BEHIND Cripps' India Mission

London (by cable).

The circumstances under which Cripps decided to accept the suggestion that he go to India were not auspicious. Least pleasant of all was the announcement—that the government was acting to some extent under a direct threat of "revolt." Allegedly this threat was cabled by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, head of the so-called Moslem League, and tossed like a hand grenade into the War Cabinet meeting. It was a pitiable thing that this Jinnah threat should actually have been presented.

Naturally the character of the "plan" which Cripps is taking with him to India is a secret. It is no secret that during the discussion of various alternative plans within the past three weeks, there were those who suggested that the thing to do was to concentrate exclusively on the strategic aspects of the Indian problem, leaving the "political and constitutional" aspects to look after themselves for the time being. It would not be difficult to imagine that the British government had on the whole found refuge in the notion that after all the major strategic considerations and objectives can be achieved without solution of any major political problems. That would be perfectly in character. To believe in such nonsense is the sort of temptation to which elements in the British government are particularly vulnerable. Let us hope that it is otherwise. However, we recall that both Mr. Clement Attlee and Sir John Anderson were certainly among those more or less unofficially mandated by their supporters to keep any proposals that might be made on an even keel. And we are probably—if we reflect upon the character and political abilities of Clement Attlee and Sir John Anderson—immune from serious disappointment.

The question then asks itself, as the French say, just what effect will this have on Cripps' position? There are people who believe that in some sense Cripps has been "put on the spot." Personally I do not think there is any evidence of that. I think that Cripps did not actually propose going to India at this stage—though he had originally planned and hoped to be there for some time after his return from Moscow. But I have good reason for believing that when the proposal was made to him, Cripps accepted it with enthusiasm. There are those who imagine that, first, Cripps will have a crushing failure in India, and that, secondly, this failure will have a serious effect upon his position here.

The first premise, of course, depends on just what is in the secret government plan—assuming that there really is a plan and that its whole development is not still dependent on what Cripps turns up. Obviously if the plan is, on the one hand, a large-scale concession to Jinnah and his plan for a partitioning of India, plus some absurd promise of "dominion status after the war," the plan is perfectly useless and Cripps cannot possibly get Indian agreement. But one must not assume that Cripps' political position here would necessarily collapse as a result of such a failure. On the morning of Cripps' decision to leave for India, a close friend of his pointed out to me with a certain acumen that, "Whether he fails in India or not, it is
likely that in the meantime a situation can arise here in which
people may once again feel that the best thing to do would be
to recall Cripps. It may be felt that if only Cripps had not
been absent in India at the moment, he would have prevented
the rest of the War Cabinet doing what it has done.” It must
be realized that in the lobbies of the House of Commons there
is fairly common assumption that—for reasons which unfortu-
nately do not seem to be under our control—events can occur
in the near future which may produce within a few months a
government crisis somewhat more serious than the one of a few
weeks ago. It may be taken for granted that the old line Labor
Party leadership will attempt to use this crisis to remove Cripps
from a position which they regard—and in conversation openly
declare to be—insulting to them. It is equally true that there
are forces on the extreme right who would also be glad to be
rid of Cripps and who cherish hopes of some sort of grand
counter-attack at the moment of “the next crisis.” On the
other hand, Cripps retains, for the time being, his enormous
prestige in the country as the man who—as is commonly be-
lieved—“made” the Anglo-Soviet alliance. And there are plenty
of important and realistic people in the Conservative Party
who conceive that since, without question, Cripps is today a
greater figure than Churchill in the eyes of the mass of the
people of this country, it might after all be possible for the

I do not have the impression that Cripps would necessarily
be hostile to such an arrangement. And it is at least certain
that he and his associates are filled with a considerable optimism
as to the prospects of Cripps’—regardless of what happens in
India—being able to retain and even to increase the power
which he has already attained.

It may be noted that those Labor Party backbenchers who
have for years specially interested themselves in the Indian
problem have received the Cripps’ mission with a perhaps
exaggerated scepticism and even cynicism. They imagine that
all this is perhaps nothing but a new delaying tactic. On the
other hand, these particular backbenchers are somewhat ham-
strung by the fact that they, while tactfully criticizing Cripps, are
also in sharp conflict with the executive of the Labor Party,
so that it is hard for them to figure out just how to attack the
one without supporting the other. The position is of importance
because it is perfectly clear that a major crisis, a crisis of real
gravity, is developing within the ranks of the Labor Party.
And it is not unlikely that India will prove the deciding factor
in a development which is of the greatest possible importance
for the internal political situation here.

CLAUDE COCKBURN.

Soviet workers reconstructing a plant after it was trans-
ferred from the battle area.