

WHAT BRITAIN PLANS FOR INDIA

The meaning of the new British Cabinet offer to India: liberation or continued domination?

By S. H. KAVIANI

AFTER the British government threw the Golden Apple into the Indian arena on May 16, some of my American friends expressed gratification at the British gesture. "After all," they told me, "the British did fulfill their long overdue pledge and granted freedom to your country." But when I asked them to explain the contradiction between London's reactionary foreign policy and the voluntary transfer of the "brightest jewel in the British crown" to Indians, my friends seemed puzzled. In other words, I asked, has Mr. Atlee really become His Majesty's Prime Minister "to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire?"

But first a brief picture of the background. India is a vast subcontinent. This subcontinent is a British colony. It is divided into British India and Princely India, with British India consisting of eleven provinces. These provinces are not at all national units based on any ethnological division of the country. They were haphazardly formed in the nineteenth century just for administrative purposes. The British government rules India through a Viceroy, who is responsible to no Indian body but to the British Cabinet. He appoints an executive council of eleven to advise him on administrative affairs. This executive council functions only at his discretion *and is not responsible to the Indian legislature*. The Viceroy has vast executive and legislative powers; he can and often does veto acts passed by the Indian legislature. The central government is the sole responsibility of the Viceroy. The British government appoints governors for provinces who are responsible to the Viceroy, and who are equally omnipotent.

Princely India comprises one-third of India. Scattered all over India are 562 misnamed "states" which were created by the British in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries. Every state is a British protectorate and the princes rule at the pleasure of the Viceroy. The Viceroy appoints his "agents" in these "states," and these agents are the real rulers. No prince can enforce any reforms or laws without the previous permission of the agent.

There are two main political parties in India—the Indian National Congress and the Moslem League. They are political and not religious parties and represent millions of Indian people. The third biggest party in the country is the Communist Party. Each one of these parties stands for the independence of India. The Moslem League also demands Pakistan—the right of the Moslems to form independent sovereign states in areas where they form the majority of the population. The Congress Party opposes this demand. In addition to these parties, there is an All-India Trade Union Congress representing 5,000,000 industrial workers, and the All-India Peasant Party.

DURING the last five or six years, in spite of mass starvation, mass arrests, mass shooting and complete suppression of civil liberty by the alien and irresponsible British administration, India's liberation movement has grown enormously. Never were the British so much hated as they are today. The Labor members of the Parliamentary Delegation which visited India last winter, in speaking of their experiences, admitted in London that "recent events like the naval mutiny [when Indians captured twenty-six British ships] and riots in Bombay and Calcutta are just symptomatic of the coming explosion."

It is this pressure of mass upheaval which has forced the British to readjust their relations with India. Obviously they do not want to make the same mistakes their forefathers did

in dealing with the Americans almost two hundred years ago. Attlee seems to be cleverer than George III. He does not want to lose all; he would rather bargain with the Indian leadership.

The British claim that since the two Indian parties—the Congress and the Moslem League—did not agree to any joint formula despite six weeks of British efforts, the British had themselves to offer a formula which might satisfy the demands of both parties. But the fact is that long before the cabinet mission went to India, the British government had completed a plan which was made not to satisfy any of the Indian parties but to protect British interests. The purpose of the mission

and the deliberations with Indian leaders was to create a state of affairs in which this plan would look quite natural to Indians so they would accept it.

The author of this plan is Professor Coupland. He is adviser to the India Office in London and went to India as Secretary to Sir Stafford Cripps in 1942. Since then he has written a large book called *The Indian Problem*. According to Prof. Coupland, India should be divided into three separate dominions: the Hindu zone, the Moslem zone and the Princely zone. He emphasizes the importance of the Princely zone. There the British would have their bases and military establishments. When this plan was exposed by the Indian press, a revised edition

of the book was published by the government in India just before the recent Simla conference. In this edition, the Coupland Plan was slightly modified and a union of the three zones was proposed. Thus it will be seen that the British government had made up its mind regarding India's future long before the Cabinet mission discussed Indian problems with native leaders. As a matter of fact, the Coupland Plan was prepared during Churchill's regime in 1943. Attlee and Bevin are faithfully carrying out Churchill's policy in India, as elsewhere.

There was another weapon which the British used to create the necessary atmosphere for bargaining with the Indians. This was the bogey of Soviet "expansion." Although the campaign of slander against the Soviet Union has been going on for years, it reached new heights in the last eight or nine months. British officials and the British controlled news agencies tried to convince the Indian people that as soon as British protection was removed the "Russian bear" would walk in.

It is only in this perspective that an evaluation of the British proposals can properly be made. They may be divided into two parts: Interim and Permanent.

ACCORDING to the proposals "an interim government may be set up at once to carry on the administration of British India until such time as the new constitution can be brought into being." This government would have "the support of the major political parties," and would function under the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935. According to this Act the central government is the exclusive responsibility of the Viceroy, appointed by the British government and responsible only to the British Secretary of State for India. It is under such a dictator that the interim government would operate. The British have so far refused to give any assurance that the Viceroy will not use his "special powers" or will always abide by the advice of his Executive Councillors.

There is also the question of the withdrawal of the British army from India. Congress President Maulana Azad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru have rightly pointed out that "there can be no independence so long as there is a foreign army on Indian soil." The British government is avoiding this is-



Sketched in India by Howard Baer.

sue. Indian leaders are told that the question of the British army in India may be postponed for "some later date." It should be noted that the number of British troops in India has trebled since 1939 and numbers approximately 400,000. Finally, no time limit is fixed for the Interim Government in the proposals; the Viceroy can prolong its existence indefinitely on one pretext or the other.

The following constitute the basis for the permanent arrangement:

1. There would be a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States, which would deal with the foreign affairs, defense and communications.

2. The Union would have executive and legislative branches constituted from British Indian and States representatives.

3. All other than Union matters and all residuary powers would be vested in the Provinces.

4. It would be necessary to negotiate a treaty between the Union Constituent Assembly and the United Kingdom to provide for certain problems arising out of the transfer of powers.

5. There would be a constitution-making body elected from the members of the provincial legislative assemblies. Moslem and Sikh members of the assemblies would vote for their representatives separately.

The same British government which insists that even former collaborators and fascists be given the right of franchise in Bulgaria and Rumania, so that their Parliaments will be "truly" representative, deprives eighty-nine percent of the adult Indian population of the right to elect their representatives to the Constituent Assembly. Only eleven percent of the adult population has the right to elect representatives to these provincial assemblies. The British admit that "the most satisfactory method obviously would be an election based on adult franchise, *but any attempt to introduce such a step now would lead to wholly unacceptable delay in the formation of the new constitution.*" (My emphasis.) This excuse of "delay" is pure nonsense. Elections to the provincial assemblies were held after ten years. Elections to the central legislatures were held after twelve years. Was this "delay" acceptable to the Indians? Is the government so anxious to part with power that it does not want to delay the Con-

stituent Assembly for even two months so that it may be elected on the basis of adult universal franchise? The main reason for refusing this democratic method of convening a Constituent Assembly is that the British find the representatives of the upper strata of society more convenient to deal with. They are afraid lest the common people elect more progressive representatives and thus their game be exposed.

Never has a Constituent Assembly been more restricted than the British-proposed Constituent Assembly for India. The most important point regarding this Constituent Assembly is that—according to Lord Pethwick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India—*it will not be a sovereign body.* When asked to define its powers, his lordship said, "The constitution-making body will frame a constitution subject to the approval of the British Parliament which must be satisfied that rights of minorities are properly safeguarded and a treaty with the British government has been provided for. This point was explicitly put in Item 22 of the proposals."

The Constituent Assembly will be composed of 170 Hindus, seventy-nine Moslems and ninety-three representatives of the Princes. Thus no one group will enjoy an absolute majority in the Assembly. And it is also interesting to note that while the Hindu and Moslem representatives will be elected by provincial assemblies, the representatives of Princely India will be nominated by the Princes.

Considering the hostility the British have created between the Congress and the Moslem League in pursuit of their policy of divide and rule, it is extremely unlikely that the two groups will unite inside the Constituent Assembly; thus the ninety-three Princely representatives will hold the balance, keep the Hindus and Moslems at loggerheads and thereby possibly shape the new constitution in favor of the British imperialist interests which they actually represent.

The Princes will share power in the Union government, but the Union government will have no right to interfere in the internal affairs of Princely India. The secret memorandum submitted by the Chamber of Princes and accepted by the Cabinet mission clearly points out that the "monarchical system and dynastic rights of the rulers of Indian States will not be affected by the new scheme. With regard to

the internal administration of States, there will be no interference either by the British government or by the new government." This constitutional monstrosity can only be possible under the British. To unite a democratic British India with totally autocratic and irresponsible Princedom, to give the latter a deciding voice in the Constituent Assembly and a share in the Union government, while protecting their monarchical and totally unrepresentative governments, is the height of mockery.

SINCE it is essential to sign a treaty with the British as provided for by Item 22, we must look at the treaties the British government has signed with Iraq (1932), Egypt (1936), and Trans-Jordan (1946) before granting them "freedom." Each one of these treaties guards the "right" of the British to establish and maintain their armies and air ports inside these "sovereign states." These "independent" states have even undertaken to provide all facilities of transport and communications to these armies. Naturally the British expect Indians to sign a similar treaty, which will guarantee Britain's economic and military domination over India and leave the Indians the husk.

The British Cabinet mission has also proposed the grouping of provinces into three sections. Nothing has been said about British Baluchistan, which is overwhelmingly Moslem and which has not been granted even the status of a province despite a resolution of the Central Assembly. This area, as large as Switzerland, is governed by a British agent and the military and is without any representative body. Instead of regrouping the provinces on a national basis, the British have found it convenient to perpetuate the problems of national minorities in these groups, which always provides them with an excuse to interfere in the internal affairs of these provinces.

The Moslem League has accepted the British proposals and it is probable that the Congress party will also accept them. A dominant group in the Congress is eager to join hands with the British for economic and political reasons. Since last year this group has been aligning itself with the Princes, the mill owners, the landlords and black marketeers. It is more alarmed over the rise of progressive forces in India than it is over British oppression. The

Moslem League leadership is also following the same opportunistic path. The real trouble will come if the Congress also accepts the British plan. Because the Congress and the League will not be joining the interim government in a spirit of mutual understanding they will quarrel over the distribution of portfolios, etc. The Moslem League claims to be the sole representative of all the Moslems. Therefore it will demand that only the League have the right to nominate the Moslem members of the Viceroy's Executive Council. The Congress disagrees with the League's position and will insist that it have the right to nominate one or two Moslems. The Congress also opposes the League's demand for a fifty-percent share of the representatives in the Executive Council.

The Communists and other powerful progressive forces consider the British proposals a trap. They are appealing to the Congress and the League to unite against the common foe on the basis of the following counter-proposals:

1. The test of British sincerity will

require an immediate declaration in unambiguous and unequivocal terms that India is henceforth free and independent.

2. In further proof of their earnestness, the British must undertake to withdraw all troops from India, including Princely India, within six months.

3. The British should establish a provisional government responsible to the Indian legislature.

4. This provisional government should convene a Constituent Assembly within six months based on universal adult franchise.

5. It should be composed of elected representatives both from British India and Princely India.

6. This Constituent Assembly should be a sovereign body responsible only to the Indian people.

7. The differences between the Congress and the Moslem League can only be settled by the just application of the right of self-determination. Therefore the provisional government should be charged with the task of setting up a

Boundaries Commission to redraw the boundaries of the provinces on the basis of natural ancient homelands of every people so that the new provinces become, as far as possible, linguistically and culturally homogenous national units.

8. The people of each such national unit should have the unfettered right of self-determination, the right to decide freely whether they would like to join the Indian Union or form a separate sovereign state.

9. The delegates from each unit to the Constituent Assembly should decide by majority vote whether their unit will join the All-India Constituent Assembly to form an Indian Union or secede from it.

10. The peoples of Princely India should have the similar right to elect their representatives to the Constituent Assembly, and the right to decide whether they want to join the central Indian Union or some other sovereign Indian group.

11. All political prisoners, numbering several thousands, should be immediately released.