

# WHAT INDIA MEANS TO US

*"How to light a fire in people's hearts" is the nub of India's crisis. Joseph Starobin discusses the background of Sir Stafford Cripps' visit and America's responsibility.*

*We surely cannot deny to any nation that right whereon our own government is founded—that every one may govern itself according to its own will, and that it may transact its business through whatever organ it thinks proper, whether king, or convention, assembly, committee, president or anything else it may choose—Thomas Jefferson.*

AS THE negotiations between the British War Cabinet and India's leaders come to a climax this week, the fact that really stands out from the whole crisis is that India has ceased to be a British problem. The global character of this war has transformed what was formerly an issue in British-India relations into a critical issue for the whole democratic cause.

It will surely amaze many Americans that this vast continent with its 380,000,000 people, with a history, culture, language, outlook so different from our own, and so far away in space, should really be of vital, intimate concern to ourselves. But that is the truth, no less for Americans than for Englishmen, for the Chinese or the Russians. History has worked itself out in a strange irony: when Great Britain finally got round to making what has been advertised as a great advance in the tortuous record of its relations with India, the problem had ceased to be purely British or purely Indian. It became a world problem.

THE REASON for this is best understood by considering a second fact, with which history has also dealt so ironically. And this is that India's problem is no longer merely constitutional. The saddest and most merciless commentary on Sir Stafford Cripps' mission to India is that when this brilliant, well meaning lawyer got the chance to deal with a problem so long close to his heart, when he finally got the legal intricacies worked out, and the constitutional details of the plan into place, the issue in essence had ceased to be legal or constitutional.

India's fate rests on its immediate military defense. Whether Britain has promised more this time than in the past, and whether its promises for tomorrow will be fulfilled, loses

much of its former importance. The issue is whether India is going to be defended. And it is because its defense is vital, not only for itself, but for China, Russia, England, the United States, and all other free peoples—for this reason the problem is not one of British-India relations and not a mere legal one.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU placed his finger on it in a statement of April 6: "The feasibility of any proposal has primarily to be judged by its application to the present, and by how far it may light the fire in people's hearts to enable them to meet the heavy trials of today and those of tomorrow." *How far it may light the fire in people's hearts*—there is the heart of the whole business. Only when the fire is lit, when the masses are roused, when they begin to train by the millions, when the thousands of anti-fascists still in the jails are released—that is when the defense of India will become effective.

To do less than this is not only to defend India poorly; it may very well be that to do less than this is not to defend India at all. Perhaps some Tory elements are already resigned to this prospect rather than arm the Indian people. Contrary to Mother Goose's opinion, they believe that all the king's horses and all the king's men might put Humpty-Dumpty together again. But this would mean another Singapore, with far more disastrous repercussions for the whole strategy of the war, and with volcanic repercussions in England itself.

For most Englishmen who do not wish this to happen, for China, for the sake of all the United Nations, India must be defended. It is, however, very, very late. Sir Stafford arrived in New Delhi clutching the hands of history's timepiece almost at the stroke of twelve. The Japanese are approaching the gates of Assam and Bengal. They are pressing north of Prome in Burma, and they are likely to reach the heights of Mandalay before the monsoon sets in. A month ago the Japanese occupied the Andaman Islands, which lie 900 miles from Ceylon and from Calcutta also. Calcutta! Bengal's capital, the second largest city in the entire empire after London, com-

manding the mouth of the mighty Ganges.

Already Ceylon has suffered its first heavy air raid. From this strategic island the Japanese could control both coasts of India, clear around from Bombay. People who know Burma say that land routes into Bengal are not more difficult than the routes from Siam into Burma. Experts say that the Japanese have only been using two divisions thus far, a fraction of her available man power. Her air force retains superiority and her Navy has not yet demonstrated its full force.

And just to make things more realistic, it is worth remembering that most of India's heavy industrialization lies in Assam and Bengal. These two provinces are really the heart of the continent. The big Tata steel works is there, with its 1,000,000 tons or more of steel-making capacity. Moreover, Subhas Chandra Bose, the former nationalist leader who was reported killed en route to Japan, after going over to the Japanese, was a Bengali and was once mayor of Calcutta. True enough, he may not have his former influence. But bearing the military facts in mind, and remembering that the Japanese were able to enlist a certain support in the Burmese population, the fact that Bengal happens to be the province which lies open to the aggressor must be assessed realistically.

And what a Japanese conquest in India would mean, or even a larger edition of the Burma business, does not have to be emphasized. The projected routes of help to China would be in danger. Within China, pro-Japanese individuals in high places would be strengthened. The rest of India would lie open. The Axis would be able to entertain the idea of a junction in the Middle East seriously. Our supply routes to the Persian gulf would be harassed, at the very least. And with the Mediterranean closed, as Churchill recently told us, that route around the tip of South Africa is absolutely vital.

AGAINST this background, with all its shadows, how does Sir Stafford's mission shape up? Divide it into two parts; one, from the time of his arrival until the publication of the Cabinet's plan; two, from the decision to prolong negotiations until this week. Perhaps the

less said about the first phase the better. Sir Stafford's "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude was very distasteful, and one can only imagine how the Indian people must have felt.

The plan itself represented an advance over previous plans, at least on paper. In practice, a dozen objectionable features come to mind. That India might ultimately consist of many dominions sounds democratic, but actually it was a concession to a handful of reactionary figures in the Moslem League. As everyone knows, they commanded only a minority of seats in the provincial elections of 1937, even in Moslem areas like Bengal, Punjab, and Sind, whereas the India Congress received substantial majorities. The history of north Ireland bears witness to the indefensibility of any proposals based on the idea that India is incapable of unity.

Even worse was the provision that the native princes would handpick their delegates to the future constitutional convention, and have the right to secede and sign separate treaties with the paramount power if they did not like the convention's decisions. It is as though the American colonies had been granted a modified autonomy in 1776 except that the royal colonial governors would remain absolute rulers of the peoples in their original land grants, with British troops garrisoning them as "friendly fortresses in debatable territory," which is the way one writer describes these native states. There are 526 of them, some ruled by men of vast wealth, others by decrepit bankrupts. One-third of India's millions live at their mercy. The system of native princes is the expression of India's decay under British rule. And the rub is that if the Japanese ever arrived, these princes would almost certainly go over, bag and baggage, without batting an eyelash, as did the Sultan of Johore in Malaya.

SO MUCH for the Cabinet's plan in its future aspects. They are no longer, and never really were, of decisive consequence. The basic question was whether India would be given the chance of immediate mobilization for effective warfare. In the original plan, the answer was no. Defense was to remain in the hands of His Majesty's government. If this had been the end of the answer, we would have been justified in assuming that the British Cabinet had decided not to defend India at all. This would be a catastrophe of the first magnitude. It would have been equivalent to Gandhi's proposal of non-resistance, in effect an invitation to the aggressor.

Fortunately the negotiations have continued. And it is characteristic of the real issues that the negotiations have revolved around India's role in her own defense more than anything else. If the Cabinet yields to Britain's own best interests, and a settlement is reached, it will have to be judged by the degree to which it lights a fire in people's hearts. Obviously, the most realistic, far-sighted solution would be complete independence. This is probably no longer a real issue. In the opinion of the Congress itself, and of such responsible forces as

represented by the British Communist Party, a provisional national government, with full responsibility for India's war mobilization in the hands of Indians themselves is at least a realistic minimum. It is possible that something even less than this will be worked out. But in the long run, it comes back to the basic consideration. India will not be defended effectively unless her people are mobilized. Only India's leaders can really light the fire in the hearts of their people.

THIS is what the rest of us in the United States and other parts of the world have got to remember. In its editorial last week, the *Daily Worker* commented that Britain was paying for its imperialist sins of the past. This is a good concept to work with. History has a way of making us pay for things that are not done right and not done in time. We are paying for the failure of the democratic world to achieve collective security while there was still time. All of us, and the German people first of all, are paying for the fact that Germany never went through a really thorough democratic revolution which would have cleaned out the Junkers and militarists, with all their medieval baggage. History will make us pay for the mistakes of India unless history is made in a hurry, unless decisive changes develop. And the longer they are delayed, the harder it will be to bend history to our ends.

In a recent article Edgar Snow pointed out the contrast between millions of Indian guerrillas fighting for their own land and any effort to get 10,000,000 or more Americans over there to try to recapture that vast continent from the Japanese. And the truth is that Americans have a distinct responsibility in this crisis. It would be a grave distortion of this country's interests and its historical role if the impression that some newspapers have left on India's leaders were allowed to stand.

We do not have to advise India on details; but on the fundamentals we have the obligation, not to blank-check Sir Stafford Cripps' original proposals which he himself was soon compelled to revise, but to endorse the broad fundamentals. And the broadest fundamental, which every American will sense instinctively, is that the Malaya fiasco must not be repeated.

In a column for February 21 Walter Lippmann observed that "Tory imperialism will die hard in the Far East" but die it must "if the British peoples are to put forward their full strength." "The objective of the eastern war . . . cannot be," says Lippmann, "the recapture or restoration of the white man's empire." The American objective "is bound to be the defeat of Japanese imperialism in alliance with the peoples of Asia, the Chinese, the Indians, the Filipinos, and the Russians." In this concept of America's historic role, Lippmann is on firm ground. It is ground which the President established in his mid-February fireside address in which he said that the "Atlantic Charter applies not only to parts of the world that border the Atlantic, but to the whole world." As a nation with world-democratic ideals, as a pioneer demo-

cratic republic, our obligation to India, like our deep-rooted friendship for China, flows out of our history.

And even from the narrow view of private enterprise in this country, India like China is a continent that literally cries out for technical assistance, for the investment of capital, for help in her inevitable industrial reconstruction. As R. Palme Dutt analyzes with such rich detail in his *India Today*, the past 200 years have stultified India's potential development, have destroyed her native handicrafts industry, and impoverished her agriculture. An India marching toward freedom would reverse this process of decay, and in that the United States has a vital role to play.

And finally from the immediate interests of the war, Washington, which is one of the strategy-making centers of this struggle, has a real obligation. The President has a challenging opportunity to fulfill his destiny as a world statesman. Failure to light the fire in India's heart, for which her people are so ready, is to risk the most dangerous complications for China, for the Middle East, for Russia, for those positions on which we ourselves depend. But to light those fires in time, to make India's resistance effective is to shorten the war, to strike at the Axis as a whole by fulfilling the great potential of our friends in Asia.

In this, the United States has a vital part. It is to be hoped that through our new envoy to India, through the President's public initiative if necessary, and through the fraternal understanding of the American people, we shall play that part.

JOSEPH STAROBIN.

## Lorca

Lorca, Federico Garcia,  
how can I speak of that dark night  
when they struck you down, left you  
without even a sheet to cover your body!

At the edge of your beloved Granada  
there on the cobblestones you fell,  
and Death took you by the arm  
and you walked away with him to the hills.

Let the rains wash away the blood!  
Let the moon cover the sight with silver!  
For Federico is gone, and his wisdom.  
He fell with a roar of pistols in his head.

Lorca, you are remembered still  
with all the brave, the living and the dead,  
who will one day return to their Granada  
in vengeance and in honor,  
and your name is the most golden of names,  
whispered by the warm sea and air.

Poets, fire a volley for him.  
Flags of the world, be lowered.

Death, be kind to him.

NORMAN ROSTEN.