

Whither India?

By FRED KARN

Sir Stafford Cripps was faced with a superhuman task when he attempted to vitalize the Indian war effort. Generation after generation of Indians has been oppressed and degraded by poverty. Such people are not physically prepared for war. Nor is their morale high enough to make them good soldiers. India can be armed in a few months, but to give Indians the fighting spirit of free men would take years.

America has suffered from depression. The effect of unemployment and government relief upon our people has not been beneficial. But what is a depression in America is a famine in India. A factory worker who makes eight cents a day cannot live long on his savings after the demand for cotton drops off and his job is gone. Yes, there is a government dole in India which has saved millions from starvation. But in the last quarter of the nineteenth century at least 15,000,000 people were killed by famine. This partially explains why the average length of life in India (25 yrs.) is less than half that in the United States (approximately 60 yrs.). Still the Indians are getting poorer.

Suddenly these people are threatened with invasion by a Japanese army. They are exhorted to defend themselves against enslavement. But Indians have found that constant hunger, and work without hope of improvement, is slavery. Whether it is administered by native princes, foreign industrialists, or Japanese soldiers, matters little.

Gandhi and Nehru, for years, have been trying to rally their countrymen in a struggle for independence. They believe that economic improvement of the masses must be attained. And they believe that as long as India is under foreign domination she will be exploited. Only Indian leadership can abolish poverty.

To these men Cripps brought Britain's appeal for an all-out war

effort. He promised India freedom in the form of a dominion government, to be established as soon as the war ends. He suggested dividing India into Moslem and Hindu states as part of the post-war plan.

The Moslems were pleased that consideration had been given to their minority problem. There are about 80,000,000 Moslems in India and 260,000,000 Hindus. But the Hindus were dismayed at the prospect of a divided nation. They pointed out that nearly all countries have minority problems. Should the United States be divided because ten per cent of its population is Negro? Should Canada be separated into three nations to please the French, English, and Indians? Far sighted Indians insist that geography, history, and culture make India a single nation. And religious differences must be reconciled for the common good.

The immediate issue is not minority representation, but defense against Japan. Unless India has independence she has little to defend, and the world can expect half-hearted action. The promise of freedom after the war spurred India into action once. But the memory of World War I is too vivid today.

India fought that war on promises of future reforms. She sent more than a million men to Europe and suffered 100,000 casualties. When it was over, India did not receive the concessions she had expected. It was then that she decided not to take part in another war until she had gained complete independence.

In September, 1939, the British Parliament brought India into this war by proclamation. The Viceroy assumed emergency powers and the Indians lost that small measure of freedom which they had so laboriously wrested against almost insuperable odds between 1920 and 1935. But the Indian National Congress denied that the British Parliament

had the right to plunge 340,000,000 Indians into war. India must make that decision for herself.

The war continued with India half in and half out, until the main battle scene shifted from Europe to Asia. It became apparent that the responsibility for defeating Japan would fall largely on China and the United States. If India were conquered, essential Chinese supply lines would be cut. So Great Britain was urged to reenforce her Indian defense. Relations between England and her colony were now of world-wide importance.

The United States first took a hand in Indian affairs last July when Girja Shankar Bajpai came to Washington. As a representative of India and not of the British Empire, he urged American economic cooperation with his country. For the first time since 1757 when Robert Clive won the Battle of Plassey and drove out the French imperialists, was non-British capital investment encouraged in India.

With the Mediterranean blocked, it is an 11,000 mile voyage, largely through enemy waters, from New York to Bombay. The surest way to arm our Eastern allies is by building munitions plants in India. The large supplies of iron ore, coal, and petroleum in India fit in well for such a program.

It is unfortunate that India was not industrialized years ago. But England preferred to keep Indian labor on the soil, in the coal mines, and in the cotton and jute factories. Most of the manufactured goods which she consumed were shipped from the British Isles. Perhaps it is too late to change. Nevertheless the United States is shipping machine tools to India under the Lend-Lease Act. Louis Johnson is at the head of a war mission to build a United Nations arsenal in the East. And many Indians suspect that this is the opening wedge of an American imperialism which will do India

no more good than British imperialism.

Nehru (and no doubt many of his followers), has decided that all foreign capital is harmful, and that the capitalistic system has no place in the future of his country. The first foreign capital which India knew was the guns and cannons brought in by the British, French, and Dutch trading companies. With these weapons, the British East India Company finally gained control over most of India. The rest of the country was conquered by Indian princes who paid well for the services of East India Company soldiers. And the produce of that wealthy empire began to pour into Europe in exchange for nothing.

Today, with the East India Company only an unpleasant memory, India exports annually \$100,000,000 or more worth of goods for which she receives no return. This represents rent to absentee landlords and pensions to retired government officials.

The foreign owned coal mines and jute mills, where workers scarcely earn enough to buy food, symbolize

modern capitalism. These mills were built up after the individual craftsmen in silk, rugs, pottery, and jewelry were destroyed by tariffs and excise laws.

If this is a necessary part of capitalism, India would do well to destroy it. But the Indian standard of living can be raised without banishing foreign capital and without changing the form of government.

For thousands of years before the European traders arrived, land in Indian villages was owned by the community. Income from the land was used to provide free education. Under foreign domination, village lands were reduced to private ownership and taxation became a powerful weapon for oppression.

The Indian national government was also a large land owner during the Mogul Empire. Under European rule much of its land was removed from production. Today only eighteen per cent of the Empire's revenue is a collection of economic rent.

In addition to the government collection, there is a private rent collector, and the ryot (farmer) who tills the land for the profit of both,

is constantly faced with famine. Uninformed sympathisers suggest that the government reduce its land tax and relieve the pressure on the ryot. They do not realize that wages cannot be raised without raising the margin of production, and that the margin of production can most quickly and surely be raised by increasing, rather than reducing, land value taxation.

The Empire claims to own 80,000,000 acres of unoccupied land which is suitable for cultivation. In all India there is only five times that amount being cultivated to support 250,000,000 people. If the government made this holding available to the half starved coal miners and cotton workers there would be new hope and opportunity for millions of Indians. They would have something to fight for—a country to defend against invasion.

India was once the richest nation in the world. Her architecture was equal to that of Greece. She was the intellectual and spiritual leader of Asia. The day may not be far distant when India will again be a leader among the nations.

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