

Will independence help India?

Anyone who reads the English newspapers and also the journals which put the point of view of the Indian Nationalists, will find himself presented with two pictures of Indian affairs and Indian problems which clash very violently with each other. From the Indian side we are told that the 320 million who live in that huge area are suffering great wrongs at the hands of tyrannical British authorities, and are united in a desire to overthrow foreign rule and establish their right to govern themselves outside or inside the British Empire as they may freely desire. It is admitted on all sides that millions of the peasants and workers in India are desperately poor, permanently undernourished, and subject to devastating diseases in time of famine. In 1918-1919, during an epidemic of influenza, the loss of life reached the enormous total of 12 millions, equal to about a quarter of the population of this country. And poverty is not the only evil which persists in India after generations of paternal British government and innumerable promises of benefits to be showered on the Indians by their foreign masters.

The Indian Central Committee (a body of influential Indians appointed to sit in conjunction with the Simon Commission) last year submitted its report (published by H.M. Stationery Office, 1929, Cmd. 3451). The Committee have something to say about the neglect of the British Government to fulfil its pledges in regard to education.

"The primary education of the masses has . . . been repeatedly declared, during the last 75 years, to be the special care of the British Government in India. It is, therefore, worth while to examine the progress achieved in this direction during that period and to see how far it has kept pace with the repeated declarations of policy . . . In 1917, that is, 63 years after the despatch of 1854, only 2.59 percent of the total population were receiving instruction in recognised primary schools . . . It is not surprising in the face of these facts that public opinion in India was profoundly disappointed with the rate of progress achieved, and became openly sceptical as to the professed intention of the Government in the matter. (Para. 24.)

The Committee rather cuttingly point out that the expenditure on education is about one-sixteenth of the expenditure on the army—"the true measure of the interest displayed by the Government in mass education."

According to the Indian Economic Enquiry Committee, which reported in 1925, only 8 percent of the population are literate.

Who is to blame?

Those who defend the British occupation of India do not deny that there is great poverty. They admit this and many other evils, but they reply that if British troops and British Government officials were withdrawn, India would cease to have any central government, and would lapse into anarchy. It would be at the mercy of the more warlike native races at home, or invading troops from outside. They point to the multiplicity of races and languages which exist in India; the bitter hatred between the conflicting religions; and the rigid caste system which prevails among the Hindus, and which results in millions of the so-called "Depressed Classes" occupying a position of the utmost degradation, aptly indicated by their name, "untouchables." British

officials show that the methods of carrying on agriculture are shockingly primitive, and that any improvement is hindered by the native customs and religious observances. Ideas of sanitation and medicine are largely lacking, and in these and other respects the Indians as a whole gain much from the British occupation. So say the defenders of the present system of government. All of this is set out at length in the Simon Commission Report, 1930.

What, then, are we to believe? Ought we to side with Gandhi, the leader of the Indian Nationalists, in condemning the English Government (as many well-meaning people in this country do), or ought we to take up the attitude which is maintained by successive British Prime Ministers, that it is necessary to remain in India for the good of the Indians? Let us consider the matter a little further, and start by asking ourselves why the British Government is in India at all. When we know why the World Powers are all of them anxious to acquire colonies and spheres of influence abroad, we shall be better able to see the Indian problem in its proper light.

Why are British troops in India?

The ultimate answer to this question is simply: "foreign trade and foreign investments." Every developed capitalist nation is faced with the same desperate problem of disposing abroad the surplus goods which its workers produce, but are too poor to buy. In every country there are a minority of rich people so wealthy that they cannot spend their vast incomes, and are perpetually seeking new foreign fields of profitable investment of the wealth which they cannot help saving. Every capitalist power needs, therefore, to find foreign markets and places for investment. This it is which leads to imperialism; to the conquest of the territory of "backward races"; to armaments; and finally to war.

Read what the late Mr. Joseph Chamberlain said on the subject in a speech delivered in 1890, before the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce—

"All the great offices of State are occupied with commercial affairs. The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office are chiefly engaged in finding new markets and in defending old ones. The War Office and the Admiralty are mostly occupied in preparations for the defence of those markets and for the protection of our commerce."

This explains the British Colonial Empire. And what is true of Britain is just as true of other great powers—France, for example.

Listen to Marshal Lyauty, the French General who conquered Morocco—

"French soldiers are fighting in Morocco to acquire territory in which rise rivers capable of supplying power for electrification schemes which will prove of great advantage to French trade. When we have acquired the last zone of cultivatable territory; when we having nothing but mountains in front of us, we shall stop. Our object is commercial and economic. The military expedition in Morocco is a means, not an end. Our object is the extension of foreign trade." (Star, 31 October, 1922.)

Now let us turn to India and read what the *Liberal Manchester Guardian* has to say (30 December, 1929).

"There are two chief reasons why a self-regarding England may hesitate to relax her control over India. The first is that her influence in the East depends partly upon her power to summon troops and to draw resources from India in time of need . . . The second is that Great Britain finds in India her best market, and that she has a thousand million of capital invested there."

Lastly, think over the bombastic utterance of Sir William Joynson-Hicks, now Lord Brentford (quoted in the *Daily News*, 17 October, 1925).

"We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. I know it is said at Missionary meetings that we conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We conquered India as the outlet for the goods of Great Britain. We conquered India by the sword, and by the sword we should hold it. (Shame.) Call it shame if you like. I am stating facts. I am interested in missionary work in India, and have done much work of that kind, but I am not such a hypocrite as to say that we hold India for the Indians. We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods in general, and for Lancashire cotton goods in particular."

When you add to this the influence of the English families who look to the Indian civil and military services to provide posts for their sons, it is easy enough to understand why a capitalist British Government does not want to lose India.

Indian capitalists or Indian workers?

We have seen why British capitalists are interested in Indian affairs—a £1,000 million is an accumulation of property worth fighting for. But now let us see what are the interests on the other side. Who are the interests behind Gandhi?

Sir Basil Blackett, an authority on Indian Finance, in a speech at New Delhi on March 19, 1929, pointed out that the capital invested in India is rapidly being concentrated more and more into the hands of Indian capitalists. He said that between 60 percent and 70 percent of the shares in Indian jute mills are Indian-owned. Indian capitalists are investing in Government loans, developing India's production of steel and other goods, financing India's foreign trade, and even investing money in other countries such as Brazil.

The Simon Commission in Volume 1. Of its Report (page 33) says:—

"It was British capital that began the modern process of industrialism in India, but more and more commercial enterprise is falling into Indian hands. Most of the share capital in the jute mills on the Hooghly is Indian; the vast majority of the cotton factories of Bombay are Indian; and, while it was British enterprise which first established and developed the tea gardens of Assam and elsewhere, these undertakings are now carried on side by side with many that are Indian owned. India is now one of the eight most important industrial areas in the world . . . Industrialism . . . is displacing the village craftsman, so that large-scale manufacture is being superimposed on the ancient fabric of an elaborately subdivided and predominantly rural society."

Here we have the problem in a nutshell. Indian capitalists want to have the profits of the developing Indian capitalism for themselves. They wish to be able to control the Indian system of taxation, and the Indian system of tariffs, and use them to further their own interests. They do not object to the exploitation of the Indian workers, but they do object to British investors getting the lion's share; and they do object to British traders, exporting British-made goods to India, enjoying preferential treatment.

Fundamentally, the Indian Nationalist movement represents the interests of Indian capitalists. It is naturally supported by the Indian educated castes, who see the promise of fat jobs in the Indian Army or Civil Service, and in the legal profession.

As the *Manchester Guardian's* special Indian correspondent wrote on 7 February, 1930, Indian independence "would mean the government of India by men drawn almost entirely from the urban Hindu capitalist and professional classes." These are the men who control the Indian Nationalist movement.

What should the Socialists do?

What, then, should be our attitude? We can give a plain and definite answer. On the one side we are in no way whatever responsible for or defenders of the actions of the British Government; nor do we associate ourselves in anyway with the British Labour Party. We are working for Socialism, and for that alone. We claim that only the establishment of Socialism can solve the Indian problem, and all other problems of national rivalries. Only Socialism will rid the world of this murderous scramble for foreign markets, and thus remove the need for colonies and for armaments to seize and retain them.

To the Indian workers we extend our sympathy in the sufferings which fall to their lot. We ask them, however, to recognise that their poverty is the result not of foreign rule—which is merely one of the evil by-products of capitalism—but of the capitalist system itself. Dominion status or Independence for India will not solve any working class problem. It will merely be a substitution of "India for the Indian capitalists" in place of "India for the British capitalists." The only sound policy for the Indian workers, the only policy in line with their calls interests, is to keep clear of the Nationalist movement, and carry on steadily with the task of organising themselves on the economic field for the defence of their interests against their employers, and organising on the political field for the ultimate achievement of Socialism in co-operation with the rest of the world's workers. There is nothing in the programme of Gandhi and the Indian Nationalists deserving of working class support. Therefore, just as we urged the British and German workers in 1914 to refuse to be drawn into the quarrel between British and German capitalist Governments, so now we urge the workers of this country and of India not to allow themselves to be led into conflict by the parties of capitalism in their respective countries. Our watchword is not "Britain for the British" and "India for the Indians," but "the world for the workers."

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