



INDIA AND THE WAR

A political deadlock threatens United Nations operations in Asia. Starvation in a land of undeveloped wealth. R. Palme Dutt's new book reviewed by Albert White.

ALTHOUGH the Quebec Conference was undoubtedly prompted by the rapid march of events in Europe, we now have it on the authority of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill that much of the military deliberations was concerned with the problem of stepping up offensive operations against Japan and getting increased aid to China. The appointment of Lord Louis Mountbatten, chief of Britain's famed Commandos, as head of the newly created South-east Asia Allied Command is evidence that an Indian-based offensive against the Japanese in Burma is in preparation. A re-examination of the Indian situation is therefore timely, for in both the military and the political spheres United Nations operations in Asia are being seriously hampered by the continued political deadlock in India.

All evidence indicates that the continuance of the policy of repression and sequestration against Indian nationalists has produced a sense of bitterness and frustration among the Indian people which is not only preventing the full mobilization of India's resources for war, but is also providing dangerously fertile ground for the operations of Axis propagandists and fifth columnists. For some time the Japanese have been waging a strong propaganda offensive against India, aided and abetted by such renegade Indian leaders as Subhas Chandra Bose, who arrived in Japan from Germany early in June and has since devoted himself to broadcasts calling upon the Indian people to rise against Britain and welcome their Japanese "liberators." Bose is now reported to be organizing an Indian army in Burma, under Japanese auspices, while continuing to appeal to his former followers in Bengal to sabotage the British war effort.

The work of Bose and other fascist agents has been facilitated by the fact that India is now experiencing one of the gravest "man-made" famines in her history. Acute food shortages have already caused riots and disturbances in many parts of the country. As a result of unchecked hoarding, speculation, and profiteering by large grain merchants, food prices in general have risen 185 percent, while the cost of flour—mainstay of the Indian diet—has risen 300 percent. Half of the population of Bengal

is now living on one meal every two days, and conditions in Bombay and other important centers are equally alarming. Thus famine adds fuel to the fires of political unrest, and renders the people of India increasingly apathetic, if not actively hostile, to the United Nations war effort.

But despite the fact that conditions in India are certainly no less critical than they were a year ago, American concern over the Indian crisis appears to have subsided from the high point reached during and immediately after the Cripps mission. This slackening of interest is presumably due in part to the fact that with Japan on the defensive, the danger of an invasion of India now appears remote. It may also be attributed to the widespread though erroneous belief, encouraged by official British

statements, that nothing further can be done until the Indians compose their internal differences, and that since the Indian situation is now "under control," the resolving of the present deadlock can be safely postponed until after the war.

THE publication in this country of R. Palme Dutt's *The Problem of India** is therefore particularly welcome, in that it should serve to dispel this unwarranted complacency regarding the present Indian situation. Mr. Dutt is well known as a brilliant political analyst, the editor of the *British Labour Monthly*, the author of such

* THE PROBLEM OF INDIA, by R. Palme Dutt. International Publishers. Trade Edition, \$2. Popular Edition, \$1.50.

The Cities

War was on the sea, they said, mainly cannonade in the alien mountains.

The school term is over, the examination passed, the romantic salvo

On the last page of the burned book. War is in the street, In the neighbor's house, at the door of the child's splintered room.

History will be simple: the names of battles and the cities Merge in stealthy smoke. They will be cited for standing in the iron rain,

For women in helmets, for old men with weapons, for children tearless in debris.

Warsaw's fallen masonry was blown up in Madrid.

London is a torn poem of defiance: in her empty squares, Peasants from Chungking are sowing tomorrow's grain.

North of Manila the foxholes come to light in Moscow and Smolensk.

The Thames welcomes the airmen returning; the Volga Curves like a mother at Stalingrad, the plain that became a mountain.

The colors on the maps have run together in the iron rain. The borders are drawn from the veins of dying men; They cannot tell Guernica ends and Coventry begins.

DON GORDON.

Marxist classics as *World Politics* and *Britain in the World Front*, and a frequent contributor to the *NEW MASSES*. In the first three sections of his latest book Mr. Dutt presents an incisive, closely knit analysis of India's political and economic development under British rule, based on original Indian and British material. These sections are a condensed and up-to-date version of his larger study, *India Today*, published in England in 1940, but not in this country. The introductory chapter as well as the final section dealing with the present crisis and possibilities for its solution, are entirely new.

In his preface to the American edition, Mr. Dutt stresses the important point that the Indian problem should not become a "source of misunderstanding and conflict between democratic opinion in Britain and the United States." And yet, although his book is addressed primarily to the people of Great Britain, who "hold the immediate power of decision, which can open or bar the road to Indian freedom and equal partnership in the alliance of the United Nations," he believes that a constructive solution of the Indian problem is also a matter of immediate concern to the American people and that "our common interests require that the path of unity and cooperation shall be found."

THE central theme of his book is that Indian freedom is not only essential for victory in the war against fascism, but that in the interests of both the Indian and British peoples and the advance of world democracy, it was "long urgent and overdue" even before the war began. In support of this contention, he shows that though India is a land of great potential wealth, most of her resources remain undeveloped, while the vast majority of her people live in abject poverty. He acknowledges that British rule performed a valuable service in uniting India and giving her the material basis for modern economic development—roads, railways, communications, irrigation works, a modern banking system, etc. But he also demonstrates conclusively that India's status as the colony of a highly industrialized power was responsible for the artificial arresting of her industrial development at a low level, which in turn caused the severe over-crowding of agriculture which constitutes the basic cause of Indian poverty. British control over the Indian economy has thus ceased to be constructive, and furthermore, the bureaucratic government of British India can never be expected to deal with the basic causes of Indian poverty and backwardness, because its chief concern is to maintain "law and order" and not to uproot the reactionary elements in Indian society, such as the princes and great landlords, who are among the staunchest supporters of British rule and who can exist only in a land of guaranteed "law and order."

In an extremely important chapter dealing with the agrarian problem of India, he analyzes the evils of the prevailing system of land tenure and land revenue, and describes with a wealth of corroborative evidence the rapid increase in the number of landless peasants and the crippling burden of debt under which the average peasant must labor. His conclusion is that "far-reaching changes are essential, reaching to the whole basis of land tenure . . . no less than to the technique of agricultural production," and that these changes can be achieved only "by the people of India themselves under the leadership of a government of their own choice."

In his discussion of India's political development under British rule, Mr. Dutt shows both how and why the Indian National Congress developed from a small body of moderates, fully loyal to the British government, into a broadly representative mass organization, fighting for complete independence from British rule. He also refutes the British contention that the main aim of British policy has been to train the Indian people for self-government. This he does by an analysis of successive British legislative measures, from the Charter of 1833 down to the Constitution of 1935, in which he shows that the real aim and effect of these measures have been to enlist the cooperation of "moderate" Indians in various branches of the British-controlled administration—a very different thing from real self-government.

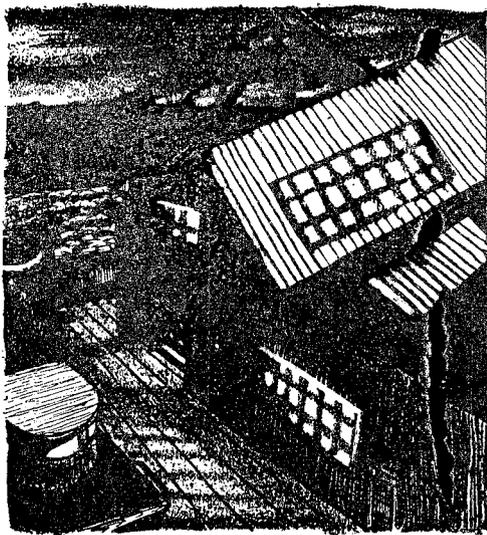
Mr. Dutt discusses in some detail the alleged obstacles to Indian unity, notably Hindu-Moslem antagonism, the Princes, the Untouchables, etc. Though not denying that serious internal differences exist, he maintains that they do not constitute an insuperable obstacle to Indian unity and, moreover, that they are being perpetuated by the existence of an External Power to which all Indian factions can appeal for protection of their special rights. It cannot be denied that a self-governing India would be confronted with many complex and difficult problems. Such an India would be obliged to deal with a primitive, over-



burdened, and usury-ridden agricultural system, as well as industrial backwardness; with malnutrition, disease, and illiteracy; and with outworn religious customs and reactionary groups in Indian society that obstruct the initiation of measures for social and economic reform. Mr. Dutt makes clear that only an Indian government, chosen and trusted by the people, could or would undertake to solve such basic problems.

A GAINST this political and economic background, Mr. Dutt discusses India's role in the war, the Cripps mission and its aftermath, and the possibilities for an early solution of the present crisis which will make possible India's participation in the war as a free and equal partner of the United Nations. He fully supports the argument of Indian leaders that the most urgent problem is the mobilization of the Indian people for war, and that this can only be accomplished by a government of Indian leaders in whom the people have confidence. The Cripps proposals represented no basic change in British policy on this all-important point, since they provided for the retention of power in British hands for the duration of the war, and granted India's leaders only the right of consultative cooperation. It was this refusal to consider any immediate transfer of power to a provisional Indian government that caused the failure of the Cripps mission. It also tied the hands of such sincere and militant anti-fascists as Nehru and Azad, who had repudiated Gandhi's pacifist attitude toward the war, and enabled Gandhi to reassert his leadership over the Congress Party. This Mr. Dutt considers "a heavy liability for the Indian nationalist movement." But while he deplores the "suicidal blindness" of Gandhi and his supporters in threatening a civil disobedience campaign when India was menaced by an Axis invasion, he nevertheless recognizes that it was an understandable act of desperation, provoked by the repeated rejection of their plea that Indians could only be aroused to fight for their country by a government of their own leaders.

In Mr. Dutt's opinion, "the continuance of crisis and conflict, with the diversion of the forces of the ruling power to tasks of repression, and the passivity, non-cooperation, or active hostility of large sections of the population and their political leaders," are dangers which cannot be ignored and which render an early solution of the Indian deadlock imperative. Such a solution, he believes, can be accomplished only by a reopening of negotiations between the British government and the Indian people, and in his concluding chapter he outlines the three general principles which should govern these negotiations. These principles are: (1) recognition of Indian independence; (2) establishment of a provisional national government representative of all



political sections and leaders willing to cooperate in the common task of armed resistance to fascist aggression as an ally of the United Nations; and (3) provision for the effective military cooperation of India and the United Nations.

Similar proposals have been voiced by many Indian leaders and other competent observers of Indian affairs. What lends particular weight to Mr. Dutt's development of these proposals is his penetrating analysis of India's political and economic problems on which they are based, and of which they form a logical and convincing conclusion.

"THE PROBLEM OF INDIA" is a *must* book for everyone interested in world affairs and the problems involved in winning the war as well as in postwar peace and progress. Unfortunately, historic developments do not wait upon publishing schedules. Much has transpired since Mr. Dutt's book was first published in England several months ago. Among other events, a new Viceroy of India has been appointed. It may help in part to bring history up-to-date by quoting the last few paragraphs of a recent letter addressed to Lord Wavell, the new Viceroy of India, by Mr. Harry Pollitt, on behalf of the Communist Party of Great Britain:

"The Communist Party therefore strongly urges that you should consider the desirability, on the occasion of the inauguration of your Vicerealty, of a new departure in policy with a view to ending the deadlock. For this purpose, we would urge the following proposals.

(1) To release the Congress Working Committee and all democratic anti-fascist leaders.

(2) To permit negotiations between the representative leaders of all political sections in India, with a view to their reaching agreement on their immediate proposals.

(3) Following these steps, to open negotiations with the Indian leaders with a view to reaching a settlement.

(4) To take energetic measures to meet the present food crisis, both by increased

production and by requisitioning of stocks, organization of supplies and distribution, and drawing in of the mass organizations of the people themselves through representative People's Food Committees to assist in the tasks of distribution.

"We believe that such measures and such a new departure in policy, expressing confidence in the Indian people and in their ability to solve their problems, could rapidly transform the situation in India. It would remove the serious weakness which the Indian situation at present represents for the United Nations. It would open the way to enormously raising the level of Indian recruiting and military training, and enormously raising the level of Indian production. It would strengthen the confidence of all peoples of Eastern Asia in the cause of the United Nations as the cause of their own freedom.

"We believe that such measures would correspond to the wishes and feelings of the overwhelming majority of democratic opinion in this country, as recently evidenced by the unanimous vote of the National Union of Railwaymen urging the government to open up negotiations with the principal national representatives of India with a view to the establishment of an Indian National Government.

"Such a resolution is, we believe, typical of the trend of democratic opinion in this country.

"We earnestly hope that you will give serious consideration to these proposals."

ALBERT WHITE.