

INDIA DEADLOCK

By **KUMAR GOSHAL**

EVER since the ill-fated Cripps mission in the spring of 1942, news about India in the American press has been scarce. Even some sections of the liberal press have followed a hush-hush policy toward India. During a recent discussion over colonial problems, an honest editor of a liberal newspaper gave me a twofold reason for soft-pedaling the Indian scene at the present time. This editor argued that, first of all, the wrong people in the United States use the evil of imperialism to smear our ally Britain. This, he rightly contended, would lead to anti-British feeling, thereby endangering the unity of the United Nations. Therefore, he concluded, in order to preserve harmony today and tomorrow, no embarrassing criticism of the British government should be made at this time.

The problem, unfortunately, is not so simple. I have no doubt that the opinions expressed by this editor are shared by many liberals in the United States. Yet these arguments seem to me not only fallacious but conducive to the very danger these liberals wish to avoid. The isolationists, the anti-British and the profascists in America are not sporting enough fellows to shut up simply because the liberals offer no opposition. In fact, by remaining silent, the liberals leave the field to them. Nor do the wrong elements in America lack ammunition. Thus, while the news of the famine in India and William Phillips' letter to President Roosevelt about Indian conditions appeared in the American press, they were handled gingerly, as one handles repugnant objects. They were published without analysis, as were the official British explanations and denials, which, in reality, explained and denied nothing. All this was grist to the mill of the reactionaries in the United States. And the public, lacking a frame of reference, was confused, to say the least.

This danger of confusion still exists, and in fact increases as the emphasis of war is about to shift to Asia. The Phillips letter furnishes an excellent ex-

ample. It will be recalled that, among other things, Phillips said: "It would appear that we will have the prime responsibility in the conduct of the war against Japan. There is no evidence that the British intend to do more than give token assistance." Immediately there was vehement denial of this accusation from various official quarters. The British Information Service stated that "there is abundant evidence that Britain is now preparing to participate a great deal more" in the Asiatic theater of war. Anthony Eden spoke in similar vein in London. And at the Quebec conference Mr. Churchill said that the only point of difference arose over what he considered the American desire to do too much of the fighting themselves in Asia, whereas Britain wanted a greater share in that fight.

One is compelled to ask, what does the British government mean by "preparing to participate more"? Logically such preparation should include the full mobilization of the enormous resources and manpower of India. But nothing is being done in this direction. Facts prove that only the British Commonwealth is mobilized for participation, whereas the mobilization of India, the keystone of the Empire, is studiously avoided. Is it difficult to imagine how this plays into the hands of those who are actively engaged in creating anti-British feeling in America?

TO DISCUSS India's contribution to the war against Japan, it is necessary to take a brief look at India today. Most of the Indian leaders are in jail incommunicado. The people's living conditions are beyond description. There is every indication that the famine, which took such a heavy toll of life last year, is casting its ominous shadow over the land again, because no basic steps have been

taken by the government to avert it.

The outbreaks of violence provoked by the arrest of the Indian National Congress leaders in August 1942, have died down; but the methods used to suppress them have left a legacy of bitterness and anger. It is important to note that the outbreaks, confined largely to student groups, died down not so much because of British bayonets as because of the ceaseless educational campaign conducted especially by the members of the Trade Union Congress, the Communist Party, and the *Kisan Sabha* (Peasant League), which kept the larger issues of the war alive in the hearts of the Indian people.

Political deadlock continues in India even though after his release from prison last May, Gandhi made a series of proposals opening the door to a peaceful solution. Despite his repeated denials, the British government continued accusing Gandhi of advising the Indian people to sabotage the United Nations' war effort and of preventing Hindu-Moslem unity by opposing the Moslem League's demand for a separate Moslem state. Gandhi now positively urges the Indians to support the war effort to the best of their ability; he has conceded the right of the Moslems to determine their future status in a free India through a plebiscite in the predominantly Moslem areas; he has invited the Moslem League to join the Congress in its demand for a provisional Indian national government for the duration of the war and has asked the government to release the Congress leaders and reopen negotiations with that aim in view.

Gandhi's proposals brought new hope of a solution to India. Public opinion, both in India and in Britain, strongly supported Gandhi. Irrespective of religious denomination or political affiliation, all Indian newspapers and organizations called for the release of the Indian leaders and the establishment of a national government. They were joined by the Indian industrialists J. R. D. Tata and Sir Homi Modi,



who asserted that delay by the British government will prove that they "are determined to carry on as they are doing, regardless of the feeling throughout the country that their persistence in a purely negative policy is against the true interests of India." Many Labor MP's, British authors and journalists issued similar statements. But the British government refuses to budge an inch from its stand. Viceroy Lord Wavell has three times refused to hold an interview with Gandhi.

Thus, political stalemate continues and the British government continues to give excuses for the maintenance of the status quo and vague promises for the future. It is necessary, once and for all, to sift these excuses and look squarely at these promises in order to reach the heart of the Indian problem.

The British government states that nothing can be done in the course of the war to establish a national government because of lack of unity between the Congress and the Moslem League and also because it would require a constitutional change, impossible during the war; that India's contribution to the war effort has not suffered because of the present situation, and there has been tremendous industrial expansion in India during the war; and that the Cripps proposals have offered freedom to India after the war.

This is complete sham. The government itself is preventing Congress-Moslem League unity by keeping the Congress leaders in jail incommunicado. There is no insuperable obstacle to the establishment of a national government, as was pointed out by Cripps himself in October 1939. It is true that Cripps used the same excuse in 1942, on the basis that a Japanese invasion of India was imminent; but no such threat of invasion exists today.

India's contribution to the war, though not inconsiderable, has been negligible compared to her potentialities. In natural resources she ranks next to the United States and the Soviet Union; yet she has contributed only such items as burlap, puttees, tents, leather goods, small ammunition, etc., but no tanks, ships, or planes. Indian mills and factories derive their power from coal and electricity. But the output of coal has decreased sharply, and the slight increase in electric power output has been nowhere near enough to offset the loss in coal production. The total supply of industrial power is actually less than it was in 1937-38. What has really happened is that a very large proportion of

existing production has been diverted from civilian to military needs, but industrial activity as a whole has not increased. The fact remains also that with a population of nearly 400,000,000, the number of Indians fighting in the British Army is minute.

Wavell and Leopold Amery, Secretary of State for India, have accused Gandhi of failure to offer a constructive program; yet with full power in their hands, they themselves have done nothing constructive whatsoever. No proper steps have been taken to alleviate the famine situation, and the program presented by the *Kisan Sabha* has been ignored. There is an acute shortage of food supplies, but no rationing or price control. Price levels have reached dizzy heights, many items costing 1,000 percent over the pre-war price. The general cost of living has risen by 250 percent to 300 percent. Inflation is rife, speculation and black market operations flourish unchecked, and the vast majority of the people have been reduced to utter destitution.

It is true that other countries have suffered casualties and serious privations in the course of the war. But in India's case the dead number nearly 5,000,000, and these died not in defense of their country but from famine which could have been prevented by a competent government. And the severity of the privations the people are suffering today could have been—and still can be—lessened by proper government action. India's contribution to the war effort, so far, has been largely negative; the only condition under which she can make more positive contribution requires, as William Phillips reported to President Roosevelt, the establishment of a provisional national government, the demand for which is virtually unanimous in India.

PHILLIPS also stated that the British government should declare that "India will achieve her independence at a specific date after the war." To this the British Information Service has countered that "Britain has gone a good deal further than offering India self-government on a specific date. The Cripps proposals left the date to the decision of the Indian leaders themselves." But the fact is that the Cripps proposals did not offer independence to India. The Cripps proposals also stated that the British government will transfer political power to an Indian government provided that the various parties and groups in India reached a prior agreement

among themselves with regard to a constitutional form of government. In case of failure to reach an agreement, provision was made for dissenting provinces of British India as well as the Indian princes' states to stay outside the union and establish their own relationships with the British Crown.

Admittedly there is lack of unity in India—but so is there such a lack, in varying degrees, in Britain, China, and the United States. The greater unity the Indians develop, the stronger they will necessarily be; from this standpoint the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting (Jinnah is head of the Moslem League), though it has temporarily ended without any definite agreement, is a great improvement over the past. It is well to bear in mind that a perfect solution of the minority problems in a country as large as India is a slow process. Gandhi's appeal to the people to exert their pressure on the leaders indicates that there is already a greater understanding than ever before among Hindus and Moslems. By putting undue emphasis on the communal question, the British government is in effect asking for an impossible ideal unity in India before it is willing, presumably, to part with power. In the debate over India in the House of Lords, the Undersecretary of State for India, Lord Munster, significantly stated, "Let it not be forgotten, that if an agreement is reached between the Congress Party and the Moslem League . . . there are still a number of minorities to be solved." Under the best of circumstances there will always be many of the 562 Indian princes, whose sovereignty is guaranteed by "solemn treaties" with the British government, barring the road to freedom for India. This last point was the biggest "joker" in the Cripps proposals.

The reason for British stubbornness is not far to seek. As long as there is a possibility of the pre-war world economy being restored in the postwar period, Britain and other imperial powers will continue tightening their hold on colonial possessions for combined reasons of profit, security, power, and prestige. Under an imperialist economy of restricted production, controlled markets and monopoly of natural resources, India is indispensable to Britain.

This is the heart of the Indian problem; all other arguments are mere eye-wash. *India and all other colonial countries can become free through comparatively peaceful means only if their freedom does not adversely affect the econ-*

