INDIA WATCHES . . .


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early stage in the war was already negotiating with Nehru, is unaware of the futility of a scheme which stopped with only that. And rightly or wrongly it is generally assumed here that Cripps must have had some pretty definite conditions in mind on the subject of India when he accepted office in the War Cabinet.

In this connection it may be noted as a fact of real importance that following his entry into the War Cabinet and the success of his first speech from the government bench, Cripps has achieved a position which nobody has occupied in any British government at any time during the past ten years except for Churchill during the couple of months before the fall of the Chamberlain government. By which I mean the position of a man whose resignation would almost automatically involve the resignation and fall of the government itself. That is a fact and an important one. And it may be assumed that it will be in the tug of war around the Indian problem—on which Churchill's own views are notoriously strong and old-fashioned—that Cripps will have the first chance to exert his power in a seriously controversial issue.

Just as one example of the sort of controversy that is in progress, it is worth mentioning that the interests in India desirous of establishing there immediately an automobile engine industry have still not received any green light either from the government of India or the India office. Encouraging is the fact that despite failures and interminable delays in the past, Indian industry is still ready with plans for immediate establishment of a motor industry.

The advantages are obvious. As I have previously reported (New MASSES, February 17) at present there exists a tragically ridiculous situation wherein engines and chassis are exported to India by the present long and dangerous routes, and all that is done in India is to put the bodies—in some cases the armored bodies—on the machines. It is suggested, I believe correctly, that the Indian company which wants to turn out complete Indian automobiles for military use is closely linked with Chrysler. And it is further suggested that it is because of this link that certain British interests have so far successfully prevented any progress being made.

I think this is true. And right here it seems to me is an example of the possibilities for that sort of Anglo-American cooperation in the defense of India which I wrote of in my last dispatch on this subject. For if, and there is no denying it, it is desirable that India should as swiftly as possible establish an automobile industry, and if one of the important snags in the way is some rivalry between British and American automobile interests, surely it is not beyond the wit or the power of the production executives here and in Washington to get this difficulty, pattern of many, many others, ironed out quickly. And with the Japanese advancing on Rangoon, quickly is the operative word.

Claude Cockburn.

What My India Can Do

In response to Claude Cockburn's recent article on "India—Giant Arsenal Ignored" (NEW MASSES, February 17), we received a number of letters from prominent Indians residing in the country, many of which are printed in Readers Forum on page 21. Mr. S. Chandrasekhar, a prominent Indian journalist living in this country, sends us the following elaboration on Mr. Cockburn's cable—The Editors.

For decisive success in this war we need men, materiel, and morale. As for men there is no dearth in India; according to 1941 census figures just announced, India's population has reached 388,500,000. But the highest official figure for the Indian army is only 1,000,000. There should be no difficulty in raising an army of nearly 5,000,000, if the British government in India can be persuaded to shed their caste prejudices. We can easily raise 5,000,000 of fighting age, not only from India's farms and fields, but also from India's eighteen universities and the hundreds of affiliated colleges. For a long time Indian youth leaders have been urging military training for Indian university students. But nothing has been done apart from the isolation training of the Indian University Training Corps. There should be no difficulty in raising an army now.

But mere men, inexperienced and above all ill-equipped, will be of little help against the mechanized and highly disciplined Japanese units. Where then is the materiel? Full equipment of arms and ammunition, tanks and torpedoes will have to be rushed from the United States. India is already under the Lend-Lease Act, and there is an Indian Government Purchasing Mission here headed by one of India's distinguished statesmen, Sir Shamsunnah Chetty.

But not all this materiel need come from America or the United Nations. India herself can be made to supply a considerable part of her war needs, if only the obstacles for rapid Indian industrialization could be removed. It is amazing but true that even today the old policy of hemming and hedging Indian industrialization continues. Till now Indian efforts to set up an automobile plant in Bombay with the aid of American engineers have been sabotaged. While everybody agrees that the defeat of the United Nations in the Pacific are due to lack of aerial superiority, nothing much is being done in India in this direction beyond the establishment of an airplane assembly plant in Mysore, South India.

In terms of resources India is a rich country. Her foodstuffs are enormous, if only they can be properly conserved and distributed. She produces enormous quantities of colza and cashews, groundnuts, rope, sesame, and linseed. She grows great quantities of barley, coffee, maize, sugar, tea, tobacco, and wheat. In rice and jute she has a world monopoly. In cotton and hydro-electric potential she is second only to the United States. She has the largest livestock population of any country in the world. She has large deposits of iron ore, copper, and manganese. She has considerable quantities of tin and tungsten, zinc and mica. India is a classic example of appalling poverty in the midst of great plenty.

But what of morale? Here is the crux of the problem. There has always been a melancholy gulf between promises and performances as far as India is concerned. India's cry for political freedom and economic industrialization fell on deaf ears even in the United States, for India has been always considered as a peculiarly British problem. But today it looks as though many of our battles are going to be fought on the fields and farms of Calcutta, Madras, and Colombo.

In the recent Atlantic Charter Mr. Churchill went beyond President Roosevelt's signature and proclaimed in Manchester not long ago that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to India. We don't know what the American government did about this tactless but honest pronouncement. Even today, beyond offering a couple of fat salaried jobs to government nominees in the Imperial war councils, nothing has been done to arouse the masses and give them a cause to fight for. Can we then wonder if some Indians even today think that this is a British war and what is happening is nothing but her nemesis? Then how can there be morale?

That dogged determination to fight the Axis to the last ditch can come only if India's postwar freedom is promised, not only by the British government but with the reassurance of the United States. That will give them a cause to fight for and a spirit to fight with. As one Englishman put it recently, "The world will be amazed at what India would then do in the world anti-fascist struggle." If we may venture a guess the Indian people can become the "Russians" of the anti-Axis struggle in the East. India has been long standing at the bar of justice. It is late, but not too late. Will Anglo-American statesmanship overcome its shortsightedness and act before it is too late?

S. Chandrasekhar.