

Has Britain Freed India?

A discussion of what happens when the Crown Jewel of Empire is split into many segments.

By CHARLES WISLEY

THE choice is division or Balkanization. . . . We had to choose the former," said Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, "boss" of the Indian National Congress, recently, as he urged his followers to accept the British proposals for the partition of India. This epitomizes the change in the course steered by India's bourgeois nationalist leadership. They have resorted to semantic tricks to avoid facing the only real and valid alternatives: freedom or colonial slavery.

The nature of this change is even better illustrated by the strange acceptance and hearty endorsement of Prime Minister Attlee's statement on India (June 3, 1947) by such dissimilar characters as Winston Churchill, an outright imperialist, and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, until now considered a militant opponent of imperialism.

What has been happening indicates that the present situation in India is due to a crisis of British imperialism as well as of that section of the Indian national movement led by the bourgeoisie. India's big-business and land-owning classes, fearing that their position is threatened by popular forces, have readily acquiesced in a scheme whereby Britain hopes to retain a large measure of control and delay the day of independence. The Anglo-Indian agreement is thus based not on freedom and on a genuine solution of the Hindu-Moslem problem; it is a class alliance in preparation for a class war.

The necessity for such an alliance arose at the end of World War II, when the imperialist overlords in India, as elsewhere in Asia, were challenged by the vast revolutionary upsurge of the people. The British felt their hold slipping in 1945 as they grappled with the campaign of the

entire country for the release of the captured Indian National Army soldiers, whom they had put into concentration camps on treason charges. The huge demonstrations that took place in Calcutta under the leadership of Communist students and workers, joined by Congress and Moslem League followers, finally forced the British commander-in-chief to accede to the popular demand.

The discontent did not stop, however, but spread to the Royal Indian Navy and Air Force. Demanding equality of treatment with their British counterparts, the men undertook a series of work stoppages and hunger strikes. The most famous of these, the Royal Indian Navy mutiny, began on Feb. 18, 1946, and lasted for five days, involving 20,000 men in Bombay and Karachi. The working class of these and other cities fully supported the sailors and engaged in the largest sympathy strike and *hartal* (general shut-down of factories, transport, communications, stores, etc.) India had ever seen. It was a united movement of Hindus and Moslems in the face of British brutality, which, at the height of the uprising, caused 250 deaths.

The joint Hindu-Moslem freedom front which was being fashioned by these events and which was further

THE EVOLUTION OF MR. ATTLEE

**Not even Darwin's fertile brain
Would now successfully explain
How a Fabian soul and scholar
Became a slave to the Yankee dollar,
And dipped the scripture of a
Fabian
In Jewish blood, and oil Arabian.**
SADIE KLEIN.

fostered by the Communist Party, the Trade Union Congress and the *Kisan Sabhas* (Peasant Unions), together with the progressive rank-and-file movement within the Congress Party and the Moslem League, presented the gravest threat to British rule. At the same time, however, the role played by Congress and League leaders became evident when they declared their opposition to the naval uprising and the subsequent general strike. These leaders did not show any of that unity which their followers had proved to be the most essential weapon in the fight against the British.

THE British Cabinet Mission sent by Prime Minister Attlee to see what could be salvaged from the Indian Empire was quick to take advantage of this situation. Its task plainly was to halt the movement of the masses with the aid of the bourgeois leaders and to undermine the unity of the Hindu and Moslem fighters. It did so in a series of back-stairs intrigues, setting leader against leader, party against party. The fact that it was a Labor Party cabinet mission helped to mask its work. The Indian leaders played into its hands by failing to formulate joint demands. Each negotiated separately with the British in an effort to curry favor for his particular point of view.

The conduct of the Congress and League high commands paved the way for the announcement of the award by the three leaders of the mission: *they* were going to solve the Hindu-Moslem problem, they said, since the Indian leaders were apparently unable to solve it themselves. It was not surprising that, with the best interests of the British imperialists in mind, they thought that the division of India could do the trick.

Knowing that an immediate partition would meet with a violent reaction, the British proceeded in easy stages. The Cabinet Mission's plan of May 16, 1946, laid the foundations by projecting an All-India Union composed of one Hindu-majority region, two Moslem-majority regions and 562 Princely States. The subsequent British statements of Dec. 6, 1946, Feb. 20, 1947, and the recent declaration of June 3, 1947, were supplementary wedges to widen the split. The design has been completed successfully; India is today divided into Hindustan, the northwestern and northeastern sections into Pakistan, and a yet undetermined

number of "independent" and "semi-independent" Princely States and Federations.

There are just two criteria which need be applied to this scheme to test its value: Does it give promise of independence, and does it offer a solution of the Hindu-Moslem problem? The answer in both cases is no.

A glance at the position of the various sections into which India has been dismembered shows that the British plan, if adhered to, would effectively prevent the attainment of true independence.

1. The Princely States, scattered over two-fifth of India's territory, have for the last one hundred years been recognized as "royal instruments" and "breakwaters" against possible insurrection. The British Crown will relinquish its paramountcy over the States on Aug. 15, 1947, according to Prime Minister Attlee's declarations, but it will not pass its superior powers on to any government in India. This means that the rulers of these feudal anachronisms are free to do whatever they like. Already two of the largest and most powerful states—Hyderabad and Travancore—have declared their "independence." Others are likely to follow. They will con-

stitute military bulwarks for the defense of British interests. It is significant that Hyderabad has not demobilized its wartime army of 100,000 men trained by British officers. Travancore has appointed its own Trade Commissioner in London and has sold to the British all rights to the development of its rich thorium deposits. These are just two items from the accumulating evidence regarding military and economic preparations by the Princely States.

2. Two other splinters of India, the Moslem-majority areas known as Pakistan, have been whittled down in area by the partition of Bengal and the Punjab so that they will be unable to exist without close economic ties to British financial and industrial interests. In the event of any internal disturbance, the government of Pakistan has been placed in a position where it will have to request British military assistance as well. There is also the likelihood that such a government, composed predominantly of large landowners, would agree to the retention of British bases in the strategic northwestern section nearest to the borders of the Soviet Union.

3. Hindustan, the largest single component in the new India, will be

surrounded and intersected by territories remaining under British hegemony. Should its leaders cut any capers displeasing to imperialist eyes, suitable pressure can easily be applied from a dozen quarters.

To disguise the impotence conferred on India by this plan, the British call it "dominion status." What this means may be seen by examining the case of Ceylon, which is also to receive the honor. In the words of the *New York Times* of June 18, "the new British dominion will differ from other commonwealth countries in not being allowed to secede from the Empire or be independent of Britain in defense matters." It should be remembered that Trincomali, the huge British naval base on Ceylon, covers the approaches to both the east and the west coast of India.

DOES the division of India, then, offer a solution to the Hindu-Moslem problem? On the contrary. Hardly had P. C. Joshi, general secretary of the Indian Communist Party, declared that "the British partition plan will not mean peace but an immediate increase in communal warfare" when it became known that in the period from March 3 to June 23 over three thousand persons had been killed in the Punjab alone and that one-sixth of Lahore, its capital, had been destroyed. Partition and repartition will add fuel to the fires.

The acceptance of the British plan by Congress and the Moslem League is thus an indication of how deeply the leaders of the Indian National movement have fallen into the pitfalls prepared by the imperialists. These leaders have failed to take advantage of the evident British weakness by launching an all-out struggle for independence, just as they have failed to find a basis of unity among themselves as well as a solution to the Hindu-Moslem problem—a political, economic and social problem, rather than a religious one. As a result, they are embroiled in the execution of an unworkable plan.

Under the pressure of Indian industrialists and landholders, the leaders of Congress and League answer the demands of the workers and peasants fighting for freedom with the words, "Don't bother us, we are negotiating with the British."

The uneasiness of the Indian bourgeoisie is manifested by its bickering and bargaining. Indicative of their

portside patter

BY BILL RICHARDS

It is reported that Americans are drinking less but smoking more. This comes as good news to the prohibitionists who, rather than have us drink, would see us inhale first.

The Army indicates that the US is short of scientists. To make matters considerably worse, many of the available scientists have expressed a preference for lengthening the life expectancy of man.

The *Chicago Tribune* claims that the UN irritates every sore spot in the world. These include, of course, Colonel McCormick.

Senator Bricker, after declaring himself out as a presidential candidate, has endorsed Senator Taft. He should have left well enough alone.

Bricker managed to leave the way open for his selection as a "dark horse." The dark horse in this case is the one

who means "yea" when it comes out "neigh."

A Netherlands official indicates that the inhabitants of the East Indies brought the present trouble upon themselves. To him an Indonesian with a rifle and bayonet is just out to get in Dutch.

The movie industry has pledged to clean house, mostly with a view toward sex and liquor. With a view like that house cleaning could be almost a pleasure.

Drastic reductions have been made in the State Department "Voice of America" organization. The GOP was the pain in the neck that reduced the voice to a whisper.

Answering Stassen's charges, a Dewey spokesman says that the Governor will speak out when ready. After all, the little tyke is just starting to run and can't be expected to talk so soon.

troubled position are the contradictory statements of the Congress and League leaderships in reply to the various British White Papers issued during the past year. The Moslem League Council, for example, accepted Prime Minister Attlee's June 3 declaration "as a compromise." While endorsing the plan as a whole, the Council rejected the vital section dealing with the partition of Bengal and the Punjab, which has nevertheless been carried out. Similarly the Congress Working Committee accepted the scheme, reiterating at the same time its faith in the unity of India and opposing violently any declarations of "independence" by Princely States.

But the working class and peasantry are expecting the nationalist leaders to take action *now* to banish pov-

erty, famine and disease. They insist upon agrarian reform through the abolition of landlordism and industrial reconstruction through nationalization. The persecuted people of the Princely States demand help to cast off the yoke of their tyrannical rulers. The Pathans in the northwest, the Bengalis in the East and the Keralas on the southern tip of the sub-continent—and all India's eighteen nations—want democracy and self-determination in order to develop their languages and cultures. And the workers subsisting in overcrowded cities on starvation wages are engaged in a strike movement of unprecedented proportions to gain better living conditions.

The followers of Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah expect their leaders to point the way to peace and

prosperity. These leaders have been sucked into a scheme which denies independence, which perpetuates Hindu-Moslem conflict, and which will embroil India in the Anglo-American bloc directed against the Soviet Union. Their fear of mass action has led the leaders to rely on British imperialists and Indian capitalists.

But this is a makeshift alliance between weak partners. The future of India lies with the people gathered in the Trade Union Congress, the Peasant Unions, the Communist Party, the peoples' movement in the Princely States, and the progressive rank-and-file in Congress and Moslem League. They have already forced the British to offer dominion status, and they won't stop until they have gained freedom.