

# India in the War

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THE war has spread and now envelops the whole world. Indian territory is within the zone of warlike operations by sea, land and air. General Wavell's headquarters have announced that Eastern Bengal, Assam and Bihar are within the range of bombing planes. Far away in the west, Bombay, the port for supplies to the Middle East and to the Soviet Union, also faces peril; the Bombay Government has called for fire watchers. The grimness and destruction of war has now been visited on the Indian people who have no responsibility for the policies of past years and decades that have plunged humanity into war and the terrors of Nazi-fascist savagery. But they cannot seek seclusion from its consequences or from the call it makes to all people who value freedom.

Just outside India's borders actual war rages. Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Hong Kong, Thailand and Burma have been attacked. India's nationals have already had the baptism of war at the hands of the Japanese. For in the Federated Malay States are nearly half a million Indians out of a total population of two millions. In Singapore and Burma are vast Indian populations. Indian soldiers and armed police are part of the defenders of these territories. Equipment must needs reach these lands partly from India. The gateway to the Indian Ocean now stands threatened. With the American reverses and the grave British losses in the Pacific this threat becomes more sinister.

India's north-western flank also faces danger. For decades, almost ever since there was a British Empire in India, her rulers have professed to guard her north-western frontiers against an invasion by Russia and "raids" by hostile tribesmen. At the moment there is irony in this; for the Soviet Union bars the Nazis in their eastward march, and has both by her might and the example of her civilisation neutralised the dangers by way of Iran.

On her west also India's strategic position proclaims its significance just

as much. The supply routes to the Soviet Union and the supplies themselves are gravely related to the situation in respect of India.

Thus both the major strategy and the needs in men and material for the world war as a whole, the supplies to and collaboration with the U.S.S.R. (whose historic resistance, and now counter-attack, is the central factor in the overcoming of fascism), the defence of India herself and the meeting of the new enemy in Eastern Asia and the Pacific, cast India into a most significant role which can be neglected only at great peril. Not only her strategic position but her immense material resources which await utilisation, her vast man power which awaits mobilisation, and her passionate and anti-fascist fervour which remains to be unleashed, are all potent factors which add immensely to her importance.

But what is the situation in India to-day? After more than two years since the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, proclaimed in New Delhi that India was at war, these immense resources remain largely sterile, the man power unmobilised for war or production. Indian economy is still partly anarchic and partly conditioned to meet the rapacious greed of vastly dilated vested interests. Proclaiming the necessity of supplying the Eastern theatre from India and of pooling Britain's resources in the East, the British Government, in the days of Mr. Herbert Morrison at the Ministry of Supply, set up what has now become the Eastern Group with its headquarters in India. It has aroused the antagonism of Indian industry and public opinion; and is openly suspected of being concerned about the protection of Dominion and British interests at the expense of the Indian manufacturer and producer and the Indian masses. It seeks to rally Indian resources by keeping the effort to do so out of the competence of Indian public opinion and the currents of Indian national life. Its organisation is notoriously inefficient and wasteful. It is incapable, even if it desired to do so,

of enlisting public fervour and enthusiasm. It is afraid of Indian industrial development which may compete with imperial and monopolistic interests.

The results are only too plainly visible in the figures officially produced. Only the other day Mr. Amery announced triumphantly that the ordnance factories in India employed fifty thousand workers! There are five million workers in large-scale industry in India, about twenty-five to thirty million industrial workers altogether, and more than a hundred and fifty million adults who are capable of work in the whole country. India has built (or is building) one ship in the last hundred years or so. Yet she has the facilities, the man power, the talent and we are told even the necessary capital to embark on shipbuilding on a much larger scale. In the face of the huge losses at sea and the contingencies that loom so grimly before us, one would imagine that it is elementary prudence to spare no effort to increase all available tonnage against Hitler and the Axis powers. India has built one aeroplane, a trainer, last June or thereabouts. She may have built another since. The plant itself in Mysore State, not British India, was built in the face of official and British opposition, and is one for the purposes of "assembly." Mr. Amery, repeatedly questioned in the House of Commons about industrial development, the manufacture of internal combustion engines, the making of automobiles, ships and other implements now imperatively needed, has always returned a blank "No." His argument is that it is now "too late to start" industries that will be of use in this war. Before the war, it was considered no use starting them since they were not required for war purposes, so it is difficult to discover what is an opportune time.

This contrasts with the phenomenon of the Soviet Government moving factories bodily and building plants in deserts and mountain sides and everywhere else; the Chinese equipping themselves with small-scale and large-scale equipment in the course of their war behind the lines in the agricultural interior; while in Britain itself every garage is converted into a factory.

Production, yet more production is now the cry. Adequate production to

replace the colossal toll of wider war alone can ensure victory. Hitler's European conquests secured for him plant, equipment, material, grain, fuel and raw materials which have vastly augmented Nazi striking power. This balance against the free forces has to be redressed, and whatever hinders that redress is a gift to the Nazis. Great parts of the world from which the Allies could and used to draw their raw materials and equipment, are either in enemy hands or cut off by enemy action on sea or land or ear-marked for the heaviest commitments. There are in India vast unexploited reserves of material easily accessible and stupendous man power lying idle and waste.

No one can dismiss lightly the "time" element in production. India while it has a very large-scale industry, is mostly undeveloped, and it is probable that the leeway to be made up is considerable. But the present exigencies demand supreme effort, and even a moderate effort could produce vast results given the will, the enthusiasm and the co-operation of the total elements of the nation.

These elements are passionately anti-fascist. The outlook of the Indian National Movement towards world affairs has been developed in the context of a British policy that in the post-1919 period sought imperial gains and consolidation, and since the emergence of fascism aided and abetted it unashamedly on every front where at present freedom stands assailed. This history is so well known as to need no recapitulation. So anti-fascist passion in India became synonymous with opposition to British foreign policy, its diplomacy and its wars. When war broke out in 1939 the Indian National Movement recognised that the assailant was the most bloodthirsty fascist, and what was at stake would ultimately affect such freedoms as existed in the world. India realised, too, that Hitler's main aim, at even that time, was the Soviet Union and the world beyond. It hoped that events would bring about a change in British policy. This has happened to a certain extent.

The Nazi attack on the U.S.S.R. has altered the character of the war for India. Nehru's first political utterance when he

came out of jail was to proclaim this change. The war, he said, "was not an imperialist war as it was when it started." The Nazi attack on the U.S.S.R. has altered its character, he said, but it had not unfortunately changed Britain's attitude to India.

Britain is now an ally of the Soviet Union, and fighting with all her resources and a united people behind her government to achieve a victory against fascism. Her factories are working overtime, and her entire man (and woman) power is sought to be mobilised for this purpose. Yet in India her policy nullifies this effort. It is a stupid policy, its tragedy may overwhelm us when it is too late. Instead of unleashing the passionate and vital forces of anti-fascism in India, the British Government imprisoned its most pronounced champions into jails and concentration camps. Some of them, including Nehru and Azad, are now freed; but thousands, including the Communists, Socialists and trade union and working-class leaders, are still in concentration camps or jails.

The releases recently effected register an advance which we may not underestimate or neglect. It is a minor victory for public opinion both here and abroad. It also offers opportunities for creating new situations advancing the common struggle.

The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress meets this month, and will no doubt reach momentous decisions. These are likely to include agitation for increased defence of India, for more vigorous activity for the development of resources, for greater assistance to China and the supplies to the U.S.S.R. But such a policy, combined with opposition to the Government, is wasteful; and would not have the same results in material and man power response as the leadership of a government by the nation's most vital elements. This alone can fully mobilise India.

To this latter solution, which appears so opportune and imperative, the British Government so far offers total opposition. The statements of the Secretary of State and the Premier has aggravated Indian opinion even outside Congress circles. It has alienated even the Moslem League. But, says Nehru, in spite of all this "the

situation is not irretrievable." It must be retrieved. It is the task of the British people as of the Indians.

On the Indian side there is willingness, nay anxiety, to co-operate and be aligned in the general and common struggle against fascist ambition. This will express itself in Congress decisions and lead to new policies. There would be an opportunity which, if grasped, would create an amazingly new situation.

Our own task is to give all our support, to rally public opinion in this country, which will compel the Government to bring about a settlement. It is not merely a matter of settling the long-standing problem of Indian freedom, but of facing and solving one of the outstanding issues of war strategy, war production, political warfare and defence of territory against newer fascist attacks in the East. The grave events of the last few weeks make it more urgent than ever before.

The immediate step is that the British Government should instruct the Viceroy to negotiate with the Indian national leaders forthwith, agreeing beforehand to the setting up of a government under national leadership which would command the acceptance of the great majority of the people. Such a government is not only possible, but eminently practicable. It would set to work to release the political prisoners, establish civil liberty, turn at once to industrial development, supply the fighting armies as best as possible, release India's man power in a way that will amaze the world, and it will grow more food for the men and women who have to stand the increased strain. More than all perhaps, it would proclaim to all the world that India's four hundred millions are now fully enlisted in the world struggle against fascism; that they stand with the millions of China, of the U.S.S.R., of the U.S.A. and of Britain.

This is no distant prospect. We may view it just as a prospect only at our peril. It must be realised and realised now. A speedy settlement with India is imperative. It is no concession to India, it is no bargain by the Indians or surrender by the British, but part of the war strategy. It is as important as any other major factor for victory.