
HOW THE BRITISH IMPERIALISTS RULE IN INDIA

BY W. LEITNER

IN HIS speeches on Britain's war aims Chamberlain has proclaimed oppression, persecution, brute force and breach of faith to be some of the evils against which the British Empire has taken the field. But the people of England whose lives are to be staked, and the neutral countries that the British bourgeoisie and its propaganda machine are doing their best to drag into the war, have every reason to take these assurances critically. And a sure touchstone of their sincerity is the policy of British imperialism in India. Even a short review of it shows that British rule in India is marked by the very evils that Britain's ruling classes claim to be fighting in this war.

The British imperialists have hitherto enjoyed a considerable measure of success in keeping from the eyes of the world the true state of affairs in India. A strict news monopoly, and now a rigorous censorship, have seen to it that the world should know less about the life and aspirations of a nation of 350,000,000 than about events in the minor states of Europe. While Citrine and his imperialist bosses are conscripting new recruits to fight for "democracy" and "freedom

for the nations," British hired troops, the foundation of imperialist rule, are still stationed in India. They are not treated to speeches about bringing the nations freedom on the points of their bayonets. Their minds are filled with white chauvinism, a Sahib mentality towards the "natives" is implanted among them. They are corrupted by the humiliating services that numberless poor Indians have to perform for them.

The English officers and officials lead the lives of oriental potentates, every one of them a little king. Such is democracy. The way a British district official in India treats the humans under his rule is in itself a crying refutation of all the fine talk that the British imperialists are parading.

The imperialist rulers of India have evolved methods practically unique in the history of the oppression of nations by an alien ruling class. Deliberate stirring up of artificial antagonisms and religious strife, provoking of bloody clashes between the different sections of the population and deliberate cultivation of economic parasite classes; brutal tyranny by an utterly corrupt native police in the pay of

British officialdom; and, to crown all this, huge massacres in which crowds of unarmed people are slaughtered in cold blood—such in the merest outline are the methods of British imperialist rule in India.

The diabolical cynicism that permeates this whole system is brutally frank in *The Lost Dominion*, a book by Al. Carthill, a prominent English official in India. This reactionary takes the war path against the so-called reforms, denounces any relaxation of the system of unmitigated violence and coercion and tenders the British bourgeoisie the following advice:

"It is to be observed that the current dictum 'you can do anything with bayonets but sit on them' is, as regards the last clause of the sentence, not universally true. Provided the bayonets are sufficient in number; provided also that they are driven well home, so that the victim is incapable of writhing; and provided that they are neatly and symmetrically arraigned in any convenient form; it is possible to erect thereon some sort of framework which, covered with a cloth of state sewn with stars or lilies or bees, will provide a permanent enough consular chair or imperial throne." (Al. Carthill, *The Lost Dominion*, p. 240.)

Nor are these the bloodthirsty fancies of one man; they are the tried recipes of British imperialism, applied throughout its rule in India. Massacres on a varying scale have always been the last resort of a foreign tyranny, and not only were the bayonets "driven well

home," so that the victims should be incapable of writhing, but everything was done to keep their screams from penetrating into the outside world and drowning out the legend of "national freedom" under the Union Jack.

One of the most horrible crimes against the Indian people in recent times is conjured up by the name of Amritsar, in the Punjab. In 1919 the people of India rose in a mighty though peaceful movement of protest against the violation of the British Government's promise of independence for India, solemnly pledged during the World War. In the Punjab the movement ran particularly high, and the British authorities, here as elsewhere, put it down with a ruthless hand. Though "law and order" had already been restored, a bloody lesson was to be taught.

When a crowd of nearly ten thousand gathered in Amritsar for a peaceful demonstration, General Dyer, the British officer in charge, brought out his troops; "without a word of warning he opened and kept up upon them a fusillade that did not stop until, as he himself said, his party's ammunition was almost exhausted, though the panic-stricken multitude broke at once, struggling to escape through the narrow exits or attempting vainly to climb the walls, or in despair throwing themselves flat on the ground. General Dyer, according to his own statement, personally directed the firing to the points where the crowd was thickest. The 'targets', he declared, were 'good

and by the time he and his men went off by the same way they had come, they had killed 379, according to the official figures given some months later by the government, and they left about 1,200 wounded on the ground for whom he did not consider it his 'job' to provide any help whatever."

It is of some interest to note that this matter-of-fact account is from a book by a reactionary British correspondent in India. (Sir Valentine Chirol, *India*, p. 208.)

Indian figures of the number of killed are much higher. Yet it was months before the British government made any admission as to this monstrous massacre and "reprimanded" the bloodthirsty general—a reprimand made good with interest by Englishmen at home and in India, who held mighty celebrations in honor of their hero and collected money to present him with a "sword of honor." What is more, in a subsequent libel trial, a prominent English judge voiced his approval of the general's action.

Amritsar was not an isolated case, a "mistake," as the flunkeys of British imperialism tried to persuade the world. Practically every day the vast country of India witnesses scenes of brutal violence of which the world never hears. When the people of India were fighting for their rights in 1930-32 with the peaceful weapon of civil disobedience, British troops shot down hundreds of unarmed troops in Peshawar; Indian soldiers who had refused to fire on their countrymen were sentenced to long terms of

penal servitude. Similar massacres were staged in several dozen other Indian towns.

In "normal" times it is the business of the native police to convince the Indian people of the British rulers' omnipotence. They forcibly evict the Indian peasants with their families from their wretched plots when they can no longer pay the exorbitant rentals and taxes. They stage vicious reprisals on strikers. They fall upon peaceful demonstrations, laying about them blindly with their long leaded staffs. During the last big movement of the Indian people this police, at the bidding of their English masters, threw more than 100,000 men and women fighting for freedom into jail, where many of the political prisoners were whipped and penned up like beasts in narrow cages. An investigation of the police methods, undertaken by the Congress Party, gave the following enumeration of their practices:

- "1. Lathi blows on head, chest, stomach and joints.
- "2. Thrusts with lathis in private parts, abdominal regions.
- "3. Stripping men naked before beating.
- "4. Tearing of loin cloths and thrusting of sticks into anus.
- "5. Pressing and squeezing of testicles till a man becomes unconscious.
- "6. Dragging of wounded men by legs and arms, often beating them the while.
- "7. Throwing of wounded men into thorn hedges or into salt water.

"8. Riding of horses over men as they lie or sit on the ground.

"9. Thrusting of pins and thorns into men's bodies, sometimes even when they are unconscious.

"10. Beating of men after they have become unconscious, and other vile things too many to relate, besides foul language and blasphemy, calculated to hurt as much as possible the most sacred feelings of the Satyagrahis." (*Young India*, July 12, 1930.)

The Indian police have earned themselves such loathing among the people that they are now tied for better and worse to their imperialist masters, who in their turn find their services indispensable. Any public control over them is out of the question; all their crimes are covered by the imperialist rulers. They stop at no torture to extort confessions and frequently resort to manhandling to aid them in the collection of taxes and rent. By the bribes they extort and other corrupt practices the Indian peasants are bled white. These police are past masters in the staging of every kind of provocation on the orders of their superiors and particularly in artificially kindling and constantly fanning the flames of religious animosity between Hindu and Mohammedan.

It is a surprising coincidence that every time the popular movement against the foreign oppressors threatens to become too strong, supposed Hindus will leave a pig lying in a mosque or supposed Mohammedans will slaughter a sacred cow at some religious Hindu festival.

In the clashes that follow between fanatical Mohammedans and Hindus, the Indian police and the British authorities take care to keep in the background long enough for them to assume the required proportions. A classical example of this kind of imperialist statesmanship was provided in 1921-22. Hindus and Mohammedans had united throughout the country in demonstrations against British rule and seemed to forget their mutual hostility before the face of the common enemy; but the Mohammedans on the Malabar coast were provoked to sudden attacks on the Hindus, and the British authorities looked on just long enough for their desired results to take effect and Mohammedans and Hindus again to start fighting among themselves.

The British imperialists never had any interest in converting the people of India to Christianity. Their predecessors, the merchants of the East India Company, voiced their purely commercial views in the matter when they said that, sad as it was to see their subjects pagans and Mohammedans doomed to perdition, it was better business to deal with solvent unbelievers than bankrupt Christians. The successors of these sober business men, the British viceroys and officials, have also been of the opinion that it is much easier to rule the hundreds of millions of Indians with as many hundred religions and sects than a nation converted to a single religion; and in any case, whites alone would be admitted to heaven in the hereafter.

The government officials of the British bourgeoisie in India make a study of Indian religions their main activity next to tax collection. The religious shadings among the Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsees and so on are innumerable. What a fertile field of activity for Englishmen with a bent for diplomacy, who in their capacity of district officials and in other similar posts often have the last say in disputes over temples, places of pilgrimage, sacred rivers, graves and shrines. What an opportunity to divert the hungry Indian masses by a thousand tricks from the troubles of this world to the only true interpretation of the Koran or the different stages in the transmigration of souls! Once the British imperialists had discovered this marvelous aid to sowing antagonism among the various sections of the Indian population, they achieved the masterstroke of making religion a basis for electoral campaigning. They imposed on resisting India an electoral system to the mock "parliament" under which Hindus and Mohammedans form separate bodies of voters, as also do the Hindu outcasts.

The Hindus and Mohammedans united in the Indian National Congress resisted this infamous electoral system with all their might, for they scented the attempt of their common enemy to make religious differences and religious strife the one criterion in Indian political life. The genuine representatives and leaders of the Indian people have on many occasions declared

that religious antagonisms would subside as soon as the all-powerful officials and the police kept out of them. But every British government, and particularly MacDonald's pious Labor Government, made it their business to see that religious distinctions should remain a permanent feature of the Indian "constitution" and electoral system. Time and again the prospect of lucrative posts and appointments held out by the ruling bureaucracy has brought to the fore individuals who can no better grounds than their say-so paraded as the representatives of religious minorities, for which they demanded special consideration in the "constitution." The same principle has been extended to various public positions. In many cases the minor administrative posts are distributed in a certain ratio among the various religious groups, so that even in the competition for a teacher's post religious differences are pushed to the fore and religious dissension given a sharper edge by definite bread-and-butter considerations.

The deliberate exploitation and fanning of religious prejudices effectively disproves the legend of British rule bringing civilization to India. British rule rests on a foundation of obsolete reactionary ideas which it perpetuates in order to befog the Indian people's minds and bar their way to the future. It is only too true that, coupled with the lack of even the most primitive universal education in India, superstition and religious fetishism are the greatest obstacles to the spread

of modern science and knowledge.

During its rule of nearly two hundred years, British imperialism in India has endeavored to secure itself a certain "social support" to lean on. The government machinery and its command of the revenues were a powerful factor in artificially cultivating a class of parasites whose only virtue is their loyalty to British imperialism. The rulers had particular need of some such instrument in the rural areas, the people of which form the overwhelming majority of the population and are less immediately under the control of the government machine than the people in the towns. This place is filled by the Zemindars, the Indian landowners, who in many parts of India are also the tax collectors. Half or more of the peasant's crop finds its way into their pockets in the form of rent, and a definite percentage is passed on to the government. When a number of years ago the world economic crisis brought down the price of agricultural produce, the peasants in many parts of India could barely cover their rent with the proceeds of their crop, adding to the oppressive rent the burden of interest on money already owing.

Being the rent and tax collectors, the Zemindars are the bailiffs of the alien rulers. In the countryside they act as policemen in the employ of the imperialist masters. In their double capacity of landowners and tax collectors their own interests as exploiters are wedded to those of the British bureaucracy; the latter in their turn have to de-

pend on the services of the Zemindars and in compensation leave the peasants defenseless in their hands.

None of the rent collected is used for land improvement. On the contrary, the Zemindars are a direct obstacle to any progress in agriculture, for they seize upon the slightest improvement as an excuse for further extortions. The British imperialists cannot even claim that when they came to India they found these parasites as they now are, and were unwilling to interfere with their rights of property. By giving them the taxes to collect they have given the Zemindars much greater power. What British imperialism wants to have in India is not free peasants but bond tenants, the exploiters of whom will act as Britain's willing tool. Even in the newly irrigated parts of India the same system has been introduced. A class of landowners has been artificially implanted who, like the traditional Zemindars, collect the taxes and are the pillars of British imperialism.

Another tool of the imperialist rulers is the usurers, who hold whole villages in their claws and who, in collecting their interest or evicting the peasants from their plots of land, have the services of the authorities, services which they return in other ways. British imperialist rule in India is sufficiently characterized by the fact that in the countryside it rests solely on these parasitic elements of Indian society.

In the industrial development of India, too, the reactionary, obstructive effect of imperialist domination is becoming more and more appar-

ent. The Indian handicraft industries were destroyed when British capitalism delivered them defenseless to the mercy of its competition. Nor was this destruction accompanied by any constructive development of Indian home industry. Indian railways have served, if we leave out troop transport, largely to enhance the sale of British goods. For decades the British rulers resisted the development of a textile industry in India. When customs duties were imposed for purely fiscal reasons on all imported textiles, the protective effects of this measure were rendered nil by the introduction of a corresponding tax on home-produced textiles. It was only during the last World War that more rapid progress began in industrialization owing to the war requirements of British imperialism.

The backwardness of Indian industry will be sufficiently understood when we say that India, with a population roughly as large as that of all Europe, produces no more iron and steel than the little Duchy of Luxemburg. The obstacle to the economic development of India is not only a customs policy fashioned to the interests of English imports, nor the preference enjoyed by English industry in the distribution of government orders (for railways, military supplies, etc.). It is first and foremost the parasitic nature of British rule. Every year the British imperialists drain from India over £100,000,000 in dividends, interests on loans, and civil service and army pensions, for which values no return is made, and the accumu-

lation of capital in India or else the consumption of the Indian population is reduced accordingly. Backward Indian economy has to bear the heavy expenditures for a non-productive military and administrative apparatus. The effect of the British financial policy on India may be seen when we say that appropriations for education, public health and improvement of agriculture and industry make up less than 10 per cent of India's total budget.

The obstacles British imperialism plants in the way of India's industrial development are also calculated to maintain British rule by hampering the obliteration of the caste system. Even with India's limited industrial development, there has arisen a modern proletariat and a progressive intelligentsia. In every liberation movement of the Indian people the proletariat and the revolutionary element among the intelligentsia act as its boldest and most resolute representatives. In the textile mills, in the smelting mills and on the railways the Indian peasants and craftsmen are discarding the religious and caste prejudices they harbor against their fellow-workers, their horizon expands and their minds grow more receptive to modern ideas. The Indian worker is much closer to the countryside than his fellows in Europe, and his experiences in the struggle, the new ideas he drinks in, in turn affect the fight that the Indian peasants are waging against the bloodsuckers and their foreign masters.

The British rulers at an early

date perceived the danger of this birth of a class which discards the dead weight of the past in the process of its leveling by machinery, by its constant work in common, and is welded to a militant class of fighters. They are doing their best to undermine the militant unions by setting up rival organizations—reformist unions standing for cooperation of labor and capital after the English pattern. These unions enjoy the special solicitude of the British trade union leadership, and naturally they make return. The reformist "union leaders" on the orders of their English patrons back the pro-imperialist policy of the so-called Liberals, or, in other words, the sections of the Indian bourgeoisie who have thrown in their lot as exploiters with Britain's continued domination.

A glance at the political map of India reveals the Indian native states scattered over the whole country and forming large numbers of little islands and enclaves. These are obsolete formations, the result of old-time feudal wars and acts of usurpation. The British imperialists, true to their principle of "divide and rule," have never made the least attempt to introduce uniformity into the administrative chaos that is India. With cold calculation they have allowed and encouraged the further existence of these reactionary units in order to counteract the formation of closely welded nationalities among the people of India.

In the present war the British imperialists cannot boast of a single

action or utterance on the part of the Indian people which shows their readiness to take part in the war on England's side and bear the sacrifices forced upon them. But all the more violently does British propaganda extol the "loyalty" of the Indian princes, who number 700 all told and command over a third of India's territory and a quarter of her population. These princes are direct dependents of the British government, puppets like the spurious governments set up by Japan in the provinces that it has occupied in China.

As abundant experience has shown, the least sign of resistance to British rule would simply lose them their thrones and parasitic existences; and this, coupled with fear of their people, for whose suppression they resort in case of need to the service of British troops, effectively secures their obedience to the least desire of their imperialist masters. They find compensation, however, in utterly shameless exploitation of their downtrodden subjects. Just as these native princes lent their services to the British conquerors of India in the latter's fight for supremacy, so they are today the reserve of British imperialism in oppressing the Indian people. They are willing pawns in the game of lying and deception that the British imperialists are playing with their proposals of a so-called constitution for India, of a parliament for the whole of India, that is, for a federation of British India and the native states. For in this sham parliament they and their

creatures, together with the agents of British imperialism smuggled in to "represent" British India, are to form a bloc solid enough to make it impossible for the genuine representatives of the Indian people to gain a majority.

The same princes who so readily played the mercenary for the English conquerors when they subjected India are today chosen to assist the English rulers to a sort of parliamentary legality. Under the constitution that England has proposed, the population of the native states would have no voice in appointing the representatives of these states; they would not receive even the limited franchise that is to be introduced in British India for this sham parliament. The Indian princes, whose actions are prescribed in every particular by the British, are autocratically to appoint their representatives in the Indian federal parliament, and these are to speak and vote on their orders. To put it in a nutshell, the constitution that the British government has proposed for India practically means that the British imperialists will allow India a "parliament" whose composition they themselves will determine. Will anyone now venture to doubt that the British bourgeoisie is waging a war for democracy?

What greater breach of faith is there in history than that committed by the British imperialists against the people of India? During the last World War, more than twenty years ago, the rulers of England vowed and swore that India would be

granted self-determination. Twenty-odd years have passed, and British imperialism in India is still playing its old game of lying and deceit, of splitting and disintegrating the Indian people and acting, as it has always done throughout its rule over India, with the aid of brute force and of the mercenary parasitic element among the Indians. We have no opportunity here for a detailed account of the effect that this imperialist rule has had on the lives of the Indian people, but it is plain enough from the fact that India of all countries in the world is the most poverty-stricken and has the highest mortality rate and percentage of illiteracy. Nearly thirty years ago, the *Yugantar*, an Indian newspaper published in Calcutta, branded British rule in India in the following passionate words:

"A handful of alien robbers is ruining . . . the people of India by robbing the wealth of India. Through the hard grinding of their servitude the ribs of this countless people are being broken to pieces. Endless endeavors are being made in order that this great nation by losing, as an inevitable result of this subjection, its moral, intellectual and physical power, its wealth, its self-reliance and all other qualities, may be turned into the condition of beasts of burden or be wholly extinguished."

These words are no less true today, although the British imperialists have in the meantime waged and won one war in the name of "freedom for the nations." During the last World War, Gandhi, leader

of the Indian National Congress, submitted to the task of recruiting Indians for the battlefields of Europe. And ever since he has attempted to make the people of India believe they would receive their independence at the hands of the British imperialists. But he voiced his disappointment when he recently said that he could not reconcile his conscience to praying for victory for British arms if that were to mean continued foreign rule in India.

The Indian National Congress has repeatedly demanded complete independence for India and expressly refused to support England in its present war. The Working Committee of the National Congress has issued an appeal to the Indian people for a civil disobedience campaign to compel the British imperialists to meet the Indian people's demands.

More than ever before, the people of India are today determined to throw off the foreign yoke. In the fight against British imperialism they are unfolding not only the forces of national liberation, but the forces of their social and cultural progress too.

In the last World War hundreds of thousands of young Indians, led by their belief in the promises of British politicians, allowed themselves to be sacrificed in an alien cause on the battlefields of Europe. The outbreak of the present war has been met by the people of India, and first and foremost by its workers and peasants, with a more determined fight for independence. And this fact weighs more in judging the lofty war aims proclaimed by the British imperialists and their henchmen, the Citrines, than all the thousands of their propaganda speeches.