



INDIA WATCHES . . .

What are London's plans? Meanwhile, Claude Cockburn cables, "The Japanese are halfway across Burma. . . ."

London (by cable), February 27.

WITH the Japanese halfway across Burma it seems that we are rather more than halfway toward working out a new plan for India. Things moving at the pace they do, the plan may be common knowledge by the time you read this. In any case it cannot be more than a halfway plan.

The question is whether it will lead immediately to constructive action for the defense of India or not. Here is the background. According to best informed London circles there was a plan a couple of weeks ago under which the following things would happen. First, the Indian office would be merged into the Dominion Affairs office—under Clement Attlee. Secondly, representatives of the "unofficial" Indian Nationalist Movement would be given the portfolios of Defense and Finance in the Viceroy's Council. I believe that plan really was on the stocks—and a bit more than on the stocks. And we can chalk up as point number one the fact that, abominably slowly as everything moves on this side of a terribly dangerous situation, this did represent a real advance, a real breakthrough against the obstructionists here. And I have the strong impression that when Chiang Kai-shek made his historic statement at New Delhi, he was under the impression that the plan was going through.

A FEW DAYS AGO came a hitch. I do not know for certain just where it came from, although if you walk down Whitehall you will find

twenty different people to give you twenty contradictory "inside" explanations. The story which seems most credible is that some of the "old India hands" at present in high places declared the whole thing to be too dangerous. That would mean, presumably, Sir John Anderson, Lord President of the Council. Also it must be recalled that L. S. Amery, still Secretary of State for India, the man who long ago declared that we must not condemn Japanese aggression because that would condemn British policy in India and Egypt, has a long and silly record to defend. So far he has attempted to defend his indefensible position by declaring that the Indians themselves must "get together" before the British government can do anything about anything.

A somewhat brighter spot in the picture is the fact that under pressure of the imminent danger from Japan, very important elements here who previously were content with Amery's futilities are content with them no longer. And you begin to hear in many quarters the expressed realization that if only the British would let the Indians have a national government of their own, the religious and other differences of which so much can be made here would on the one hand tend to disappear, and on the other would be dealt with effectively by an Indian national government. Of course there would be fifth columnism. Of course there would be persons and groups seduced and suborned by the Japanese Pan-Asiatic propaganda. Of course sections of the Moslem population would be at-

tracted by Japan's claim to be the "new leader of Islam." But the point is that an Indian national government could deal ruthlessly with such elements. It could raise and arm forces which would be quite capable of treating such elements as they ought to be treated.

As an editorial writer in the London *New Statesman and Nation* remarks, "In the past all our efforts have been qualified by reservations which in effect enabled and even invited the minorities to put their veto on any advance. What Indians chiefly mean by independence is that we should cease to play this traditional game of divide and rule. When once we reach the point of surrendering what Marshal Chiang calls 'real political power' the Moslem minority will adjust itself to the inevitable. The feud is a painful fact, but we have made it the central reality of Indian life by our well meant efforts to separate the warring creeds. At the center, when a federal India governs herself, the views men take about tariffs, railway communications, and the technicalities of defense will not depend on whether they derive their faith in the supernatural from the Koran or the Vedic hymns. Taxes strike Hindu and Moslem much as the rain falls, on the just and the unjust impartially. The real divisions in this modern world must increasingly follow lines not of creed but of economic function."

However, there was certainly some kind of hitch in that plan which would have been a definite move in the direction of national government. As a result of the hitch a new plan had to be evolved. And according to those in London who should know and who claim that they were asked about the matter as representative of Indian opinion, the new plan was a very different pair of shoes. This plan too involved the merging of the India office in the Dominions Affairs office. In fact at the London end it seemed to be the same plan as before. But according to these sources—which are not official—the scheme for giving additional portfolios, including the portfolios of Defense and Finance to representatives of the Indian national movement, was dropped. And the Indian reaction to that was summed up in the words, "This is home rule for the Viceroy."

It was felt, that is to say, that there is no advance worth speaking of if India is created a Dominion in London while being left in the same position as before as regards the practical government of India from New Delhi. Yet it does seem that that was just the situation as it stood on the eve of Cripps' first speech to Parliament—or a few days before that. So far as can be ascertained here, all responsible progressive opinion in India either has rejected or is going to reject any such offer.

IT MUST BE SAID, however, that the agreement—assuming there really exists such an agreement—to abolish the India office and merge it into the Dominions Affairs office does represent a certain movement forward. It is hard to imagine that Cripps, who at a very

early stage in the war was already negotiating with Nehru, is unaware of the futility of a scheme which stopped with only that. And rightly or wrongly it is generally assumed here that Cripps must have had some pretty definite conditions in mind on the subject of India when he accepted office in the War Cabinet.

In this connection it may be noted as a fact of real importance that following his entry into the War Cabinet and the success of his first speech from the government bench, Cripps has achieved a position which nobody has occupied in any British government at any time during the past ten years except for Churchill during the couple of months before the fall of the Chamberlain government. By which I mean the position of a man whose resignation would almost automatically involve the resignation and fall of the government itself. That is a fact and an important one. And it may be assumed that it will be in the tug of war around the Indian problem—on which Churchill's own views are notoriously strong and old-fashioned—that Cripps will have the first chance to exert his power in a seriously controversial issue.

Just as one example of the sort of controversy that is in progress, it is worth mentioning that the interests in India desirous of establishing there immediately an automobile engine industry have still not received any green light either from the government of India or the India office. Encouraging is the fact that despite failures and interminable delays in the past, Indian industry is still ready with plans for immediate establishment of a motor industry.

The advantages are obvious. As I have previously reported (NEW MASSES, February 17) at present there exists a tragically ridiculous situation wherein engines and chassis are exported to India by the present long and dangerous routes, and all that is done in India is to put the bodies—in some cases the armored bodies—on the machine. It is suggested, I believe correctly, that the Indian company which wants to turn out complete Indian automobiles for military use is closely linked with Chrysler. And it is further suggested that it is because of this link that certain British interests have so far successfully prevented any progress being made.

I think this is true. And right here it seems to me is an example of the possibilities for that sort of Anglo-American cooperation in the defense of India which I wrote of in my last dispatch on this subject. For if, and there is no denying it, it is desirable that India should as swiftly as possible establish an automobile industry, and if one of the important snags in the way is some rivalry between British and American automobile interests, surely it is not beyond the wit or the power of the production executives here and in Washington to get this difficulty, pattern of many, many others, ironed out quickly. And with the Japanese advancing on Rangoon, quickly is the operative word.

CLAUDE COCKBURN.

What My India Can Do

In response to Claude Cockburn's recent article on "India—Giant Arsenal Ignored" (NEW MASSES, February 17), we received a number of letters from prominent Indians residing in this country. Several are printed in Readers Forum on page 21. Mr. S. Chandrasekhar, a prominent Indian journalist living in this country, sends us the following elaboration on Mr. Cockburn's cable.—The Editors.

FOR decisive success in this war we need men, materiel, and morale. As for men there is no dearth in India; according to 1941 census figures just announced, India's population has reached 388,500,000. But the highest official figure for the Indian army is only 1,000,000. There should be no difficulty to raise an army of nearly 5,000,000, if the British government in India can be persuaded to shed their caste prejudices. We can easily raise 5,000,000 of fighting age, not only from India's farms and fields, but also from India's eighteen universities and the hundreds of affiliated colleges. For a long time Indian youth leaders have been urging military training for Indian university students. But nothing has been done apart from the sissy training of the Indian University Training corps. There should be no difficulty in raising an army now.

But mere men, inexperienced and above all ill-equipped, will be of little help against the mechanized and highly disciplined Japanese units. What then of materiel? Full equipment of arms and ammunitions, planes and guns, tanks and torpedoes will have to be rushed from the United States. India is already under the Lend-Lease Act, and there is an Indian Government Purchasing Mission here headed by one of India's distinguished statesmen, Sir Shanmukham Chetty.

But not all this materiel need come from America or the United Nations. India herself can be made to supply a considerable part of her war needs, if only the obstacles for rapid Indian industrialization could be removed. It is amazing but true that even today the old policy of hemming and hedging Indian industrialization continues. Till now Indian efforts to set up an automobile plant in Bombay with the aid of American engineers have been sabotaged. While everybody agrees that the defeats of the United Nations in the Pacific are due to lack of aerial superiority, nothing much is being done in India in this direction beyond the establishment of an airplane assembly plant in Mysore, South India.

In terms of resources India is a rich country. Her foodstuffs are enormous, if only they can be properly conserved and distributed. She produces enormous quantities of colza and cashews, groundnuts, rope, sesamum, and linseed. She grows great quantities of barley, coffee, maize, sugar, tea, tobacco, and wheat. In rice and jute she has a world monopoly. In cotton and hydro-electric potential she is second only to the United States. She has the largest livestock population of any country in the world. She has large deposits of iron ore, copper, and manganese. She has considerable quantities of tin and tungsten, zinc and mica. India is a classic example of appalling poverty in the midst of great plenty.

But what of morale? Here is the crux of the problem. There has always been a melancholy gulf between promises and performances as far as India is concerned. India's cry for political freedom and economic industrialization fell on deaf ears even in the United States, for India has been always considered as a peculiarly British problem. But today it looks as though many of our battles are going to be fought on the fields and farms of Calcutta, Madras, and Colombo.

In the recent Atlantic Charter Mr. Churchill went beyond President Roosevelt's signature and proclaimed in Manchester not long ago that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to India. We don't know what the American government did about this tactless but honest pronouncement. Even today, beyond offering a couple of fat salaried jobs to government nominees in the Imperial war councils, nothing has been done to arouse the masses and give them a cause to fight for. Can we then wonder if some Indians even today think that this is a British war and what is happening is nothing but her nemesis? Then how can there be morale?

That dogged determination to fight the Axis to the last ditch can come only if India's postwar freedom is promised, not only by the British government but with the reassurance of the United States. That will give them a cause to fight for and a spirit to fight with. As one Englishman put it recently, "The world will be amazed at what India would then do in the world anti-fascist struggle." If we may venture a guess the Indian people can become the "Russians" of the anti-Axis struggle in the East. India has been long standing at the bar of justice. It is late, but not too late. Will Anglo-American statesmanship overcome its shortsightedness and act before it is too late?

S. CHANDRASEKHAR.