to include "the success of the cause of the United Nations" and that India should become "an ally of the United Nations." The resolution specifically laid down the concern of the Congress "not to weaken in any way the defence of China or Russia" "or to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations." The final conclusion contemplated a course of action which, if carried, could only mean intense internal conflict and disorganisation in a major country of the Alliance, such as in practice would jeopardise the defensive capacity of the United Nations and would facilitate an Axis victory.

In the earlier phase of the war, when it was still only a war between Anglo-French imperialism and Nazi Germany,

when India was not directly involved save at the heels of British Power and was not directly threatened from any danger of invasion, the utmost care had been taken that no step of Congress policy should embarrass the war effort. Gandhi had declared on September 5, 1939, that Britain was fighting for a 'just cause' and that India should give 'unconditional co-operation':

> "I am not, therefore, just now thinking of India's deliverance. It will come, but what will it be worth if England and France fall?"
>
> *(Harijan, September 9, 1939.)*

In consequence, during this period when, in the words of the Congress, the war was being fought "for imperialist aims" and the conditions were most favourable for Indian active pressure for advance, every proposal for a mass movement or for mass civil disobedience was rigidly opposed on the grounds that it would embarrass the war effort of British imperialism. The purely symbolic method of individual satyagraha was chosen in order to cause no embarrassment and indeed the semi-official historian, Sir Reginald Coupland, has admitted that "the campaign had not seriously embarrassed the Government" ("India: A Restatement," 1945, p. 206).

Yet when the whole character of the war changed and Congress had recognised this change, when the vital interests of India were recognized as bound up with the victory of Russia and China and of the camp of the United Nations, and when India was directly threatened with invasion, the moment was judged opportune for proposing to launch a mass resistance movement which had been judged impermissible in 1939-40.

It is true that there was no serious intention of launching such a struggle, for which no preparation whatever was made by the leadership, but only for issuing a threat of struggle in order to negotiate. This fact which has been again and again pleaded by the leadership in defence of their policy only emphasises the frivolity and bankruptcy of an approach that sought to meet a critically serious war situation with a policy of empty bluff which could at best be no more than a gamble. The blind *naivete* of such an approach in the midst of a major war revealed the complete lack of realism in understanding the situation or the tactics of imperialism.

Tactically, the resolution was no less ill-judged. The resolution provided the pretext for which imperialist reaction

had been eagerly waiting in order to launch its attack. It is clear that the whole tactics of imperialist reaction during the phase following the Cripps Mission breakdown was designed to place the Congress in a dilemma and drive it to such a false step which could give the excuse for oppressive measures. So long as the Congress stood out, with its unchallengable anti-fascist record, as the decisive political force seeking to mobilise the Indian people for the common struggle of the peoples of the world against fascism, while imperialism, with its dubious pro-fascist record was revealed as the main obstacle to the mobilisation, the tactical position of imperialism was at a disadvantage. The moment the resolution was passed, the opportunity was seized by imperialism to claim that it stood for the defence of India against attempts at disrupting that defence, to slander the Indian national movement as pro-fascist, pro-Japanese and as sabotaging the war effort of the peoples of the United Nations, and to make this the political basis for carrying out its policy of reactionary suppression against the national movement.

The resolution was thus not a short-cut to Indian freedom; it was capitulation to imperialist provocation and its adoption meant walking straight into the imperialist trap. Unfortunately, the nationalist leadership were so entirely unconscious of the actual situation that after passing the resolution they were preparing for peaceful negotiations with the Viceroy. They neither anticipated the arrests, nor had they made any preparations for such a situation, nor given any directives for the course to be followed.

The minority in the Congress which opposed the resolution had consistently given warning of this outcome. In its open letter of July 26, 1942, the Communist Party of India wrote: "What will happen if and when you start the struggle? They will quietly put you and thousands of active Congress workers into jails and sanctimoniously declare that it is their unfortunate duty to be able to save India from the fascist invaders."

Unfortunately this warning fell on deaf ears. The arrests took the leadership completely by surprise, as their subsequent statements and memories have revealed. On August 14, 1942, immediately following the arrests Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy:

"The Government of India should have waited at least till the time that I inaugurated mass action. I have

publicly stated that I fully contemplated sending you a letter before taking any concrete action."

The anti-fascist working-class sections of the national movement represented by the Indian Communist Party had from the outset put forward a clear and consistent line in relation to the war of liberation through a positive response to the tasks and responsibilities raised by the war. They showed concretely how such a positive response was possible and essential, despite the resistance of British reaction to Indian popular initiative or the national demand. On this basis they set out their positive alternative programme to non-co-operation in the existing critical situation:

1. To build up the united National Front in India, including the unity of the Congress, the Moslem League and all other political sections, on a common platform of resistance to fascism;

2. On the basis of such a National Front to press the demand for a settlement and for a National Government with the united support of all sections;

3. While pressing the just political demand, to co-operate wholeheartedly in the war effort and the mobilisation of the people and to initiate unofficial measures of popular mobilisation under the leadership of the national movement in order to strengthen the war effort and capacity of national resistance to fascism;

4. Resolute rejection of all policies of non-co-operation as fatal to the interests of the Indian people.

But with the existing embitterment of national feeling, and the reactionary refusal by British ruling circles of the demand for a National Government, this policy was not yet able to win the support of the bulk of the national movement.

The majority of leaders of Indian Nationalism professed to hope by a short sharp struggle (Vallabhbhai Patel, Gandhi's principal lieutenant spoke of victory in a week, though Gandhi declared on this that "if it ends in a week, it would be a miracle") to establish Indian national freedom in time to be in an enormously stronger position to resist Japanese aggression and act as an effective ally of the United Nations. Such success would, they confidently declared, justify their tactics as the best defence of India and the best contribution to world victory over fascism. The suicidal blindness of this calculation is manifest. The apostles of non-violence who for twenty-two years had failed to shake the citadel of British

Power by their methods, expected now by a similar campaign to secure a transference of power within a few weeks in time to meet the Japanese invader at the gates. Alternately, if they hoped to see their campaign develop to a violent mass revolt, they only revealed how lightly a movement trained to non-violence estimated the prospects of a revolutionary struggle for power by an unarmed population in the midst of a war, with the invading armies on the frontiers. They ignored the plain overshadowing menace that their campaign would lead, not to the victory of Indian freedom, but to internal conflict, chaos and paralysis, opening the way to the victory of fascism in India. Their policy, as the Indian Communist Party bluntly declared, was equivalent to "cutting our own throats. It weakens the defence of the country against aggressors and makes the task of the fascist invader easier."

The policy of non-co-operation, if it had been seriously intended to carry it out, was a policy of desperation. But the leaders who adopted it were in fact striving to reach a basis of co-operation; they made openly plain that they hoped never to launch their campaign, and sought to reach a settlement first. However much there is justified ground for criticising the policy which could propose a campaign of non-co-operation in such a situation, the heaviest burden of responsibility must rest on that reactionary policy of the Government which, by refusing India's just demands and throttling the eager desire to co-operate upon equal terms, provoked this desperate outcome.

To the last the Congress showed every desire to reach a settlement and to negotiate. The resolution was revised to stress the desire for practical settlement and for co-operation in armed resistance to fascism. The final speeches of Gandhi and Nehru stressed the desire to negotiate. Nehru stated in his final reply to the debate: "The resolution is not a threat; it is an invitation and an explanation; it is an offer of co-operation." Gandhi's subsequently published letter to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in July made clear that he

> "will take no hasty action, and whatever action is taken will be governed by the consideration that it should not injure China or encourage Japanese aggression in India or China. I am straining every nerve to avoid a conflict with British authority."

It was explained that the first step would be a letter to the

Viceroy proposing negotiations before there would be any question of launching any action.

The letter was begun immediately after the close of the Congress Committee, but was not at the time allowed to be finished. Within a few hours the wholesale arrests followed which opened the widespread conflict.

The Congress resolution was adopted on August 8. On the morning of August 9, all the principal Congress leaders were arrested (148 in Bombay) including Gandhi, Nehru, Azad, Patel, Kripalani, Rajendra Prasad and others, and the Congress was declared an illegal organisation.

While the Working Committee members were imprisoned in Ahmednagar Fort, Gandhi was separately imprisoned in the Aga Khan's Palace, not indeed in conditions of personal discomfort ("You have placed me in a palace where every reasonable creature comfort is ensured. I have freely partaken of the latter purely as a matter of duty, never as a pleasure" — Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy, December 31, 1942) but so that they completely passed out of any active political role or leadership during the ensuring critical years. Indeed, according to the memoirs of Dr. Sitaramayya, the Working Committee members during these years did not even attempt to discuss political questions, but gave their attention to religion, philosophy and recreation. The national movement was thus left without leadership, since no preparations whatever had been made either to provide for alternative leadership or to lay down the course of action to be followed in the event of the arrests.

The arrests of the national leaders provoked nationwide demonstrations and disorganised partial conflicts and disorders, which were met with violent and brutal repression by police and military action with wholesale firing and many killed and wounded. Between August 9, 1942 and December 31, 1942, according to the summary of official statements of the Home Member in the Central Legislative Assembly, 60,229 persons were arrested; 18,000 detained under the Defence of India Regulations; 940 killed by police or military firing; and 1,630 injured through police or military firing." ("March of Events 1942-45," published by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, 1945.)

The mass protests and national indignation following the arrests of the national leadership were spontaneous and widespread. But the sporadic disorders, unrest and confused and conflicting directives of individual groups and sections did

not represent an organised Congress struggle. These sporadic disorders were, as Churchill later declared in Parliament, suppressed "with remarkable ease." They had never been authorised by the Congress and were publicly disowned by Gandhi in whose hands alone was placed the authority to launch a struggle. As Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy on September 23, 1942:

> "Wholesale mass arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made the people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control. I feel that the Government, not the Congress, are responsible for the destruction that has taken place."

And again in his letter of July 15, 1943, to the Home Department:

> "The Government action in enforcing India-wide arrests was so violent that the populace which was in sympathy with the Congress lost self-control. The loss of self-control cannot imply Congress complicity."

The Andhra Circular (quoted by Gandhi with reserve in his letter of July 15, 1943 but with full acceptance of the correctness of the line of the passage quoted) laid down:

> "No movement should be launched or any other act done till the Mahatma decides. After all, he may decide otherwise, you will be responsible for a great unwarranted mistake. Be ready, organise at once; be alert but by no means act."

An official statement signed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and G. B. Pant on behalf of the Congress on September 21, 1945, declared:

> "No movement had ben officially started by the A.I.C.C. or Gandhiji."

It was only later that the somewhat disingenuous attempt was made for the purpose of a temporary sectional political manoeuvre to treat the confused leaderless events of August 1942 and subsequent months as the "August Struggle"; to treat this struggle which was disowned and repudiated by the only authorised Congress leadership as a Congress struggle; to treat actions of petty anarchist violence in contradiction to the Congress creed as Congress actions; to treat the propaganda which ran completely counter to the August Resolu-

tion, supporting Bose and the Japanese camp and denouncing the United Nations, as Congress propaganda; and finally, as the height of paradox, to treat the failure of participation in this basically anti-Congress campaign, as equivalent to a breach of Congress discipline, when Congress discipline had enjoined that no struggle should be launched until Gandhi had given the word and Gandhi made it clear that he had not given the word.

The disorganisation of the national movement following the August events, the absence of any organised leadership and absence of any clear line of policy, led to a period of frustration and confusion in the ensuing years alongside the political deadlock. It was during this period that the Moslem League rapidly grew in strength.

On May 6, 1944, Gandhi was released from confinement on grounds of health. He lost no time thereafter in announcing that mass Civil Disobedience portion of the resolution of August 8, 1942, stood automatically cancelled since in 1944 he could not go back to 1942. But the deadlock continued, since the Government refused to consider negotiations until the August Resolution was withdrawn, and at the same time refused, until June 1945, to release the Working Committee who alone could be in a position to review the August Resolution and make any new statement of policy.

One more attempt was made on resolving the deadlock in the summer of 1945. A provisional agreement was reached in May between the parliamentary leader of the Congress Party in the Central Legislative Assembly, Bhulábhai Desai (acting in consultation with Gandhi and with his approval) and the parliamentary leader of the Moslem League Party, Liaqat Ali Khan, for the formation of a Provisional National Government on the basis of parity between the Congress and the Moslem League (40 per cent Congress, 40 per cent Moslem League and 20 per cent other groupings). This proposal was placed before the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, who flew to London for advice. After prolonged consultations Lord Wavell returned with a new statement of policy announced by the British Government on June 14, 1945. This put forward a plan for a Provisional National Government but with a subtle change in the formula for representation from the terms agreed by the Congress and League representatives. In place of Congress-League parity the British plan laid down "Caste Hindu-Moslem parity." Thus the issue was forced back to a communal plane. This seemingly slight

modification, introduced by the ingenuity of the India Office in London, guaranteed a breakdown. It meant that either the Congress would have to accept relegation to the status of a Hindu organisation, or, by claiming one of the Moslem seats for a Congress Moslem, violate the basis of parity with the League. Alternately, the League would either have to accept a Congress Moslem to one of the Moslem seats, thus surrendering parity and accepting an inferior position to the Congress, or by resisting this appear to take the responsibility of wrecking the Conference.

When the Simla Conference of the representatives of the Congress, Moslem League and others met in June 1945, the proceedings soon reached a deadlock. In place of presenting a joint front for the original plan, the Congress and League leaders manoeuvred against each other to interpret the British formula for sectional advantage. The Simla Conference ended in a breakdown.

So it came about that by the end of the war, when all over the world peoples were advancing to liberation, India emerged from the war as completely subject as at its onset.

Chapter XVII

THE LATEST PHASE

"If an indigenous government took the place of the foreign government, and kept all the vested interests intact, this would not even be the shadow of freedom."—JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, "Whither India?", 1933.

SINCE THE END of the second world war in 1945 far-reaching changes have taken place in India, and are still developing.

The extent of the national revolt following the war made it impossible for imperialism to continue to govern in the old way. After protracted negotiations, first through the Cabinet Mission in 1946, and then through Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy in 1947, a new basis of political settlement was reached in 1947 by which India was partitioned and the Dominions of India and Pakistan were established.

This settlement has been widely acclaimed in official expression, both in Britain and in India, as the fulfilment of Indian independence and the voluntary abdication of imperialism.

In June 1946, the Labour Prime Minister, C. R. Attlee, speaking at the Labour Party Conference, declared:

> "We ask for others the freedom we ask for ourselves. We proclaim this freedom, but we do more than proclaim it. We seek to put it into effect: witness India."

Similarly the Chairman of the Labour Party, Professor Laski, declared in an interview published in the Indian press on May 23, 1946:

> "It is the biggest abdication of power in modern history in a non-violent way made by any imperialist power

> to any people, and I hope that Indian nationalist leaders will appreciate this offer made on a golden platter."

And the Labour Party official organ, the *Daily Herald*, wrote in an editorial under the title "Historic Change," on October 12, 1946:

> "In India to-day one of the greatest advances in human history is taking place.
>
> "Britain which to-day weilds power over four hundred million souls is transferring control voluntarily and peacefully to an Indian democracy."

It will be necessary to examine how far these glowing paeans of self-praise correspond to the realities of the modern situation in India.

At the outset, in order to answer this question, it will be worth while to take a wider view of modern imperialist development and extend our gaze beyond India. In the most recent period of imperialist policy a new technique has been evolved and elaborated and more and more widely used, which may be termed the *technique of "formal independence."* The principle is not in itself new; it is indeed only the continuation of the old principle of concealed rule which was characteristic of the earlier period of British domination in India; but it has received a further extension and elaboration in the modern period, as a method of countering the advance of national liberation movements.

This technique was illustrated in classic form in the case of Egypt in 1922. Egypt, it will be recalled, was proclaimed independent by a British statement of policy published on February 29, 1922. But this Declaration stated that certain subjects would remain at the absolute discretion of His Majesty's Government until such a time as a treaty would be negotiated between Britain and the Egyptian Government with regard to their regulation. These special subjects comprised:

1. Security of Empire communications in Egypt;
2. Defence of Egypt;
3. Protection of foreign interests and minorities in Egypt;
4. The Sudan;
5. Egypt's relations with foreign States.

These terms were rejected by the Egyptian national movement. Nevertheless Egypt was proclaimed independent;

Fuad was installed as King and a suitable Prime Minister found. British Martial Law was maintained in Egypt until August 1923. In this way Egypt became "independent."

Twenty-six years later in 1948 negotiations were still at a deadlock between the British Government and the Egyptian Government with regard to the unsettled question of the final withdrawal of British troops (maintained under a provisional Treaty of 1936) and the future of the Sudan.

Since then this new imperialist technique has been further elaborated and extended. In 1927 Iraq was proclaimed "independent" under King Feisal—with treaty provisions covering the maintenance of British bases. After the second world war examples multiplied. In 1946 Transjordan was hastily proclaimed "independent" under King Abdullah, to prevent its former mandatory status being transferred to trusteeship under the United Nations, with special provision for British military control of its armed forces and a two-million-pounds annual subsidy from the British taxpayer. In 1947 the United States took a leaf from the book of British imperialism and proclaimed the Philippines "independent", subject to maintenance of American economic rights, American military bases and an American Military Mission with retention of American troops for these purposes. In 1948 Burma was proclaimed "independent" under a treaty providing for the maintenance of a British Military Mission, payment of debt interest instalments to Britain and protection of British monopoly interests.

An examination of these examples would indicate that the use of the term "independence" is elastic, and that the label on the bottle is no guarantee of the contents. The examples cited cover a variety of forms, ranging from what would have formerly been frankly termed a protectorate or puppet State, as in the Middle Eastern examples, to more subtle forms of indirect rule. In every case it is obviously necessary to look behind the diplomatic conventions and paper formulae in order to judge the real concrete conditions and relations of power.

Reality in all these cases reveals a different picture from the diplomatic fiction. Imperialism has by no means yet withdrawn from the colonial countries on which "independence" has been conferred by imperialist fiat. The essence of the imperialist colonial system lies, *first*, in the economic exploitation of the colonial country, its resources and man-power, in the interests of the big monopolies of the imperialist power;

second, in the strategic domination of the country and its absorption in the imperialist bloc on the world scale; and *third,* in the maintenance of a political system capable of fulfilling these aims in the interests of the imperialist power. The particular political form is subordinate to these essential purposes. By all these tests the colonial countries on which formal "independence" has been conferred remain, with greater or less openness—crudely, as in the case of Transjordan under the subsidised King Abdullah, or more subtly in the case of a more developed territory handed over to the administration of compromising bourgeois interests economically and strategically tied to imperialism—colonial countries, even though at an advanced stage of decay of the old imperialist power. The vested interests of the great imperialist monopolies, dominating and strangling the life of the country, are maintained and protected and guaranteed by special treaty arrangements. Joint military arrangements are maintained, with varying degrees of direct occupation, control by military missions and upkeep of bases. Joint warfare or repression by imperialism and the puppet governments is carried out against the liberation struggle of the colonial peoples and against the working-class movement.

It is in the light of this new technique of modern imperialism, this technique of pseudo-independence, that the crucial case of India needs to be more carefully examined.

In the second place, it is worth noting that the political changes executed by imperialism in India since the war were not so entirely "voluntary" an "abdication" as suggested. In the view of competent and well-informed British observers on the spot, these political measures were compelled by the depth of the crisis and the popular upsurge following the war, reaching to the armed forces, and were regarded as the only means to avert or postpone an Indian revolution:

> "India in the opinion of many was on the verge of a revolution before the British Cabinet Mission arrived. The Cabinet Mission has at least postponed if not eliminated the danger."
>
> *(P. J. Griffiths, leader of the European Group in the Indian Central Legislative Assembly, speech to the East India Association in London, June 24, 1946.)*

Similarly, Sir Stafford Cripps in the parliamentary debate on

March 5, 1947, stated on behalf of the British Government in justification of the policy pursued

> "There were fundamentally two alternatives facing the Government First, they could attempt to strengthen British control in India on the basis of an expanded personnel in the Secretary of State's services and a considerable reinforcement of British troops, to be in a position to enforce for as long as might be necessary our administrative responsibility while awaiting an agreement among the Indian communities. Such a policy would have entailed a definite decision to remain in India for at least fifteen to twenty years, because for any substantially shorter period we should not be able to reorganise the services on a stable and sound basis.
>
> *"The second alternative was to accept the fact that the first alternative was not possible.... One thing that was quite obviously impossible was to decide to continue our responsibility indefinitely and indeed against our own wishes into a period when we had not the power to carry it out."*

Thus of the "fundamentally two alternatives" envisaged by the Government (1) to maintain British direct power in India by "a considerable reinforcement of troops," or (2) to make the political transfer on the lines of the 1947 settlement, the first was judged by the Government to be "impossible....we had not the power to carry it out." The simple reader might be excused for concluding that the "two alternatives" were only one. Behind all the complicated parliamentary phraseology the supposed "two alternatives" boil down into one —in other words, *there was no choice.* In the same way, the *Manchester Guardian* commented in an editorial on October 11, 1947:

> "Public opinion has preened itself on British virtue in withdrawing voluntarily from India; but posterity may dwell rather on the hustle with which the withdrawal was carried out....It may be hard to disentangle whether the British action was based on high principle or on a less glorious desire to retreat to shelter before the storm broke."

The political settlement of 1947 was thus no magnanimous voluntary gift of freedom by imperialism to the Indian people, but a conscious political manoeuvre extorted and dictated by conditions of crisis which had outstripped the power of impe-

rialism to control it by superior force, and which rendered it impossible for imperialism to continue to maintain its direct rule in the old fashion.

Whether this political manoeuvre carried within it the "abdication" of imperialism or the ending of imperialist domination and exploitation in India it will now be necessary to examine in the light of facts, through a closer survey of the conditions and relations of forces preceding the settlement, the character of the settlement and the consequent situation in India since 1947.

1. INDIA IN THE CHANGING WORLD

Why did British imperialism change its policy in relation to India after the second world war?

Four main reasons may be noted for the new trend in British policy.

First, the end of the war brought a new popular upsurge all over the world. Fascism, the main spearhead of reaction in the present era, the leader of the offensive against democracy and the most brutal exponent of the open and unconcealed theory of racial domination had been defeated by the united struggle of the democratic peoples. German, Italian and Japanse imperialism had been wiped from the ranks of the Powers. Anglo-American imperialism remained, but had to share world leadership with the Socialist Soviet Union in an uneasy partnership of the three World Powers. The Soviet Union despite the grim losses of the war whose main burden had fallen on the Red Army and the Soviet people, emerged from the war enormously strengthened in its world position and influence. The liberated European nations pressed forward along the path of advanced democratic power against the old feudal and militarist and big-business forces which had betrayed the national cause and served Hitler. Japan's grip on China was broken and the march of the Chinese national and democratic movement was resumed, despite pressure of American reaction placing obstacles in the path. All the colonial peoples were in movement, demanding their freedom for what their liberation movement had fought. In this new world situation there could be no question of maintaining unchanged the old autocratic and bureaucratic regime in India, the greatest colonial territory of all and with the most powerfully developed national movement.

Second, the British Empire was basically weakened, despite its share in the common victory. The relative decline of British capitalism both in its economy at home and in its position in world economy and in its hold on its colonial empire, had been a marked feature of the era between the two wars. This relative decline from the old dominant world position was carried still further forward by the effects of the second world war. Older statesmen of British imperialism like a Smuts or a Churchill, observed with alarm the growing and preponderant relative strength of what they termed the two "colossus" Powers of the new world—the United States and the U.S.S.R.—and the prospect of British sinking to second or third rank. On every side the British Empire was assailed by the challenging pressure of the peoples held directly or indirectly within its orbit, from Egypt and Palestine to Burma and Malaya and Indonesia.

The masses of the British people awakening to the new conditions were turning away from Toryism to find a new path for British progress and prosperity but the old rulers of the Empire were seeking by all means to maintain and restore the old disintegrating basis of domination. They sought to re-establish colonial suppression in the reconquered territories, as in Burma and Malaya and Indonesia. They sought to counter the changed world balance by new imperialist alliances first by the attempted device of a Western European bloc and when this failed, in face of the opposition of the European peoples, by the alignment of an Anglo-American bloc against the Soviet Union. In all these new strategic calculations, India was of primary importance. It became essential for the weakening British imperialism, alike for its economic requirements and for its strategic plans, to find a basis of settlement in India which, while serving to appease and if possible to win over the upper sections of the national movement, should hold India within the British economic and strategic orbit.

Third, the change in the world position of Britain was reflected also in the internal position in Britain. Toryism went down in overwhelming election defeat in the summer of 1945 despite every attempt of the old Tory electoral machine to capitalise the moment of victory, and the prestige of Churchill. For the first time a Labour majority was returned to power. Although the moderate Right-wing leaders of the Labour Party who composed the new Government were in practice closely allied to Tory British imperialist policy, as

subsequent experience soon showed, the mass rejection of Toryism in the elections was a sign that the British people were beginning to seek new paths to replace the old imperialist basis. The Labour Party Conference, following the Trades Union Congress had already adopted a resolution, sponsored from the movement and in the face of initial resistance from the Executive Committee, for Indian independence. Thus the Labour movement was officially committed to Indian independence and it became imperative for the new Labour Government to make some fresh departure in policy in relation to India.

The fourth reason of decisive importance was the rising popular upsurge within India and universal national demand for immediate independence. Imperialism could no longer continue to govern India in the old manner.

2. THE NATIONAL UPSURGE OF 1945-46

The mighty tide of popular advance which swept over the world after the defeat of fascism did not leave India unstirred. Although India had not been able to share in the great popular liberation movement fighting in alliance with the United Nations, which in the fascist-occupied countries had played so powerful a part in winning victory and in preparing the way for political transformation after the war, the same impulse to national liberation and democratic advance swept through India. In an inverted fashion even the example of the "Indian National Army," sponsored by Bose in the Axis camp and especially the trials of leading officers staged by British imperialism after the war, helped to kindle to white heat the flame of militant patriotism in India and had its especially marked effect in the armed forces.

The Simla Conference breakdown in the summer of 1945 had revealed the impasse which British imperialist policy had reached. But it had also revealed the deep and seemingly unbridgeable gulf between the Congress and the Moslem League. Both the Congress and the Moslem League leadership had found it easier to negotiate with the British against one another than unite in a common front against the British. This was the cardinal weakness of the national front after the second world war and in marked contrast to the Congress-League-Khilafat alliance which followed the first world war. British policy took advantage of this weakness.

Hence it came about that the mass upsurge in India im-

mediately after the war found itself without effective united leadership of the official national movement. Among the masses the desire for unity in the struggle against imperialism was overwhelming. This was shown in the great demonstrations in Calcutta, Bombay and other leading cities, where Congress and Moslem League flags and in many cases also Communist Party flags were carried in unity by the crowds. Unfortunately this unity below found no responding unity at the top.

Nevertheless the movement swept forward not only among the civilian population but also among the armed forces. This was a new development for India, whose revolutionary significance was not lost on the ruling authorities of British imperialism or on the upper-class leadership of the national movement. Previously there had been the refusal of the Garhwalis to fire in 1930. But now widespread strikes in the armed forces and especially in the Air Force and Navy, revealed the disintegration of British authority in the very basis and machinery of its power. The rising of the Indian Navy in February 1946 laid bare in a flash all the maturing forces of the Indian Revolution. The memories of the *Potemkin* in Russia in 1905, of Kronstadt in Russia in 1917 or Kiel in Germany in 1918 have all deeply impressed the significance of the Navy in the vanguard of great revolutions. The Naval rising in February, 1946, the mass movement of support within India and the heroic stand of the Bombay working people constituted the signal of the new era opening in India and one of the great landmarks of Indian history. In those February days the friends an dfoes of Indian popular advance stood revealed.

The rising of the ratings of the Royal Indian Navy which developed in Bombay and Karachi and Madras with support from the people in these and other towns, centred in Bombay. It began on the morning of February 18 at the *Talwar* Training School as a result of a long series of unremedied grievances. By the morning of February 19, it had spread to all the 20,000 ratings in the twelve shore-establishments in Bombay and the suburbs as well as the twenty ships in the harbour. The Union Jack was removed from the ships' masts, and Congress and Moslem League flags were put up instead. Demonstrations followed in the town area with united Congress, Moslem League and Red flags and with such slogans as 'Jai Hind', 'Inquilab Zindabad', 'Hindus and Moslems unite', 'Down with British imperialism', 'Accept our demands', 'Re-

lease the I. N. A. and political prisoners', 'Withdraw Indian Army from Indonesia'. The strike also extended to other vessels of the Indian Navy including the *Hindustan* of Karachi which was later involved in armed action.

From the outset the Naval ratings had made contact with the Congress and Moslem League leadership, but received no support or practical help. They elected a Central Naval Strike Committee and perfect discipline was maintained. Support from the Bombay people who brought food to the ships was overwhelming. The British authorities completely taken by surprise by the extent of the movement, resorted to violent measures of suppression. Heavy naval and military reinforcements were hastily dispatched to Bombay and Karachi. When the Indian soldiers refused to fire, British troops were called in and a seven-hour battle ensued on February 21 outside the Castle Barracks. In the afternoon on the 21st, Admiral Godfrey broadcast his ultimatum that "Overwhelming forces at the disposal of the Government will be used to the utmost... even if it means the destruction of the Navy." The Central Naval Strike Committee replied with an appeal to the civilian population for a peaceful strike and hartal. Despite the urgent need of support to defeat this threat and save the lives of the Naval ratings, Vallabhbhai Patel on behalf of the Congress leadership refused to countenance the strike and hartal and issued instructions against it. Nevertheless the call of the Central Naval Strike Committee, which was supported by the Bombay trade unions and the Communist Party, received a universal response from the Bombay working people on February 22. The British authorities sought to smash the popular movement with indiscriminate police and military firing on the people. Over the three days, February 21-23, the official figures reported 250 killed. The eye-witness description of a British officer is worth quoting:

> "I was walking along Suparibag Road, near the corner of Elphinstone Road, in Bombay's working class quarter, Parel, at 4 p.m.
>
> "There were a good many people in the street though they did not make up a crowd, much less a mob. On the advice of the Communist Party none of them was armed, not even with sticks or stones.
>
> "Suddenly, without the slightest warning, an open lorry loaded with British troops, drove across Elphinstone Road with rifles and one Bren Gun.

"As the people ran into the doorways, myself included, the troops turned their fire in that direction. Twenty people were wounded and four killed.
"What was behind it?

"The trade unions had called for a general strike in support of the Naval ratings. The strike was 100 per cent effective in textile mills, factories and railway workshops.

"Some one in a high position decided to 'teach the wogs a lesson.' So, armed patrols in full battle-order moved about the streets in lorries, firing at random into crowded streets and moved on before anyone could even pick a stone.

"No ambulances were on the streets and the people had to get to hospital as best they could.

"Later, on DeLisle Road, I saw the troops enter the chawls (slum tenements) and fire on people in their own houses. Four were killed and 16 wounded.

"In one hospital, the King Edward Memorial Hospital serving the Parel district, there were 50 deaths. The Parel hospitals took in over 200 of the 600 casualties.

"Many papers have told you about the 'irresponsible mutiny'. They have not told you that the authorities ordered the strikers into Castle Barracks, cordoned them off without food or water, and fired on them when they came out for a drink (or 'rushed the gates' as the communique said).

"They told you about the mob violence and the hooliganism. They did not tell you that the first stones were thrown after a truck, driven at great speed knocked down members of an orderly procession.

"This was a united struggle of the people to defend their lives and homes against indiscriminate terror.

"United—that's the word. The sight that gave the brass-hats the jitters was the Congress Tricolour, the Moslem League Crescent and the Red flag carried side by side in processions; the League and Congress flags flying from the mast-heads of the battleship *Narbada*.

"As we crouched in the doorway and the bullets whizzed past, an Indian said to me: 'That's British Socialism in action.' I am concerned for the honour of our Labour Government, which lost in 24 hours whatever support it had left after Indonesia.

"I am concerned most of all for the honour of the British people. Almost all the firing was done by British soldiers.

"The police took a back seat. I saw no Indian troops, and I am told that fear of disaffection spreading to the Army prompted the authorities not to employ Indian troops in the orgy of suppression.

"The British soldiers were not special troops or security units. They were the ordinary conscript and wartime volunteer soldiers—British workers in uniform, men of the Liecester Regt., the Essex Regt., the Royal Artillery and the Royal Marines."

Finally, on February 23, under the pressure of Vallabhbhai Patel who gave the advice to surrender and promised that "the Congress will do its level best to see that there is no victimisation," followed by a similar assurance from the Moslem League, the Central Naval Strike Committee decided to surrender. Within two days the leaders were arrested. The last statement of the President of the Strike Committee declared: "We surrender to India and not to Britain."

The Naval rising and popular struggle in the February days in Bombay revealed with inescapable clearness the alignment of forces in the explosive situation developing in India in the beginning of 1946. It showed on the one hand the height of the movement, the courage and determination of the people and the overwhelming mass support for Hindu-Moslem unity and Congress-League unity. It showed that the movement had reached to the armed forces and that therefore the basis of British rule was no longer secure. But it showed on the other hand, the unreadiness and disunity of the existing national leadership and their consequent inability to lead the national struggle.

Previously there had been much rhetorical play for platform purposes with the glorification of Subhas Bose and the Indian National Army, following its double surrender first to the Japanese and then to the British, as emblems of supposed revolutionary national struggle. There had been the much attempted glorification of the events of 1942, which never attained a mass character.

But now when the masses were really in movement, when Hindu-Moslem unity was being realised and practised, when the armed forces had united with the civilian population in the common national movement and when the real strug-

gle for freedom had opened the gates of British rule, the attitude of the upper leadership of the national movement revealed a marked change. The upper class leadership of the Congress and Moslem League found themselves in opposition to the mass movement and aligned with British imperialism as the representative of law and order against the people. A whole series of statements and denunciations were issued condemning the "violence", not of the imperialist authorities whose ruthless firing had slaughtered hundreds in three days, but of the unarmed people who had been the objects of military firing. Vallabhbhai Patel issued a statement in which he declared that the Naval ratings ought not to have taken to arms and that he "endorsed the remarks of the Commander-in-Chief that there ought to be discipline in the Navy." The Congress President, Azad, declared:

> "Strikes, hartals and defiance of temporary authority of the day are out of place. No immediate cause has arisen to join issue with the foreign rulers who are acting as caretakers."

Gandhi in a significant statement condemned what he called the "unholy combination" of Hindus and Moslems in defiance of the creed of non-violnce:

> "I might have understood it if they had combined from top to bottom. That would of course have meant delivering India over to the rabble. I would not want to live upto 125 to witness that consummation. I would rather perish in the flames." *("Harijan," April 7, 1946.)*

Thus the breach between the top national leadership, representing the big bourgeoisie, and the mass movement, which had already revealed itself after Chauri Chaura in 1922, and in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931, was revealed anew on a still higher plane. Hindu-Moslem unity for joint struggle against British rule was seen, not as the path to Indian national independence, but as the greatest danger to be prevented, because it would mean the victory of the popular masses in India ("delivering India over to the rabble" — a revealing phrase betraying the antagonism of the upper class leadership to the masses of the people). The British, so far from being seen as the oppressors of India, were seen as "caretakers" on behalf of the Indian upper class. Such was the degeneration and sliding over to the side of imperialism, through fear of the latent revolutionary forces of the Indian

situation at the moment of crisis, which had already revealed itself at every high point of the mass struggle in India, and now revealed itself anew in the most critical phase of India's struggle for freedom.

The British rulers were quick to see this weakness in the national front and to take full advantage of it. As the subsequent proceedings of the Cabinet Mission showed the entire tactics of British imperialism were now directed towards the Congress and Moslem League leadership, simultaneously to play on their hopes of a peaceful transfer of ruling authority into their hands, their fears of the popular masses and their mutual division and antagonism.

On February 18, the Bombay Naval Strike began.

On February 19, Attlee in the House of Commons announced the decision to dispatch the Cabinet Mission.

3. THE CABINET MISSION

The Cabinet Mission arrived in India in March, 1946. Its instructions followed the line of the preceding statement of policy broadcast by the Viceroy in September, 1945.

The Viceroy's broadcast of September, 1945, had declared:

> "It is the intention of His Majesty's Government to convene as soon as possible a constitution-making body and as a preliminary step they have authorised me to undertake immediately after the elections, discussions with representatives of the Legislative Assemblies in the Provinces, to ascertain whether the proposals contained in the 1942 declaration are acceptable or whether some alternative or modified scheme is preferable.
>
> "Discussions will also be undertaken with the representatives of the Indian States with a view to ascertaining in what way they can best take their part in the constitution-making body.
>
> "His Majesty's Government are proceeding to the consideration of the content of the treaty which will require to be concluded between Great Britain and India.
>
> "During these preparatory stages the Government of India must be carried on.... His Majesty's Government have, therefore, further authorised me as soon as the results of the provincial elections are published to take steps to bring into being an Executive Council which will have the support of the main Indian parties...."

It will be seen that the statement carried forward the general line of the Cripps Proposals of 1942, while offering the possibility of modification. As the Prime Minister declared in his parallel statement to the Viceroy's broadcast:

> "The broad definition of British policy towards India contained in the declaration of 1942, which has the support of all parties in this country stands in all its fullness and purpose."

In the opening months of 1946, the elections were held. The results showed the crystallisation of opinion behind the two major political organisations standing for the aim of independence, the Congress in the general seats and the Moslem League in the Moslem seats, and the relative eclipse of all the previous minor sectional groupings such as the Hindu Mahasabha or regional and official-favoured parties such as the Unionist Party in the Punjab and the Justice Party in Madras. In the Central Legislative Assembly (elected on a very narrow franchise of less than one half of one per cent of the population of British India) the Congress won 56 seats (previously 36) with 91 per cent of the votes in all general seats and 59 per cent of the total vote. The Moslem League won all the 30 Moslem seats (previously 25) with 86 per cent of the Moslem vote and 27.6 per cent of the total vote. In the Provincial Assembly elections, with a franchise covering 11 per cent of the population and between 1|5 and 1|4 of the adult population, the Congress obtained 930 seats as against 715 in 1937, and 55.5 per cent of the total vote while the Moslem League obtained 427 of the 507 Moslem seats as against 108 in 1937 and 74.3 per cent of the Moslem vote. For the first time the Communist Party was able to contest the elections and won 8 seats and 6,84,928 votes.

The announcement by the British Prime Minister on February 19, of the dispatch of the Mission of three Cabinet Ministers—the Secretary of State for India, Pethick Lawrence, President of the Board of Trade, Stafford Cripps, and the Lord Admiralty, Alexander — was accompanied by a statement of the terms of reference of the Mission 'to promote in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion, the early realisation of full self-government in India."

The steps to be taken were to include—

> "(1) Preparatory discussions with the elected representatives of British India and with the Indian States

in order to secure the widest measures of agreement as to the method of framing a constitution;

(2) Setting up a constitution-making body;

(3) The bringing into being of an Executive Council having the support of the main Indian Parties."

In the session of Parliament on March 15, on the occasion of the departure of the Mission, the Prime Minister made a further statement of policy (see pages 6-7 Chapter 1), two points of which received especially widespread attention. The first was the reference to "independence" as a possible alternative to Dominion Status which India might choose:

> "India herself must choose as to what will be her future constitution and her position in the world. I hope that India may elect to remain within the British Commonwealth....But if on the other hand she elects for independence, and in our view she has a right to do so, it will be for us to help make the transition as smooth and easy as possible."

The second referred to the question of minorities:

> "We are mindful of the rights of the minorities and the minorities should be able to live free from fear. On the other hand we cannot allow a minority to place their veto on the advance of a majority."

The reference to "independence" as a possible goal of Indian constitutional development was widely acclaimed as a startling new departure of policy and evidence of a new spirit in the relations of Britain and India. With suspicious unanimity the Tory spokesmen in the debate joined in the chorus. "Why boggle at the term independence?" — declared such a hardboiled old champion of British rule in India as Sir Stanley Reed. Nevertheless, the very guarded hypothetical offer that a future undemocratic constitution-making body whose position and procedure would be determined and weighted by the British rulers would have the choice between Dominion Status and independence, was not in fact a new definition of policy. It had already been set out in the Cripps offer of 1942, sanctioned by the Tory-dominated Cabinet:

> "In order to achieve the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India, the British Government propose that steps should be taken to create a new Indian Union which will have the full status of a Dominion with the power to secede if it chooses from the British Commonwealth."

The promise to refuse to allow the veto of a minority to block political development did suggest an advance on the position of the Simla Conference, and revealed the determination to end the existing political deadlock; but subsequent official explanations in India that the reference to minorities should not be taken as reference to the Moslem community diminished the significance of this supposed change of policy.

The Cabinet Mission spent the first few weeks of its proceedings in separate interviews with Governors, Princes, Provincial Prime Ministers and leaders of Opposition, and the representatives of the Congress, Moslem League and other organisations. These separate negotiations served to display to world opinion the divisions of the different political sections in India and especially of the Congress and the Moslem League. In the next stage, after the Easter recess, the Mission opened discussions with a view to finding a common basis between the Congress and the League. Proposals were put forward by the Mission for such a basis, and the Conference was adjourned to Simla from May 5 to 12 for tripartite negotiations of the Mission, the Congress and the League. The second Simla Conference, like the first a year earlier, ended in a breakdown. The first seven weeks of the proceedings of the Cabinet Mission had thus prepared the ground for a British award.

On May 16 the Cabinet Mission in association with the Viceroy and the British Cabinet issued its statement of policy. This statement of policy contained both decisions and recommendations: decisions as to the immediate steps to be taken with regard to the etsablishment and composition of the Constituent Assembly and its procedure; and recommendations with regard to the governing principles of a future constitution. While the recommendations were subject to modification by the Constituent Assembly, the decisions were laid down for acceptance or rejection. Since the decisions in fact governed all the key steps which would inevitably determine the subsequent character of the constitution, this statement of policy was in reality an award (though the term was avoided and even denied) imposed by unilateral British decision.

The Cabinet Mission Declaration of May 16, put forward the following proposals:

1. *Recommendations for the Future Constitution*

(1) There should be a Union of India embodying both

British India and the States, which should deal with Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications and should have the power necessary to raise the finance required for these subjects.

(2) The Union should have an Executive and Legislature constituted from British Indian and State representatives.

Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities (Congress and Moslem League) as well as a majority of all members present and voting.

(3) All subjects other than Union subjects and all residuary powers should vest in the Provinces.

(4) The States should retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the Union.

(5) The Provinces should be free to form Groups with Executives and Legislatures and each Group could determine the Provincial subjects to be taken in common.

(6) The constitutions of the Union and of the Groups should contain a provision whereby any Province could, by majority vote of its Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution after an initial period of ten years and at ten-yearly intervals thereafter.

2. *Proposals for Constitution-making Machinery*

(1) A Constituent Assembly of 389 members; 292 from the Provinces of British India indirectly elected on a communal basis with separate seats allotted according to population, for general, Moslem and Sikh groupings, by the existing Provincial Legislative Assemblies; and 93 from the States, the method of selection to be arranged by consultation.

(2) Division of Provinces in three sections:

(a) Representing Hindu-majority regions (Madras, Bombay, United Provinces, Bihar, Central Provinces and Orissa).

(b) Representing the North-Western Moslem-majority region, (Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan) and another repre-

senting the North-Eastern Moslem-majority region (Bengal and Assam).

Representatives of these Groups to meet separately to determine the provincial constitutions for the Provinces in each Group. The Provinces to have the right to opt out only after the completion of the new constitution and the first elections on this basis.

(3) Advisory Committee for smaller minorities.

(4) Union Constituent Assembly to determine the Union Constitution.

Resolutions raising major communal issues to require a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities.

3. *States*

Basis of co-operation of the States in the new Indian Union to be determined by negotiation. States to be represented in the preliminary stages by a Negotiating Committee.

Paramountcy to end with the attainment of independence by British India.

4. *British-Indian Treaty*

A British-Indian treaty to be negotiated between the Union Constituent Assembly and the United Kingdom.

5. *Interim Government*

Recommendation for the establishment of an "Interim Government having the support of the major political parties" to be formed by the Viceroy on the basis of reconstitution of this Executive Council.

The immediate reception of the Cabinet Mission's Plan was mixed. British comment in general applauded the proposals as a generous and complete fulfilment of the promise of independence to India and of the right of the Indian people to make their own constitution. Criticism voiced by a section of Right-wing Tory opinion, represented by Churchill, only emphasised this general approach, since criticism was based on the same assumption that the plan implied the granting of independence to India.

Indian comment was more varied. Gandhi who throughout the negotiations had been most active in praising the sincerity and goodwill of the Mission and the British Government ("they will not betray us"—curious and revealing words to come from the leader of an insurgent nation in relation to its oppressors) welcomed the Plan as "containing the seed to convert this land of sorrow into one without sorrow and suffering." Most leading Congress comment mingled support and criticism. League expression was at first cautious and non-committal, until Jinnah later declared that the Plan gave "the foundation and the basis of Pakistan." Left Congress opinion was openly hostile. The *Free Press Journal* denounced the Plan as the "British plan to muddle India's future." The Communist Leader, P. C. Joshi, denounced the Plan as a "British imperial plan to preserve India as their greatest colonial base" and a "scheme to prevent a statute of independence being passed and to keep the Indians permanently warring amongst themselves."

Protracted negotiations followed the announcement of the Plan. On May 24 the Congress Working Committee issued a provisional statement of its standpoint. The resolution of the Congress withheld final judgement but noted a number of divergences between the Congress policy and the Plan; especially the maintenance of military occupation in the interim period ("the continued presence of a foreign army of occupation is the negation of independence"); the representation of Europeans in the Constituent Assembly, infringement of provincial autonomy by compulsory grouping of provinces; the absence of provision for democracy in the States and the limitation of power of the proposed Interim Government.

On June 1, the official A.I.C.C. News Letter elaborated its criticism, and declared the Plan to be—

> "Not much better than what even Messrs. Churchill and Amery were willing to concede in March, 1942.
>
> "The independence that has been promised is so hedged-in with restrictions that it is a misnomer to call it by that name. The so-called Constituent Assembly will have the semblance but not the reality of a sovereign body. Both the Union and the Provinces will be at the mercy of certain arbitrary groupings of provinces. The scheme has almost all the defects of an India divided on a communal basis without even the redeeming feature of a full-fledged scheme of Pakistan which would have

left the Provincial Units homogeneous and sovereign

"The Union Government without control over currency, banking, customs and planning will be too weak to direct the economic progress of the nation under modern industrial conditions....

"National interest has been subordinated not only to the communal but to the feudal no less. The Princes and not their people will decide the future relations of the States to the Union....

"The Plan lacks even the merit of being simple and easily workable.

"Sovereignty has been so long ingeniously divided between the Federal Union, sub-Federal Groups, Provincial Units and the Princes (not to speak of His Majesty's Government who will have the last word even after the constitution has been framed) that it will ever be a problem to locate it....

"In the jungle of restrictions, reservations, safeguards and the balancing of one interest against another, it is difficult to visualise a clear and complete picture of a free and independent India.

"The communal and feudal interests have been the main props so far of the British imperial game in India. To try to maintain them as permanent and effective features of the so-called independent India gives rise to a plausible suspicion that the British Government are unable to break away from the traditional policy of their predecessors."

In answer to the Congress resolution of May 24 the Cabinet Mission issued a further statement and clarification on May 25. This statement made clear, among other points:

(1) "The scheme stands as a whole"—i.e., to be accepted or rejected as a whole.

(2) The Provinces can have no right to opt out of the Groups whatever their wishes, until after a constitution has been established and brought into operation and elections have taken place.

(3) The future cession of sovereignty to India would be subject to two conditions:

(a) "Adequate provision for the protection of minorities";

(b) "willingness to conclude a treaty with the British Government to cover matters arising out of the transfer of power."

(4) The States representation in the Constituent Assembly can only be settled with their consent and "it is not a matter for decision by the Delegation."

(5) "The present constitution must continue during the interim period, and the Interim Government cannot, therefore, legally be responsible to the Central Legislature."

(6) Military occupation must continue in the interim period during which the British Parliament has, under the present constitution, the ultimate responsibility for the security of India and it is necessary therefore that British troops should remain.

Subsequent preparations for the elections to the Constituent Assembly revealed that members of the Constituent Assembly were required to pledge themselves beforehand to acceptance and operation of the Constitutional Plan.

These implications of the Plan, revealing more sharply its true character as an imposed award, intensified opposition within considerable sections of the Congress and Left national opinion.

On June 6, the Moslem League, while reiterating that "the attainment of the goal of a complete sovereign Pakistan still remains the unalterable objective of the Moslems of India", announced their acceptance of the Plan as a whole, both the long-term and the interim proposals "inasmuch as the basis and the foundation of Pakistan are inherent in the Mission's Plan."

Negotiations followed for the constitution of the Interim Government on the basis of joint representation of the Congress and the League as the main representatives of minorities. These negotiations revealed at once the essential perpetuation of division and friction which was in practice involved in every attempted step for the operation of the Plan. No agreement could be reached between the Congress and the League on the composition of the Interim Government. In the absence of an agreement the British rulers once again stepped into the breach and proclaimed an award on June 16. The proposed composition of the Interim Government was announced on the basis of 5 representatives of Congress (all Hindus and excluding any Congress Moslem), 5 representatives of Moslem

League and 4 representatives of minorities (Sikhs, Christians, Harijans and Parsis—with the added sop to the Congress that the Harijan was a Congress Harijan, thus giving the Congress 6 seats).

It was made clear that entry into the Government would have to be "on the basis that constitution making will proceed in accordance with the Statement of May 16."

This proposed composition of the Interim Government aroused strong opposition, especially with regard to the exclusion of a Congress Moslem thus relegating the Congress to the position of a Hindu organisation. On June 24, the Congress announced rejection of the Plan for the Interim Government, but followed this up by accepting participation in the Constituent Assembly. The resolution of the Congress Working Committee on June 26 emphasised the "defects" of the Cabinet Mission's Plan, reiterated the Congress aims of "immediate independence" and social advance and declared that the Plan falls short of these objectives. The Congress resolution did not declare acceptance of the Plan but only the decision to join the proposed Constituent Assembly "with a view to framing the constitution of a free, united and democratic India." They made it clear that they would enter it with their own interpretation backed by legal advice and that they would not accept compulsory grouping of Provinces.

Following this declaration, the Cabinet Mission and Viceroy announced that an Interim Caretaker Government of officials would be established pending further negotiations for a Provisional National Government.

On June 29 the Cabinet Mission left India.

The new Constitutional Plan of 1946 was widely presented to world opinion as a plan for Indian freedom. Yet an examination of its provisions could only lead to the conclusion that it was in reality little more than a repetition of the Cripps offer of 1942, and very far from the establishment of Indian freedom or the right of democratically elected representatives of the Indian people to choose their own future.

First, the hypothetical offer of future choice between Dominion Status and independence was very far from the immediate declaration of Indian independence demanded by all Indian political organisations without exception. The issue of independence was in fact left to be decided by an unrepresentative body whose composition and procedure were determined by the British award and weighted in a reactionary direction.

Second, the indispensable basis for any democratic choice of a constitution, that is the election of the democratic Constituent Assembly based on universal suffrage, was refused, nominally on the grounds of haste. The composition of the Constituent Assembly was undemocratic in that it perpetuated communal division; it was indirectly elected from Assemblies, based on an electorate representing 11% of the population, and in addition was weighted by 93 nominees of the Princes representing one-fourth of the whole.

Third, no provision was made for democracy in the territory of the Princes constituting one-third of India. Arrangements with the Princes were left entirely to voluntary negotiations, including with regard to the matter of their representation in the Constituent Assembly. The States were not only left untouched, but by the ending of paramountcy, if no agreement was reached in the interval with their consent, they would be legally and diplomatically independent sovereign states.

Fourth, the Plan partitioned India into four zones—one Hindu-majority zone, two Moslem-majority zones and the fourth zone of the Princes' States. No provision was made for the consultation of the wishes of the inhabitants over this partition which was arbitrarily laid down as an award. This partition had nothing in common with any principle of self-determination; the resulting three-tier structure would be extremely cumbrous and possibly even unworkable in practice.

Fifth, on the basis of this partition the Centre was left with very weak and limited powers. In particular, it lacked powers for economic planning or social regulation on an all-India scale, such as would be essential for progressive democratic advance, effective large-scale economic reconstruction and the raising of social standards.

Sixth, during the interim period no transfer of power was proposed; the old constitution would continue and the Interim Government would only be a re-constituted Viceroy's Council with the veto and over-riding powers still available in case of need.

Seventh, military occupation would continue during the indefinite interim period, so that the drawing up of the new Constitution would take place under the shadow of the military occupation.

Eighth, the Constitutent Assemly would not be sovereign. The new constitution drawn up by it would not be

valid until approved by the British, and British approval would be dependent on the fulfilment of two conditions—satisfaction of the British rulers as to adequate provisions for the protection of minorities and acceptance of an Indo-British Treaty—both of which would have to be fulfilled before any cession of sovereignty would take place.

The general conclusion is inescapable. The Constitutional Plan of 1946 continued the old method of elaborate balancing and counter-poise of the different elements in Indian political life, especially of building a political situation on communal antagonism, by balancing the Congress against the Moslem League, with the Princes as the reactionary pivotal force, in such a way as to nullify in practice the supposed offer of Indian freedom and retain effective final control in their hands. British control was to continue during the critical and indefinite interim period and so be able to govern the whole character of the ensuing Constitution. British imperialism had not yet abdicated and transferred power to the Indian people. It had rather exploited all its ingenuity and age-old political experience to establish an elaborate, cumbersome, precarious machinery through which even behind the formal facade of Indian "independence" it would be able to continue to manoeuvre and seek to maintain its essential economic and strategic domination.

4. THE MOUNTBATTEN SETTLEMENT

While the interminable negotiations between the representatives of imperialism (the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, taking over from the Cabinet Mission after their departure) and the leadership of the Congress and the Moslem League dragged on during the latter part of 1946 and the early months of 1947, the crisis in India continued to rise higher.

The growth of the industrial strike movement of the workers showed a continuously rising curve. During 1945 the number of workers involved was returned as 747,000, and the number of working days lost as 4,054,000. During 1946 the number had risen to 1,961,000 workers and 12,717,000 working days, or more than three times the total of 1945. During the first eight months of 1947 the number of workers involved was 1,323,000 and the number of working days lost 11,195,863, or nearly the total of 1946 in two thirds of a year. Thus, while the general body of the national movement was paraly-

sed and disorganised by the compromising tactics of the leadership passing over to agreement with imperialism, the working class fight continued to advance.

At the same time the States peoples' fight against princely rule rose to new heights. This was shown especially in the struggles in Travancore and Hyderabad, and above all in Kashmir, where the "Quit Kashmir" movement led by Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference for the ending of the rule of the Maharaja was met by violent repression, imprisonment of the leaders, military firing and a reign of terror.

On the other hand, the effects of disorganisation of the national movement through the capitulation of the leadership to imperialist intrigue showed themselves in the simultaneous advance of reactionary and disruptive forces. In place of the communal unity which had characterised the great national upsurge in the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946 before the arrival of the Cabinet Mission, the disruptive tactics of the Cabinet Mission, playing ceaselessly on the division of Hindus and Moslems, and aided and abetted by the compromising and fiercely competitive tactics of the leadership of the Congress and Moslem League, lit once more the flames of communal conflict. Communal conflict raised its ugly head anew in June, 1946—a grim commentary on the work of the Cabinet Mission. By the autumn of 1946 communal conflict flared up to new murderous heights never before known, with the Moslem League "Direct Action" Day in Calcutta in August, followed by the riots in East Bengal in October, and the anti-Moslem riots in Bihar, all resulting in thousands of killed, many more thousands wounded and rendered homeless, wholesale massacre, arson, looting and horrors beyond record. The gospel of "non-violence", which had only served to stifle and paralyse the revolutionary energy of the masses from being turned against imperialism, was now bringing its terrible nemesis in unexampled violence and carnage as the energies of the masses were twisted and distorted under the guidance of reaction away from their true enemies to mutual fratricidal strife and suicidal self-destruction. Communal passion spread from the Moslem League to the ranks of the Congress, with the rapid growth of the Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu communal organisations, and powerfully affected the proceedings of the Meerut session of the Congress in November, where Patel preached amid acclamation the new gospel "to meet the sword by the sword"—not as a call to Indians against imperialism, but as a call to Hindus against Moslems.

Faced with this deepening crisis, signalised equally in the advance of the working class and peasant struggle and popular revolt against princely rule, and in the growth of political disintegration and reactionary communal conflict and anarchy, imperialism sought to hasten the time-table for reaching the new political settlement. In August, 1946, a new Interim Government was formed (still within the formal framework of the Viceroy's Executive Council), on the basis of the Congress and Sikh leadership, with Nehru at its head. In October Moslem League representatives were brought into the Interim Government. The Interim Government, however, failed to function as a coalition; the two leaderships continued in open opposition; and a paralysis at the centre threatened.

In December, 1946, a Conference was called in London of Indian leaders and the British Government, with the participation of Attlee, Wavell, Nehru and Jinnah. This Conference did not produce any solution of the deadlock. But in the statement that was issued by the British Government on the outcome of the Conference a significant final clause was added:

> "Should a Constitution come to be framed by a Constituent Assembly in which a large section of the Indian population had not been represented His Majesty's Government could not of course contemplate forcing such a Constitution upon any unwilling parts of the country."

The significance of this declaration was clear. The reference to "a large section of the Indian population" as "not represented" did not of course refer to the disfranchised three quarters of the adult population in British India, who had had no share in the voting for the Provincial Assemblies which were the indirect basis for the proposed "Constituent Assembly." It referred, and was universally understood to refer, solely to the Moslem League and to the refusal of the Moslem League to accept majority decisions of a Constituent Assembly in which its representatives would be in a minority. This statement was thus the first clear indication that British policy was moving to the partition of India as its "solution." The statement placed in the hands of the Moslem League an absolute veto, and guaranteed in advance that, if the Moslem League chose to exercise this veto, the British Government would impose partition.

As the crisis continued to deepen in the beginning of 1947, measures of repression were intensified. In January, 1947, wholesale raids and arrests of hundreds of leaders were con-

ducted against the Communist Party all over India. While these arrests were carried out by the ordinary imperialist police machinery, responsibility for them was finally accepted, after some preliminary prevarication, on behalf of the Central Government by the Home Member, Patel, who admitted in a statement in the Central Assembly on February 21 that 1,950 Communists were under arrest. Reports from British representatives to London emphasised that the situation was getting out of hand, and that the administrative services were in danger of disintegrating, and pressed urgently the necessity of reaching a speedy political settlement.

In February, 1947, the British Government took new decisions to speed the settlement. The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, was recalled and was replaced by Lord Mountbatten, who had already served as Supreme Allied Commander in South East Asia during the war (in his younger days he had also served with the Prince of Wales tour to India in 1921), and who was sent out with new instructions for a speedy settlement, which in practice was to be based on the partition of India. Simultaneously the Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, made a new declaration of policy in the House of Commons on February 20, (commonly referred to as the Attlee-Declaration), which was published as a White Paper. The Declaration laid down that

> "His Majesty's Government wish to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect the transference of power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June, 1948."

At the same time the Declaration warned that no Constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly would be accepted by Britain unless it were drawn up "in accordance with the proposals" of the Cabinet Mission Plan and "by a fully representative Constituent Assemly", i.e., with the assent of the Moslem League; and that failing such assent of the Moslem League, or if a majority of representatives of the Indian Constituent Assembly should dare to draw up a Constitution not approved by Britain,

> "His Majesty's Government will have to consider to whom the powers of the Central Government in British India should be handed over, on the due date, whether as a whole to some form of central Government for British India, or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments, or in such other way as may seem most

reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people."

With regard to the States the Declaration laid down:

> "In regard to the Indian States His Majesty's Government do not intend to hand over their powers and obligations under paramountcy to any Government of British India. It is not intended to bring paramountcy as a system to a conclusion earlier than the date of the final transfer of power; but it is contemplated that for the intervening period the relations of the Crown with individual States may be adjusted by agreement."

Since this Declaration of February, 1947, is the key guiding statement of policy for the so-called "transfer of power" to a "free India", it is worth noting the very definite character of its formulation. There was no question of a free choice by the Indian people of the kind of government under which they might wish to live. There was no question of a free Constituent Assembly, freely elected by universal suffrage of the Indian people, being entrusted with sovereign powers on behalf of the Indian people to draw up a Constitution without external interference. There was no sovereign Constituent Assembly at all. All these normal characteristics of the genuine establishment of a sovereign independent democratic State were completely absent. On the contrary, the most explicit regulations were laid down beforehand by the overruling British Power as to what kind of Constitution would be permitted. Failing compliance with these regulations and requirements laid down unilaterally by the ruling imperialist Power, it is the ruling imperialist Power which holds sole decision and determines unilaterally to what "responsible Indian hands" the so-called "transfer of power" shall be made. In other words, *there is here no establishment of a sovereign independent State, but a delegation of authority by imperialism to such forms of administrative authority in India as imperialism may judge expedient in its own interests.* And this in practice is what happened through the Mountbatten Settlement and the establishment of the Dominions of India and Pakistan.

The new Mountbatten Plan, replacing the former Cabinet Mission Plan, was evolved rapidly and published in June. By August, 1947, it was put into effect. This acceleration of the original date of June, 1948, laid down in the White Paper reflected the increasing urgency of the crisis and the official recognition of the need for the utmost speed if the collapse

of imperialist authority and a revolutionary outcome of the crisis in India were to be averted. As the *"Sunday Times"* correspondent reported on May, 4, 1947, British official opinion had to recognise the "risk that chaos may overtake India long before June, 1948."

The Mountbatten Plan laid down detailed measures for the partition of India and the speedy transfer of responsibility in the form of Dominion Status to Indian Governments for the sections of a divided India.

Formally, the Plan did not lay down the partition of India, but provided machinery for the areas affected by the Pakistan demand to choose, either through their Legislative Assembly representatives or through referendum, between a single Constituent Assembly in accordance with the Cabinet Mission Plan, or a separate Constituent Assembly for a separate State. This involved division of the Punjab and Bengal so that the Moslem-majority areas and non-Moslem-majority areas could decide separately. In practice, on the basis of existing representation, this meant the certainty of partition, including the partition of the Punjab and Bengal.

The position of the Princes' States was left open: that is, with the ending of paramountcy they could enter into separate negotiations to join either grouping on their own terms; or alternatively, they had the right in theory, even though practice was not likely to maintain the right, to proclaim their independence and establish their separate relations with Britain.

By this Plan India was partitioned into the following areas:

1. North West Pakistan, covering Western Punjab, Sind, the North West Frontier and Baluchistan, with a population of 25 millions (8 million Moslems).
2. North East Pakistan, covering Eastern Bengal and the Sylhet district of Assam wih a population of 44 millions (31 million Moslems).

   These two areas, divided by a thousand miles constituted the Pakistan State, with a population of seventy millions.
3. The Indian Union, covering the rest of British India with a population of 225 millions.
4. The Princes' States, covering two fifths of the area of India with a population of 13 millions, or one quarter, to enjoy independent status after the transfer,

with a view to joining either Dominion by separate negotiation.

In the outcome, by a little over a year later, after all the States had been ranged with one or other Dominion, including the disputed accession of Kashmir (accession by decision of the Maharaja in 1947, but war continuing in 1948) and Hyderabad (accession by war in Septmeber, 1948) to the Indian Dominion, the map of India in 1948 showed the following partition :

PARTITION OF INDIA

(Areas in square miles)

	Non-States Area	*States Area*	*Total*
Pre-partition India ..	865,446	715,964	1,581,410
Indian dominion excluding Hyderabad and Kashmir	632,211	421,104	1,053,315
Hyderabad and Kashmir		166,784	
Indian Union including Hyderabad and Kashmir	632,211	587,888	1,220,099
Pakistan	233,235	128,076	361,311

The Mountbatten Plan received the assent of the leadership of the major political organisations in India and in Britain.

In India the political leaders of the Congress and the Moslem League declared their acceptance of the proposals, though with considerable misgivings. Nehru on behalf of the Congress stated :

> "It is with no joy in my heart that I commend these proposals".

Jinnah on behalf of the Moslem League stated :

> "We cannot say or feel that we are satisfied or that we agree with some of the matters dealt with by the Plan."

And Baldev Singh on behalf of the Sikhs stated :

> "It would be untrue if I were to say that we are altogether happy, The British Plan does not please everybody, not the Sikh community anyway."

Indian Left-wing opinion, equally among Socialists, Communists and Left nationalists, sharply criticised the Plan as involving the dismemberment of India and as not representing a real transfer of power. The Communist Party of India stated:

> "The new British Plan for the dismemberment of India is a desperate move against the freedom movement which stands for the complete independence of the whole of the country... Mountbatten's Plan is not a genuine "Quit India" plan rather one which seeks to keep in British hands as many economic and military controls as possible."

In Britain, Tory-Labour unity was proclaimed in support of the Plan. Churchill, in contrast to his opposition to previous proposals, expressed his enthusiastic approval of the general lines of the Mountbatten Plan, and congratulated Attlee on his selection of Mountbatten as Viceroy — praise which according to *The Times*, "brought a flush of pleasure to the Prime Minister's cheek". "The two men," observed the *Manchester Guardian* of Churchill and Attlee, "have not found so much common ground since this parliament began". On the occasion of the parliamentary announcement, only the Communist spokesman, Gallacher, expressed criticism. In the City Indian share prices immediately rose, following the announcement, and, as the *Daily Herald* noted, "the City gave its blessing to the Plan." The viewpoint of the City found expression in the *Economist*:

> "Something may remain even of the formal ties if Dominion Status is not renounced; and in any case the essential strategic and economic ties between Britain and India will remain, even if it is under different political forms". *("Economist", June 7, 1947).*

Internationally, the Plan received high praise in the American official press, and in the Right-wing press of most countries. On the other hand, Reuters noted that "Left-wing newspapers have been unfavourable in all countries." Soviet comment was provided by the statement of Zhukov:

> "Britain is being forced to take a page from America's book and copy her policy in the Philippines—to give a nominal false freedom. In other words, to clear out so as to remain."

A commentary by the Soviet publicist, Lemin, drew the conclusion :

> "From declarations proclaiming the transfer of power to the Indians it is a far cry to true independence for India. The achievement of the latter will depend first and foremost on the strength of the national liberation movement. British ruling circles mean to maintain their economic, military and political positions in India, whatever her future constitutional structure may be. Among other things they bank on the economic ties established between the British and the Indian bourgeoisie...
>
> "Irrespective of the constitutional changes in India, what really matters is the actual economic, political and military positions that British capital succeeds in maintaining in that country. This will decide whether the long-standing question of independence for India will be settled as it was in the Philippines, or whether India will become a really independent democratic country."

The central new feature of the Mountbatten Plan — which in other respects only carried forward the principle of the alliance of imperialism and the Indian big bourgeoisie already proposed in the Cabinet Mission Plan—was the partition of India.

For many decades the main boast of British rule in India had been its unification of India. At the end of two centuries of British rule the India which had been united under Asoka and Chandragupta over two thousand years ago and under Akbar three and a half centuries ago was handed back to subordinate Indian rulers, split into discordant fragments, and needing to tread a toilsome and painful path to overcome this vicious legacy of imperialist "divide and rule" and forge living unity anew.

Partition on the lines laid down in the Mountbatten Plan brought great evils to India.

First, it divided State boundaries, not on lines of linguistic, cultural or national divisions, but on lines of religious divison. This not only meant that the frontiers were arbitrary and disputable, opening the way to further conflict, but that large minorities of an opposing religious faith were included in States whose basis was declared to be the predominance of a given religious faith. It not only meant the division of India into two States on the basis of religious division; since religious division was made the basis of political division, it

meant the reproduction and multiplication of this division in every town and village and area of India. No more potent specific to promote chronic internal conflict could be found. The introduction of the Mountbatten Plan let loose the most hideous communal conflicts, massacres, and flight of millions of refugees, without parallel in Indian history.

Second, the transfer of governmental responsibility, not to a united Indian Government, but to two Indian Governments counter-posed against one another, alongside the further complication of the Princes' States, with open competition for the adhesion of States, created the conditions for chronic inter-governmental discord and conflict. Within a year the two Dominions were engaged in direct military operations against each other, and on each side invoking the support of the imperialist authorities through the United Nations against the other. The fact that both Dominions' armies had British Commanders-in-Chief and many British officers did not smooth the conflict, but only increased the complications. As the *Manchester Guardian* had to note on August 3, 1948:

> "Pakistan's official participation in the Kashmir campaign raises serious problems for the whole British Commonwealth. This is the first time the armies of the two Dominions have fought against each other...
>
> "Moreover, the fact that both the Pakistan and Indian armies have British Commanders-in-Chief and British advisers, while the former has several hundred British officers as compared with the latter's few score, means in effect that Britons are ranged on opposing sides."

Third, the division cut across economic and political links, divorced mutually interdependent agricultural and industrial areas, cut indiscriminately across railway and irrigation systems, and this placed a barrier in the way of All-India economic development and planning, of vital importance for the future prosperity of India. Similarly it placed the maximum difficulties in the path of the democratic movement and working-class and peasant movement, which had grown up and built organisations on a united basis, and were now separated and organisationally split by the new State divisions, as well as having to combat the devil's brood of communal discord let loose by the imperialist plan.

The Mountbatten Plan was pushed through with extreme haste. On August 15, 1947, the new Dominions of India and Pakistan were proclaimed.

5. INDIAN UNION AND PAKISTAN

The profound crisis in India which followed the second world war did not end with the settlement of August 15, 1947. On the contrary, it has continued to develop in a variety of forms, alongside the repressive measures of reaction, and holds the prospect of future new explosions. But the first year of experience of the new Dominion Governments rapidly revealed their real character and role in Indian development.

The initial communal carnage which accompanied their formation dominated the scene in the early stages, and in the midst of the welter of blood, confusion and tragic emotions, as well as of reaction-fostered violence and provocation, culminating in the assassination of Gandhi, left small room for calm reflection as to the character of the change which had taken place. But as soon as these waves began to subside, the new class relations and political alignment consequent on the settlement of 1947 began to unfold their full character in the evolution of the programme and administrative activity of the Dominions and Provincial Ministries, no less than in the new stage of the mass movement.

At the outset there was undoubtedly widespread popular rejoicing over the formation of the new Government composed of Indian political leaders in whom the mass of the people had for many years placed their confidence, with the powerful backing of the mass popular organisations, the Congress and the Moslem League; and "Independence Day" was widely celebrated as a day of liberation and triumph, when the Union Jack was hauled down to give place to the national flag. Few were the voices at the outset to sound the note of warning as to the illusory character of the "liberation" and "independence". But experience brought rapid disillusionment.

The characteristic feature of the new Governments was continuity with the old imperialist regime. The entire administrative machinery of imperialism was taken over and carried forward; the same bureaucracy, judiciary and police of old imperialist agents and servitors; the same methods of repression, police firing on unarmed crowds, lathi-charges, prohibition of meetings, suppression of newspapers, detentions without charge, persecution of trade unions and peasant organisations and crowding of the gaols with thousands of Left-wing political prisoners. The vast assets, investment holdings and financial interests of imperialism in India were zealously

protected, and the even flow of imperialist exploitation continued. Military control remained in practice in the hands of the imperialist High Command. In the initial stages even the British Governor-General was carried forward in the same position as the head of the Union, British Governors were maintained for the key Provinces in both Dominions, and British Commanders-in-Chief, military advisors and superior officers for both armies. In short, the new Governments were revealed, not as new independent Governments established in their own right and making a break with the past of slavery, but as subordinate Governments established by the fiat of a superior ruling Power to carry through permitted tasks; as Governments in tutelage being trained for the job — the former prisoners learning to be gaolers, the former apostles of non-violence learning to denounce the anti-imperialist struggle in Asia as criminal unrest requiring to be put down with a firm hand.

Within the elements of leadership composing the new Governments there could be room for secondary differences; personal and temperamental differences, differences of tendency and political background, differences on concrete details of policy. But these secondary differences could not affect the basic class character of the new regime, representing the interests of the Indian big bourgeoisie ruling as a junior partner in alliance with imperialism and maintaining a common front with imperialism against the popular mass movement.

The decisive test of the real character and basis of the new regime was most sharply revealed in the sphere of economic policy. Already in the summer of 1947, on the eve of the change-over, it is worth noting the assured tone of the giant imperialist monopoly, Imperial Chemical Industries, in its Information Bulletin's special confidential report on the "Political Outlook" in India:

> "There is every reason to believe that the discrimination against foreign businesses which was once feared will not materialise...
>
> "Nationalisation of industries will not go much further than the Government setting up factories at State expense in all those cases where the ordinary chances of supply and demand do not forecast a probable profit on an adequate scale...

"On the whole, business interests with substantial resources are justified in not taking too short a view and in being cautiously optimistic."

This confidence proved justified by the event. The Congress programme had provided for nationalisation of all key resources and industries and extensive State control. Such large-scale nationalisation would obviously be essential, not only for progressive reconstruction, but for eliminating the *dominant hold of foreign capital in industry*. But after the formation of the Dominion Governments this programme was placed in cold storage.

On February 17, Prime Minister Nehru declared to the Legislative Assembly:

"There will not be any sudden change in the economic structure. As far as possible, there will be no nationalisation of existing industries."

Reuter's Trade Service Financial Section reported on April 1 from New Delhi:

"Large-scale nationalisation of existing industries is ruled out in the Government of India's industrial and economic policy for the next ten years."

On April 6, 1948, the Government's Resolution on Economic Policy, substantiating these predictions, was published. The Resolution laid down that Government ownership would be confined to munitions, atomic energy and the railways (where it already existed): that in respect of coal, iron, steel and other leading industries "the Government have decided to let existing undertakings in these fields develop for a period of ten years"; that there would be State control of electricity; and that "the rest of the industrial field will normally be open to private enterprise". Nationalisation was thus abandoned in favour of the existing big monopolies, including the imperialist big monopolies.

The Explanatory Memorandum published with this Resolution on Economic Policy is of especial interest. The Memorandum declared:

"The apprehension recently felt in Indian markets that the Government might experiment in nationalisation over a wide field of industries, thereby jeopardising their efficiency and credit, has been completely allayed. The expected result of the announcement of the policy will be

the restoration to their former level of the prices of Government securities.

"It is expected in knowledgeable quarters that the way is now clear for the Government to float big loans for purpose of reconstruction now that confidence has returned."

The Memorandum then proceeded to give assurances to allay fears of any possible limitation or control of profits:

"Markets were touchy about the possibility of the Government stepping in to regulate and limit profits in private enterprise. The policy as announced contains no hint of this, and share values are bound to go up. Private enterprise therefore receives encouragement."

"Private enterprise....encouragement", "Share values are bound to go up"—the class basis of this appeal is sufficiently clear.

Nor was any room left for doubt as to the type of "private enterprise" to which this appeal was especially directed —i.e., to imperialism, to Anglo-American capital. The official Memorandum accompanying the Government Resolution laid down the aim in its final clause:

"The Resolution contemplates full freedom for foreign capital and enterprise in Indian industry while at the same time assuring that it should be regulated in the national interest. This part of the Resolution reveals the Indian Government's recognition of the need for foreign aid both in management and technical training and investment, and of the wisdom of welcoming foreign capital and skill to supplement Indian enterprise."

"Full freedom for foreign capital" — the Mountbatten Settlement was in truth realising rich dividends for imperialism.

Especially important in this respect was not only the maintenance and further penetration of British capital (continuing and extending the method of the joint Indo-British combines), but also the increasing penetration of American capital. The official organ of the British Export Trade Research Organisation, the *Betro Review*, reported in its issue for November, 1947:

"The determination of American capital to enter the Indian market is becoming more and more obvious.

"There has been a considerable influx of American technical experts into India...Parallel to the Indo-British

combines for manufacturing in India, the Americans are also participating in joint Indo-American industrial production...Americans seem to be associated with all the major development schemes in the Indian Dominion."

The American Ambassador to India during 1947-48, Dr. H. F. Grady, had been head of the American Technical Mission to India during the war, which had had the task "to investigate the industrial resources of India" and had drawn up a very elaborate unpublished report. His activity as Ambassador was intense not only in promoting American economic penetration, but in open political intervention in public speeches attacking Indian Communism. In March, 1948, in an address to the Indian Council of World Affairs in New Delhi, he proposed a Marshall Plan for Asia with the participation of India :

> "Your Marshall Plan, or if you will, your Nehru Plan, might provide an equally effective programme of mutual aid on a regional basis. There are definite opportunities for trade expansion within the Asian and Far Eastern region."

American economic penetration carried with it American political intervention. On April 30, 1948, a group of 17 United States businessmen, having completed a 50,000 mile air trip round the world surveying business prospects, reported in New York :

> "We felt India offers the biggest opportunities of any country we visited because it is the wealthiest nation. The only question which arises is the maintenance of law and order which is essential when foreign capital is invested."

The Prime Minister of West Bengal, Dr. B. C. Roy, returning from a business tour in the United States, further defined the conditions of American aid when he told the Eastern Chamber of Commerce at Calcutta on December 10, 1947 :

> "So far as I could feel from my tour, they (the Americans) are eager to help us with men and materials provided they can feel secure by investing in India. The question of security does not lie with the internal strife between India and Pakistan, but with the industrial policy of the Indian Government. By the industrial policy I mean the policy of nationalisation and their policy to deal with industrial disputes."

The retreat from nationalisation and the anti-trade union legislation and action thus followed American orders.

Indian Big Business, conscious of its own economic weakness and of mass discontent at home, was far from resenting American intervention, but sought rather to woo American capital and bowed low before it. Thus the Birla organ, the *Eastern Economist*, wrote on July 2, 1948:

> "What, then, is especially recommended in our foreign policy? It is suggested that we should redefine our foreign policy, giving it direction and positive purpose in the economic sphere, that we should seek out opportunities of new trade and accept constructive help when we can get it, without timid hesitation that we may endanger neutrality in others' eyes. In practical terms this means a leaning towards the United States."

The foreign policy of dependence on British and American capital was closely bound up with the reactionary economic and social policy at home. It was in the beginning of April, 1948, that the Government's Resolution on Economic Policy, proclaiming the retreat from nationalisation and opening the doors to foreign capital, was published. And it was equally in the beginning of April, 1948, that the wholesale offensive of raids and arrests was launched against the Indian Communist Party and trade unions on a scale never before paralleled. Similarly it was the Premier of West Bengal, Dr. B. C. Roy, after his return from his American tour, who took the drastic step of banning the Communist Party, which had been functioning legally even under direct imperialist rule. Reports of the role of American intelligence officers in the anti-Communist offensive were widely circulated in the Indian press:

> "Officials in Washington do not minimise the danger of Communism in India despite the relatively small number of Communist Party members in that country. They concur with the belief expressed by Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, former Dewan of Travancore, who said here a few days ago that Communists were a real menace in India because of their strategic deployment in industry."
>
> *(U.P.A. Washington message, "Bombay Chronicle", March 31, 1948).*

> "An American news agency message has recently suggested that it was on the basis of information supplied

by the U.S. State Department that the Governments of India, Pakistan, Burma and other countries took action against Communist Parties."

("Free Press Journal", April 27, 1948).

The Government's economic policy in both India and Pakistan brought great suffering for the masses of the people. Decontrol of prices of foodstuffs and cloth, put through in the beginning of 1948 in response to the insistent demand of big business interests, led to a skyrocket rise in the cost of living. The All-India Index of Wholesale Food Prices (on the basis of 1939 as 100), which had stood at 253 in 1943 when controls wer imposed, and at 252 in 1947, leaped to 362.9 by May, 1948. By July the desperate situation can be judged from the folowing reports:

"Rises of 200% and more in food prices in India this year and the prospect of a market-rigged famine, despite a good June harvest, are to be discussed by the Central Government and the Provincial Premiers tomorrow. A wave of indignation is sweeping the country.

"Hoarding and profiteering, encouraged by the steeply rising costs of commodities since food was decontrolled, are regarded as the causes...

"In Bombay Province the wholesale price of the staple food rice, has risen since January from 18*s.* to 54*s.* a maund (82 lb). In the same province the price of wheat has arisen from 18*s.* to 45*s.* a maund.

"While prices vary in different areas of the country, there have been increases following decontrol averaging about 100% in the United Provinces, East Punjab, Bihar and Madras."

(New Delhi correspondent, "Manchester Guardian", July 19, 1948)

"The economic situation throughout India is deteriorating. Prices of foodstuffs, cloth and coal have doubled since last year. The removal of controls from essential commodities in January seems primarily responsible for the rapidly rising prices, and there is no doubt that industrialists, particularly textile millowners, have exploited the situation."" *("Ibid", July 20, 1948).*

Widespread mass discontent and unrest followed this disastrous situation, and was reflected in the further development of the strike movement, as well as in peasant struggles

in the countryside. This unrest was met with draconian measures of repression. A general offensive was let loose against the Communist Party and the All-India Trade Union Congress, against the peasants' and students' organisations and against the Left-wing press. In West Bengal the Communist Party was banned, and its daily newspaper suppressed; in other provinces conditions of semi-illegality were imposed. Arrests and detentions or warrants for arrest reached to practically all prominent working clas leaders; the trade union leaders arrested included S. A. Dange, President, and S. S. Mirajkar, Vice-President of the All-India Trade Union Congress. Police violence in the jails as well as outside resulted in many deaths. The continuity with previous imperialist repression was illustrated by the fact that two of the veteran leaders arrested, Dange and Muzzaffar Ahmad, had already gone through the prosecutions and sentences of the Cawnpore trial in 1924 and of the Meerut Trial in 1928-32. Repressive laws taken over from imperialism were further intensified by new special legislation; thus the Bombay Public Security Measures Act was amended in 1948, so that, whereas previously the power of arrest without warrant could be exercised against "any person acting in a manner prejudicial to the public safety, the public order or the tranquillity of the province", this was now extended to cover any person "likely to act" in such a manner. Thus the first year of "liberation" revealed the heaviest offensive against the working-class movement yet known in its half century of history, exceeding anything previously experienced under direct imperialist rule.

This general reactionary course was paralleled in all spheres of internal politics. Extremist and provocative communal organisations, backed and subsidised by big landlord and industrialist interests, and closely linked with terrorist gangs, had free play in both Dominions, and bore the main direct responsibility in promoting communal bloodshed. In opposition to Moslem communalism, the Hindu communal organisations, the Hindu Mahasabha and the sinister R. S. S. (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) rapidly extended their operations in the Indian Union. When Gandhi, devoting the last phase of his life to a selfless struggle against these dark forces and for communal peace, launched a direct offensive against them at the All-India Congress Committee in November, 1947, openly denouncing by name the Hindu Mahasabha and the R. S. S. and their leaders, he was assassinated by the gangs associated with the R. S. S. in January, 1948. The uni-

versal wave of public anger which followed compelled the Government at last to take tardy steps to ban the R. S. S. and arrest its leaders; but in a short time the majority of the arrested R. S. S. leaders were released from prison, while the Communist and trade union leaders were sent to prison in their stead.

This same reactionary course was shown in relation to the Princes. The traditional outlook of Indian nationalism had always denounced the Princes as reactionary puppets maintained by imperialism, and had called for the establishment of the single sovereign democratic Republic of India. In the new structure however, resulting from the negotiations with the Princes, the Princes' States, which cut across all cultural-national groupings of the people, were not only maintained under a facade of constitutional reforms leaving the Princes at the head of their States, but were even consolidated into about twenty five major units of provincial dimensions. Already in July, 1947, on the formation of the new States Department to take over relations with the Princes, Patel had said:

> "I should like to make it clear that it is not the desire of the Congress to interfere in any manner whatever with the domestic affairs of the States. They are no enemies of the Princely Order...I hope the Indian States will bear in mind that the alternative to cooperation in the general interest is anarchy and chaos which will overwhelm great and small in a common ruin if we are unable to act together in the minimum of common tasks."

On behalf of British imperialism, Lord Mountbatten, in an address to the conference of the Princes on July 25, 1947, expressed glowing satisfaction with this statement as ensuring the continuance of the Princes:

> "You can imagine how relieved I was, and I am sure you will yourselves have been equally relieved, when Sardar Vallbhbhai Patel on taking over the States Department made, if I may say so, a most statesmanlike statement of what he considered were the essentials towards agreement between the States and the Dominion of India."

The new Instrument of Accession signed by the Princes laid down:

> "Nothing in this Instrument shall be deemed to commit me in any way to acceptance of any future constitu-

> tion of India, or to fetter my discretion to enter into arrangements with the Government of India under any such future constitution...Nothing in this Instrument affects the continuity of my sovereignty in and over this State."

Special arrangements were made for the permanent maintenance of the Princes:

> "Mr. V. P. Menon, Secretary of the States Ministry, said that..there was no intention to "exterminate" the Princes; in fact, if one of them died childless, the title would not be allowed to lapse...The indications of this decision are far-reaching, as it may create a social structure the antithesis of the social structure visualised by social thinkers here."
>
> *("Times", March 29, 1948).*

The Princes were not only to be accepted as a temporary concession; they were to be maintained in perpetuity.

The whole character of the internal situation and development under the new Dominion Governments thus revealed the continuance and maintenance of the foundations of imperialist exploitation and domination under the guardianship of the big monopolist and feudal interests acting as junior partners of imperialism. The outward form of "independence" could not disguise the real dependence on imperialism. This was still more clearly shown in the external relations of India in the new period, in the military and strategic sphere, in the relations of India and the rest of the British Empire, and in the whole field of foreign policy.

While British troops were withdrawn from India, the military structure and strategic planning continued under British control. All the key strategic controlling positions, alike in the Indian Army and in the Pakistan Army, continued in British hands. Not only were the Commanders-in-Chief still British in the initial period, even after the formal "transfer of power", alike for Indian and Pakistan Armies, but in the summer of 1948 there were still reported to be some three hundred British officers functioning in the Indian Dominion and some five hundred in Pakistan. In April, 1948, at the same time as the Government Resolution on Economic Policy announcing the retreat from nationalisation was published, and the offensive launched against the Communist Party, the simultaneous de-

cision was announced to suspend the previous decision to appoint an Indian Commander-in-Chief :

> "After careful consideration the Government has decided that it would be in the best interest of India and the Army to retain the services of General F. R. R. Bucher as Commander-in-Chief for some time longer. This superseded an earlier statement by the Defence Minister when he said that by April this year it would be possible to appoint an Indian Commander-in-Chief".
>
> *("Times", April 9, 1948).*

Military and naval training, staffing and equipment were closely linked up with Britain, and the operation of air bases with the R. A. F. In this connection interest attaches to the report which was published in the Indian press in the autumn of 1946 giving the text of an alleged cypher message on June 19, 1946, from the British Air Ministry to Air Headquarters in India on the subject of a "Strategic Reserve". The text of this alleged cypher message, the authenticity of which was not denied, ran :

"1. Now agreed that your theatre should be capable of accommodating for a minor operation the following interim strategic reserve force from the United Kingdom at two months' notice :

4 Long Range Bomber Spuadrons
3 Day Fighter Squadrons
4 Long Range Bomber Squadrons

Total : 11 Squadrons

2. You should plan for the above interim strategic force in addition to the garrison force for December, 1946.

3. A paper plan should also be prepared for the accommodation by July, 1950, of the Plan "C" Strategic Reserve, namely :

6 Long Range Bomber Squadrons
3 Light Bomber Squadrons
3 Long Range Fighter Squadrons
5 Ground Attack Fighter Spuadrons
1 Single-Engined Squadron
Total : 18 Squadrons".

Although this reported instruction belongs to 1946, its interest lies in the assumption, after the dispatch of the Cripps

Mission and the supposed offer of "independence", that in 1950 Indian strategic arrangements would still be integrated with British strategic arrangements and Indian air bases would be available and prepared for the accommodation of British operational air squadrons. The further interest lies in the indication that in the summer of 1946 the British Labour Government was calculating on the use of India in 1950 as a base for long range bombing operations against an unspecified enemy.

An illuminating light on the new political relations was afforded by the decision in April, 1948, after eight months of "freedom", to restore "God Save the King" for use on ceremonial occasions:

> "For the first time since the transfer of power 'God save the King' will be played before a large public gathering when the first performance of a military tattoo finishes here to night. This return of pre-Independence Day formalities was decided upon by Pandit Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, who stated recently that as long as India remained a member of the Commonwealth 'God Save the King' would be played on all formal and military occasions and that the Indian National Anthem would be played afterwards".
>
> *("Times", April 2, 1948).*

If M. Attlee had announced that in future on all ceremonial occasions in Britain the "Star Spangled Banner" would be played in front of the British National Anthem, this would have represented a considerably less remarkable shock to British national feeling than this announcement from the former leader of Indian national anti-imperialist revolt ordaining to the startled Indian people the priority of the hymn of once hated "satanic" Empire in front of their own national anthem. The Order of Precedence ("the Indian National Anthem...afterwards") expressed in a symbolic nutshell the new political set-up in India. Nor was it without significance that this re-enthronement of "God Save the King" took place on the same day as the All-India raids and round up against the leader of the Indian fight for freedom under the new conditions, the Communist Party.

Relations between the Indian Dominions and the Empire or "Commonwealth" were left to be negotiated at the Dominions Premiers Conference in October, 1948. In the case of Pakistan, Jinnah as Governor-General had already stated to a correspondent of the B.B.C. on Decemer 20, 1947, that "Pa-

kistan will be ready to stay in the British Commonwealth". In the case of the Indian Union the formal Congress aim and original constitutional draft of the Constituent Assembly to proclaim the Indian Union an "independent sovereign republic" (a subsequent amendment suggested the substitution of "sovereign state") was not regarded as necessarily incompatible with continued membership of or association with the Commonwealth. The search was rather for a suitable formula to express the association. In this search for a formula both sides, both the imperialists in London and their partners in New Delhi, in practice cooperated; nor was any insuperable obstacle seen to the finding of such a formula.

At the London Conference of Dominion Premiers in April, 1949, attended by the Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, the formula was found. India was to stay in the British Commonwealth or Empire under the British King, while enjoying the little luxury of the nominal title of "sovereign independent republic". The official communique declared:

> "The Government of India have declared and affirmed India's desire to continue her full membership of the Commonwealth of Nations and her acceptance of the King as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such the Head of the Commonwealth."

It may be noted that the British Prime Minister, Attlee, subsequently declared in the House of Commons on May 2, 1949 with reference to the London Agreement that no distinction should be drawn between the use of the terms "Commonwealth", "British Commonwealth" or "British Empire", all of which should be regarded as interchangeable.

With this London Declaration subsequently ratified by the Indian Assembly, India was formally linked with the camp of Anglo-American imperialism. There is no doubt that this decision was accelerated by the advancing tide of national liberation in Asia, and especially the victory of the Chinese Democratic Revolution, with its powerful repercussions in South East Asia, and the consequent panic anxiety of imperialism and its satellites in Asia to endeavour to build up a bulwark of counter-revolution in Southern Asia.

The London Conference was accompanied by military conversations of an Indian Military Mission in London and in

Washington, and arrangements for Nehru to visit Truman. It was further announced that at the London Conference arrangements had been made for Britain, India and Pakistan jointly to supply the puppet government of Burma with finance and arms in order to suppress the popular revolt in Burma.

The view point of leading official circles in India was undisguisedly expressed by K. M. Munshi, who had played the main part in drawing up the draft Indian Constitution, when he declared in an address on "India and World Politics" in New Delhi on November 18,1947:

> "The world has become small and India is fast becoming world-minded. World politics has many facets, but the core of it is the conflict between the U.S.A. and Soviet Russia—between Democracy and Dictatorship...
>
> "Of any policy which India may formulate, the necessary elements are strength and international alignment. Strength implies military power sufficient for the defence of the South Asian Region and resources sufficient to support that power. Our armed forces have not only to be augmented in number, but to be completely modernised. This would involve almost double the expenditure which we incur under this head at present. And more military expenditure would mean greater and steadier industrialisation, which is not possible without the aid of England and the U.S.A.
>
> "As to international alignment, Britain, whatever our memories of her past rule, has been and is a staunch friend. We are tied to her by bonds of over a century of close association. The U.S.A., the great democracy, is the world's unquestionable leader at the moment. Even the future of the UNO is in her hands. It can help to build a powerful world federation of free nations only in close association with the U.S.A. In such association with Britain and the U.S.A. only will India find the strength she wants."

Here the line of Indian Neo-Imperialism is open and unmistakable: (1) support of the camp of imperialism, spoken of as the camp of "Democracy"; (2) alignment with the Anglo-American Bloc; (3) hostility to the Soviet Union; (4) dreams of military domination and political hegemony in a "South Asian Region."

Similarly the *Eastern Economist* expressing the outlook of Indian Big Business, laid down the line in its issue of July 23, 1948:

> "Membership of the Commonwealth would probably bring it on our side if the attack were from the U.S.S.R.: it would pay us, too, in the case of the United States as the United States cannot easily disrupt its relations with Britain at the present time. In other words, membership of the Commonwealth would in both cases strengthen our external defence."

In the early stages after the establishment of the new Dominions in India, Indian foreign policy was frequently described by its leaders as one of "neutrality" between the "two world blocs". It is evident that this conception of "neutrality" already implied separation from the anti-imperialist camp with which Indian nationalism had previously been associated. But the further development revealed in the statements quoted above, no less than the practice of Indian representatives on a number of issues in the United Nations and in other fields of international alignment, soon showed how the thin veneer of "neutrality" only covered alignment with the camp of imperialism and the Anglo-American Bloc.

The logic of this alignment, no less than the expansionist ambitions of Indian big capital, inevitably drew the new Indian rulers more and more directly to the side of imperialism also in Asia against the liberation struggles of the Asiatic peoples. This startling reversal of every previous tradition of the Indian national movement received powerful expression in Patel's broadcast on the first anniversary of "Independence Day" on August 15, 1948:

> "China which at one time was expected to be the leading nation of Asia had serious domestic troubles... Again the conditions in Malaya, Indo-China and Burma were disturbing...If the undesirable elements in the country were not put down with a firm hand immediately, they were sure to create the same chaos as they found existing in some other Asiatic countries."

"Undesirable elements", "A firm hand". This is not Colonel Blimp speaking. It is the leader of "Indian Nationalism", of "Free India"—himself recently imprisoned as an "undesirable element" to be put down with a "firm hand". The wheel has

come full circle. Indian Bourgeois Nationalism has blossomed into Indian Neo-Imperialism.

If this were indeed the end of the long struggle of Indian independence — with India as the gendarme of imperialism in Asia—it would be a grim and repulsive picture. But it is not the end. It is only the demonstration of the outcome of the Mountbatten Award—the last great manoeuvre of imperialism in India. The liberation battle goes forward in new forms.

6. THE OUTLOOK

The general conclusion from this analysis of the first year of the new Dominion Government in India is inescapable. The new regime has not solved the Indian crisis. It has not brought liberation for the masses of the people in India. It has not drawn India outside the orbit of imperialism.

The "transfer of power" has indeed meant a major political change. It has meant a change from the direct rule of imperialism to its indirect rule. It has elevated the Indian big bourgeoisie from a previous vacillating, compromising semi-oppositional role, at the head of the popular mass movement, to the role of junior partners of imperialism, exercising authority and repressive powers over the masses, uniting with the feudal and princely elements against the tide of popular advance, negotiating and manoeuvring within the camp of imperialism, not without conflicts of interests, with its own trading, military and expansionist ambitions in Asia, but essentially a secondary and dependent power within the camp of imperialism.

The second conclusion follows no less inescapably from the first. The Indian liberation movement has entered on a new phase. The change-over means that the leaders of the Indian big bourgeoisie have ceased to exercise the role of leadership in the Indian national movement, have passed over into the counter-revolutionary camp, have entered into a bloc with imperialism. Hence the leadership of the national liberation movement passes to the new rising social forces, represented in the first place by the hegemony of the industrial working class, as the one consistently revolutionary and irreconcilably anti-imperialist leadership, not united by any links with the old order, and capable of uniting, and already to an increasing degree beginning to unite, all sections of the wor-

kers, peasantry ,intelligentsia and petty-bourgeois masses, exploited and oppressed under the existing regime of the alliance of imperialism and the big bourgeoisie, in a common struggle for liberation. This new political leadership is expressed in the role of the Indian Communist Party.

Already in 1925 Stalin had indicated the differentiation proceeding in India and the political conclusions to be drawn:

> "In certain of these countries (India for instance) capitalism is growing rapidly, and is giving birth to and crystallising a more or less numerous class of native proletarians.
>
> "As the revolutionary movement progresses, the national bourgeoisie in such countries divides into two sections, a revolutionary section (the petty-bourgeoisie) and a compromising section (the big bourgeoisie). The former continues the revolutionary struggle; the latter enters into a bloc with imperialism."

From this analysis Stalin drew "three deductions":

> "(1) The liberation of colonies and dependencies from the yoke of imperialism is not possible save by a victorious revolution. Independence does not come as a gift!
>
> (2) The revolution cannot be advanced and the complete independence of capitalistically developed colonies and dependencies cannot be achieved unless compromising section of the national bourgeoisie is isolated, unless the petty-bourgeois revolutionary masses are freed from the influence of this bourgeoisie, unless the hegemony of the proletariat is established, unless the advanced elements of the working class are organised in an independent Communist Party.
>
> (3) No lasting victory is possible in colonial and dependent countries unless a real link is established between the movement for their liberation and the proletarian movement of the more advanced countries of the West."
>
> *(J. V. Stalin; "The Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East", speech at a meeting of the students of the University, May 18, 1925)*

With the establishment of the new Governments of the Indian Union and Pakistan in alliance with imperialism it may be

said that this process of the counter-revolutionary alignment of the big bourgeoisie to the camp of Imperialism reached final completion, and the conditions had matured for new forms of the national democratic front led by the working class.

The experience of China begins to reproduce itself in new forms, corresponding to the different conditions, in India. Just as the earlier united Kuomintang, under the leadership or the national bourgeoisie, but with the increasingly active and prominent role of the working class and its Communist Party, carried forward the initial advance of the Chinese Revolution, and then, after the betrayal by Chiang Kai-shek, gave place to the differentiation between the reactionary forces represented by Chiang Kai-shek, entering into alliance with imperialism, and the mass movement led by Communism, and this in turn has given place to the increasingly feudal-military-monopolist dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek and the advancing victorious offensive of Communism leading all the democratic forces of the Chinese nation, so a corresponding evolution, through different forms, begins to reveal itself in India.

The Second Congress of the Communist Party of India, held in February-March, 1948, set itself to analyse the new situation and lay down the new tasks for the development of the broad Democratic Front to carry forward the struggle for the victory of national liberation and the democratic revolution in India.

The present regime in India on the basis of the Mountbatten Award of 1947 cannot be regarded as other than temporary and unstable. The crisis has continued to develop. The many local and partial struggles, and the ferocity of the measures of repression, indicate the coming storm. The wave of popular democratic advance which has swept over China and other Asiatic countries will extend also to India. Already the camp of imperialism, in place of the previous belittlement, is compelled to recognise the growing strength of Communism in India:

> "The Communist Party is undoubtedly getting stronger. The Government's support of the boss-sponsored and Congress-organised Indian National Trade Union Congress as against the Communist-inspired All-India T.U.C. has aroused resentment and cynicism, but it has had no effect on the membership of the A.I.T.U.C.,

which is the only real labour organisation in the country."

("New Statesman and Nation", August 14, 1948)

"The New Delhi Government is facing the fact that quarrels with Pakistan, Hyderabad and part of Kashmir offer far less a threat to its regime than that taking shape in the growth of Communism.

"In spite of Congress attempts to bring trade unions under the party umbrella, the federated unions controlling labour in all forms of industry and transport remain thoroughly in the grip of the Communists.

"To-day the Communists have the second strongest party in India...The Socialist Party of Mr. Jaiprakash Narian remains without influence among the Indian masses...At present there is no party of national significance in the field against Congress except the Communists."

("Daily Telegraph", September 7, 1948)

These judgments from British correspondents in India reveal the same fear as is shown by the repressive actions of the Indian authorities against the Communists, trade union and peasant leaders.

India in 1948 has not yet reached the goal of national independence or the fulfilment of the democratic revolution. India in 1948 still groans under the double yoke of imperialist exploiters and home-grown exploiters—now drawn together in close alliance. The path forward before the Indian people is no easy one. There are still heavy struggles in front. There are still many obstacles to surmount in overcoming existing divisions and confusions and building the united Democratic Front of the Indian people. But there can be no question that the forces are gathering for the new advance; through the new conditions of struggle, to the certain future victory of national liberation, and eventually of social liberation of the Indian people, in common with all the peoples of Asia and the world.

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