

HOW BRITONS FEEL ABOUT INDIA

R. Palme Dutt cables that democratic opinion has taken "a critical line on the arrests and urged immediate negotiations." Trial ballots in big factories show a ten to one vote for independence.

London (by cable).

THE situation in India is grave. Grave for the Indian people. Grave for the British people and grave for the cause of the United Nations. It is of the most urgent concern for all the United Nations to exert their endeavors to overcome the present crisis and find a basis for the free and honorable cooperation of the great Indian nation in the alliance of the United Nations for the defeat of fascism and for the freedom of all nations, including India. With fascism at the gates of India, threatening directly to conquer India and to utilize India for its aims of world domination, there is internal crisis and conflict, division between rulers and ruled, arrests of the principal and best known popular leaders, sporadic disorder and police firing—a conflict that must be watched with grim satisfaction by the Japanese generals on the frontiers, or the Axis propagandists in Berlin.

In this most desperate stage of the war when the Axis is making its supreme thrust; when the Soviet people are straining all their forces to resist the Nazi offensive; when the Chinese people are battling against odds; when Japan threatens to attack Siberia; when the Anglo-American powers are straining their resources and need all for the external enemy, not for internal fronts; when the Moscow conference is meeting and the issue of the second front is in the balance—the opening of conflict in India is equivalent to a victory for the Axis and a defeat for the United Nations.

IT IS today universally admitted by all observers that the loss of Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, Java, Borneo, and the speedy advance of the Japanese in these regions, was above all due to the lack of cooperation between the governments and the peoples. Will the lesson be learned or must this experience be repeated in India with deadly consequences for the whole world fight against fascism? We cannot afford to thrust aside 400,000,000 potential allies and turn them into enemies. We cannot afford to provoke a needless conflict in India for the benefit of fascism.

For this conflict is needless, unjustifiable, indefensible; it is a conflict between opponents of fascism—between two nations who are equally opposed to fascism. The 400,000,000 of India, one-fifth of mankind, are no allies of fascism. They passionately desire national freedom and have struggled for it for decades, with signal self-sacrifice, heroism, and solidarity; but with the exception of an insignificant minority represented by Subhas Chandra Bose in Berlin, they no less passionately hate fascism.

Their sympathies are with the Chinese people, with the Soviet people. Their leaders have understood and proclaimed that the cause of Indian freedom is bound up with world freedom and with world victory over fascism. For the past ten years, under the leadership of men like Nehru, they have played their part in the vanguard of the international anti-fascist front. And they played it at a time when many who now, from the places of power in Britain, denounce them for failing to fight fascism were themselves praising and helping fascism. India is far more deeply and sincerely anti-fascist than many national government ministers in Britain. The demand of the Indian National Congress today is for the recognition of a free India as an ally of the United Nations to mobilize the armed resistance of their people against fascist aggression, under a popular government of their own leaders in whom they have confidence, but fully accepting the supreme military leadership and command of the United Nations.

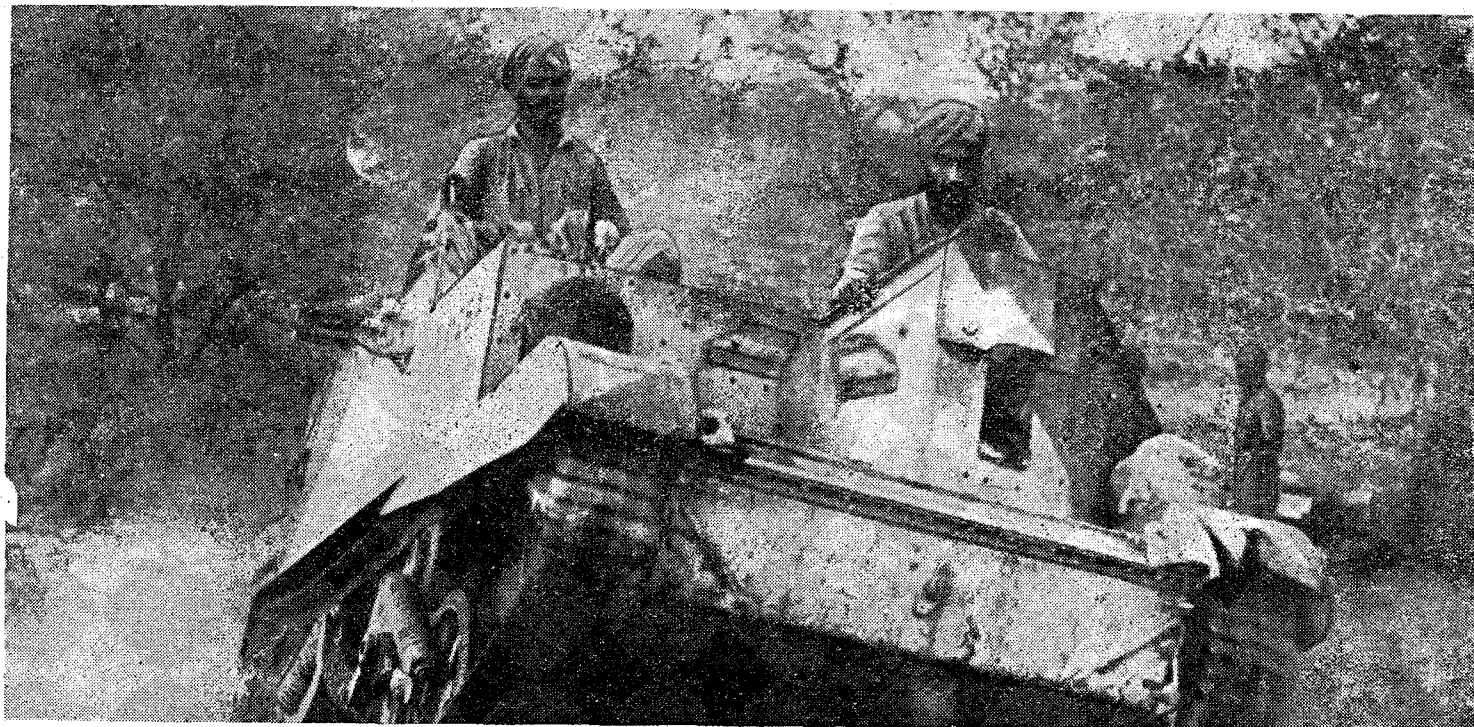
What sincere democrat or supporter of victory over fascism could oppose such a demand? Yet with all the cards stacked against fascism in India and on the side of the United Nations, with ninety percent of articulate political opinion eager to fight on the side of the United Nations, the policy of the British government has succeeded in performing the brilliant feat of turning the bulk of this popular movement and feeling into bitter hostility, or even active resistance. What are we to think of a policy which produces such fruits? The most outstanding military fiascos of this war can hardly compare with this political fiasco. What are we to think of a policy by which a man like Nehru, a symbol of international anti-fascism, finds himself against his will thrust into a position in which he appears to be struggling in a front opposed to the front of the United Nations?

How has this tragic situation come about? The significance of the transformation of the war in June 1941 was well understood by the Indian national movement. The release of the principal Congress leaders opened the possibility of a new orientation and the beginning of cooperation. The Bardoli resolution of the Indian National Congress in December 1941 declared for armed resistance to the Axis as an ally of the United Nations, provided India could mobilize under a national government. Gandhi passed out of the leadership because of his disagreement with this resolution and the abandonment of non-violence. The way was open, given only a minimum of statesmanship and favorable response from the side of Britain.

The Cripps mission in April destroyed this favorable position. The Cripps mission did immeasurable harm in India. It failed because, under cover of a highly dubious postwar plan, it rejected out of hand any form of responsible national government now. For Indian participation in the war the Congress went to extreme lengths of concession, offering to serve under a British viceroy provided they had real responsibility and powers, and to accept a British commander-in-chief. In vain. They were told that British power must remain dictatorial and absolute, that Indian ministers might at the most control canteens and stationery. They were told to take it or leave it. This take it or leave it attitude gave the impression that there was no real desire to negotiate but rather to prepare the grounds for a future conflict.

Deterioration in the political situation rapidly followed. The British government declared that nothing more could be done. The National Congress, frustrated in its desire to cooperate, slid down the inclined plane toward non-cooperation. Leadership passed back into the hands of Gandhi, the pacifist evil genius of Indian politics. Realistic anti-fascist leaders and advocates of cooperation like Nehru and Azad passed into the wake of Gandhi and his dangerous proposals for a non-cooperation campaign. Unscrupulous reactionary propaganda at once seized on the characteristic utterances of Gandhi, advocating pacifism and appeasement, to smear the whole national movement, although such policies were explicitly repudiated by the national movement.

The Congress resolution was promulgated in July and finally adopted on August 7 (against an opposition vote of thirteen led by the Indian Communist Party, whose restoration of legal rights was a recognition of their growing political influence and strength). The resolution, while reaffirming sympathy for the United Nations and the demand for recognition of India as a free ally under a national government for armed resistance to fascism, added the threat of a civil disobedience



Indian soldiers have distinguished themselves fighting the Nazis in Africa. India's independence would mean mobilization of its people for armed resistance.

campaign in the event of refusal. It is not difficult to understand how sincere Indian patriots and anti-fascists, goaded and provoked by the refusal of their reasonable demands and unable to see the possibility of the positive alternative policy which the Indian Communist Party advocated to combine the pressing of their just political demands with active cooperation in the war effort and resolute resistance to all policies of non-cooperation—it is not difficult to understand how they fell into the fatal trap of adopting the policy of non-cooperation, which could only mean division in the face of fascism, suicidal to the interests of Indian freedom.

BUT while we must deplore this failure of leadership, we cannot but recognize that the heaviest responsibility rests with the reactionary policy which refused India's just demands and thus provoked such an outcome. At last the Congress showed every desire to reach a settlement and to negotiate; the resolution was revised to stress the desire for a practical settlement and for cooperation in armed resistance to fascism; the final speeches of Gandhi and Nehru stressed the desire to negotiate. Within a few hours the wholesale arrests followed, and in turn provoked civil conflict and some sporadic disorders disowned by the Congress, and active repression with widespread police and military action.

It is difficult to see how the policy of repression in preference to negotiation can be regarded as justified by the situation. There was no immediate urgency. No order to civil disobedience had been given. There were obviously no plans ready. The aim of the Congress was manifestly to negotiate. It is not easy to escape the impression that the precipitation of the conflict in this way was dictated by reactionary interests in ruling circles which were more concerned with utilizing a favorable tactical opportunity for crushing the Congress and the popular movement in India than in winning Indian cooperation against Japan.

We need now to do all in our power to remedy this dangerous situation. We must press for the immediate reopening of negotiations with a view to the speediest establishment of a provisional popular government in India, representative of all political sections and leaders who are prepared to cooperate in the common task of armed resistance to fascist aggression as an ally of the United Nations. On this basis we must strive to end the crisis and to establish that cooperation which is equally essential in the interests of India, of Britain,

and of all the United Nations. Important sections of democratic opinion in Britain are already pressing for such a solution.

It is unfortunate that the declaration officially issued by the Labor Party and Trades Union Congress on August 12, by swinging completely behind the reactionary policy pursued, and directing its criticism only against the Congress, has failed to respond to the urgency of the situation and is only calculated to deepen the gulf between the peoples of the two countries.

BUT this is not representative of the general body of labor and democratic opinion. Such press organs as the *Manchester Guardian*, *News Chronicle*, *Evening Standard*, and also the *Daily Herald* (until the official Labor declaration compelled it to reverse its policy) have taken a critical line on the arrests and urged immediate negotiations. The Miners Federation national conference on August 1, representing 500,000 miners, unanimously adopted a resolution for the reopening of negotiations on the basis of the recognition of India's claim to independence. Trial ballots in big factories have shown a ten to one vote for Indian independence. The campaign of the 50,000 members of the Communist Party has followed the lines of the national conference resolution adopted on May 25, 1942, which declared: "To win the cooperation of the 400,000,000 of India in the common struggle, we must recognize the independence of India as an equal partner in the alliance of the United Nations and reopen negotiations with the National Congress for the establishment of a National Government with full powers, subject only to such restrictions as the Indian people are willing to accept in the interests of India and of the common struggle against the Axis powers."

This demand has won enthusiastic endorsement at crowded mass demonstrations all over the country, as at the mighty rallies of 60,000 Londoners in Trafalgar Square on May 25 and July 26, which combined the demand for the second front with the Indian demand. There is no doubt that the influence of world opinion, and especially of the other chief partners of the alliance of the United Nations, will make itself felt in relation to the present Indian crisis, which is of urgent concern to all, and assist in reaching such a solution. American democratic opinion can play a very important part in mobilizing support for such a policy and exerting its influence to help in securing its adoption.

R. PALME DUTT.