

The Indian Revolution at the Cross-roads

By Max Shachtman

The resolution adopted by the Indian National Congress last month on the initiative of Mahatma Ghandi, which gives formal approval to "complete Indian independence" from the British empire as the goal of the Congress, is of tremendous importance, not so much for itself but for the temper of the Indian masses which it mirrors. And what characterizes the present spirit of the latter is much less the lukewarm if sonorous phrases of the elements which dominated the Congress than the militant action of the workers in Bombay on Independence Day (1-26-30) particularly the mill workers who attempted to hoist the Red Flag not only in place of the Union Jack but also of the red-green-white flag of Indian nationalism.

To grasp the enormous significance of a genuine revolutionary movement in India, a land embracing some three hundred million people—a fifth of the world's population—its place in the mosaic of British imperialism must first be established.

A Keystone in the British Empire

Out of every ten people in the British Empire, black, brown, yellow and white, more than seven are in India alone. From the very first days of the conquest of India by Britain and the ousting of the Portuguese and other mercantile pirates, the country has been a source of almost inexhaustible loot for the Englishman. The British bourgeoisie still remembers with satisfaction and longing the days of the notorious East India Company, whose profits frequently mounted to 250 percent a year. The period of ruthless primitive accumulation for British industrial capitalism was greatly accelerated by the plundering of India and the impoverishment of its millions. As a source of markets and raw materials for Britain India has occupied an almost unrivalled position in the scheme of the Empire.

In more recent times, it has offered an immense field for capital investments. The British investment in India today is estimated at more than one billion pounds sterling, or a larger sum than that of all the other British dominions combined. In four post-war years alone, from 1919 to 1923, British capital exported to India increased 1800 percent, from 1,400,000 pounds to 25,300,000 pounds, and constituted a change in the capital exported by Britain to all parts of the world from six-tenths of one percent to fourteen and four-tenths percent of the total, or an increase in the Indian proportion of British capital exports of 2400 percent. India is not only a source for capital exports. One-tenth of general British exports go to India—more than any other single country in the world—and represents 70 percent of India's total imports.

India has even more than an economic-financial importance in the British Empire; it is of incalculable strategical value. It is not for nothing that priceless India has been the central objective of British Mediterranean and Oriental policy for virtually centuries. It is not for nothing that every European maritime power has sought enviously at one time or another for a route to India. The fabulous riches that spurred Columbus to cross the Atlantic exist today in an even more substantial and developed form. The Gibraltar guards not only Egypt but India, Malta and Cyprus are stations on the road to India and so is the Suez canal. A look at the map will further show that India forms the apex of a rough triangle, the basis of which is formed by a line drawn between South Africa and Australia; that India is a guardian towering over Afghanistan and Arabia, in which England is heavily interested; that India neighbors upon that second great Oriental field for imperialist buccaneering, China; that India forms an unrivalled basis for Asiatic and Pacific power for the country that dominates it.

Loss of India a Fatal Blow

The loss of India would be a fatal blow to the British Empire, compared to which the loss of even Ireland or being driven entirely out of China would take second place. That is why England prizes India as highly as a pauper would value the Koh-i-noor. Not a single political party or group in England, with the exception of the Communists has the slightest intention of ever granting India genuine freedom. The policy of England towards its possession has been stated with harsh frankness in the noted "steel frame" speech of Lloyd George in Commons (8-2-1922): "That Britain under no circumstances... has responsibility in India

is a cardinal principle, not merely of the present Government, but of any Government which will command the confidence of the people in this country... I can see no period when India can dispense with the guidance and the assistance of this small nucleus of the British Civil Service... They are the steel frame of the whole structure."

With no essential changes, this policy has been pursued in India by every British government, be it Tory, Liberal, Coalition—or Labor. In two words, therefore, to find the forces and interests making for a movement to liberate India, one must look anywhere but in the ranks of British imperialism. The latter will never voluntarily yield its domination. The driving forces of the Indian revolution are consequently centered in India itself, even more so now than a few years ago because of the weakening of the revolutionary proletarian movement in England—the only other reservoir of Indian freedom.

What elements in India constitute these driving forces? In the first place, they are not the big Indian bourgeoisie or the native princes. The latter exist largely on the sufferance of Britain and are more or less satisfied with their present status. Imperialism exerts no particularly harassing pressure upon them. The former is an avowedly counter-revolutionary force. Much as it would like a larger share in the unequal partnership it has established with its British master, it likes infinitely more the suppression of every mass movement that threatens its social and economic position in the slightest. There is no movement away from Britain that has not been opposed by the native big bourgeoisie and the Liberal Federation. They can be counted upon to act hand in hand with the British bourgeoisie in crushing any struggle of the masses for the improvement of their economic conditions, not to speak of their liberation from the imperialist yoke.

The Nationalist Bourgeoisie

The second factor in the Indian struggle is the petty bourgeoisie in its various sections: landlords, merchants, professionals, small manufacturers, civil service employees, students, intellectuals, etc., etc. Having no really broad basis, and no over-secure economic position, they must rely for their troops upon the millions of workers and peasants. They are for the development of a native industry, by bounties if possible (Swaraj Party), for protection, for the decreasing of the heavy burdens of taxation, for the abolition of the irksome color discrimination that exists in governmental institutions, for a more decisive voice in the management of India's affairs and destiny.

But the national petty bourgeoisie constantly vacillates between its troops—the workers and peasants—and the class interests to which it is inherently inclined, to the big bourgeoisie and to compromise with British imperialism. It has always been ready in the past to accept some form of dominion status, which will allow it greater freedom of action and a larger measure of influence in India, without allowing the movement of the masses to "get out of hand". It lives in respect for the might of the British master and fear of a developing movement of the workers and peasants. On more than one occasion it has already demonstrated that when the miserably impoverished masses really enter the path of struggle against imperialism the role of the petty bourgeoisie is to sap the vitality of the movement, to misdirect its energies, to curb and limit it, and if necessary to betray it into the hands of British imperialism.

The Indian national bourgeoisie cannot and will not lead a revolutionary struggle against imperialism. It cannot and will not solve any of the fundamental problems that now strangle the development of India. It cannot and will not free the workers and peasants from the British and Indian chains that fetter them. If anything, its role will be even more rather than less ignominious and treacherous than the deceptive, murtherous role played by the Chinese national bourgeoisie in the revolution of 1925-27 and thereafter. It will lead the masses of workers and peasants only to the extent that the latter can be used as a club with which to extort from England certain concessions for the national bourgeoisie, as obedient troops who can be ordered to advance or retreat as the class in-

terests of the bourgeoisie dictate at the moment. But so far as the interests of the workers and peasants themselves are concerned, whether they are viewed from the angle of the struggle against British imperialism, or the native capitalists, users and landlords, the native bourgeoisie will lead them only to defeat and slaughter.

That the nationalist leaders, from Ghandi to Nehru, have apparently moved to the "Left" in the recent period, under the pressure of the masses, is just an indication of the fact that they will make every attempt to head the mass movement in order to behead it the moment it presents a serious danger to British imperial rule and their hoped-for class domination in the future.

To put a pennyworth of confidence in the capacity of the nationalist bourgeoisie and its leaders to conduct a genuine struggle against imperialism is to prepare and permit the strangulation of the Indian revolution in the same manner as the national bourgeoisie rode to power over the backs of the Chinese workers and peasants. The conclusion flows not only from the bitter experiences of the Chinese revolution, but from the recent past of the Indian movement itself.

Ghandi's Record

Will Ghandi, for example, who introduced the apparently "revolutionary" resolution at the Congress, lead or participate in a real struggle against British imperialism? His whole record proves the folly of such a belief. From the days when he organized an ambulance corps for service on the side of British imperialism in the Boer War, and his war record as a chauvinist servant of Britain, down to more recent times when he has defended proprietorial interests in every workers struggle or strike, Ghandi has played a reactionary role (not to speak of his semi-feudal "economic" theories or his spiritualistic and mystical confusionism).

Or do the actions of Ghandi and all the rest of the national bourgeoisie in the period after the war inspire any confidence that their real role is anything but the restraining and betrayal of the movement and interests of the masses? It is sufficient to recall the period between 1919 and 1922, when the liberation struggle reached a high point, with millions participating. The Empire was really in danger. Demonstrations, strikes and various other struggles swept the whole country. The visit of the Prince of Wales was the occasion for magnificent demonstrations of mass antagonism and resistance to British imperialism. The temper of the masses was approaching a high pitch. At Chauri Chaura and Bareilly, conflicts took place between the workers and poor peasants and the authorities.

The role of Ghandi and the Congress was to stab the movement in the back, nothing less. The struggle was officially called off at the notorious Bardoli meeting which adopted a resolution deploring "the inhuman conduct of the mob at Chauri Chaura in having brutally murdered constables and wantonly burned police (stations)" and demanding of the peasants that they recontinue the payment of taxes to the government and rent to the landlords! The contemptible middle class hoof of the hallowed Ghandis was revealed—as it always is and always will be—as soon as the storm of a mass movement of workers and peasants swept the country and threatened the existence of British imperialism and the "rights" of the landlords. The Bardoli resolution expressed in a classic manner the real role of the national bourgeoisie in the colonial struggle against imperialism: to stand by its foreign master, by the native landlord and business man against the masses of workers and peasants.

It is not the national bourgeoisie that will lead the Indian revolution. It will only mislead it. Its role will be no more glorious than the role of the Russian Kerenskys and the Chinese Chiang Kai-Sheks. The Indian revolution will not succeed as a "democratic revolution" carried on by a so-called "revolutionary democratic alliance." It will be successful only if it is led by the Indian proletariat, already quite numerous and enriched by many militant battles, supported by the mass of horribly pauperized tillers of the soil. It is quite true that there are gigantic difficulties in the way greater in many respects than those that confronted the Chinese workers and peasants. It is also true that the

course pursued by the revolutionary elements particularly by the Communist International, in the past few years, has not facilitated the success of the struggle—it has made it harder and introduced the most ridiculous and calamitous confusion into the situation.

At the Cross-Roads

But these difficulties are decreased at the present moment by the revolutionary situation that is developing at such a rapid pace. Under the concentrating pressure of such a situation, mistakes and shortcomings of the past can be swiftly rectified—or lead swiftly to catastrophe. A rectification is now an essential requirement that dare not be postponed, precisely because the Indian revolution now stands at the cross-roads: it can travel either the path of the 1927 debacle in China or the 1917 victory in Russia.

As for the workers and peasants, the shortcomings of the past, the mistakes of the present, the character of the coming revolution, the question of the Communist Party—all the problems of decisive consequence—a consideration of these points require and must be left to another article.

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Stalinists Disrupt Minneapolis T. U. U. L. Conference

MINNEAPOLIS—Although the T.U.U.L. unfurled its banner at Cleveland several months ago with a call to the wide masses of workers for struggle on all fronts, the first district conference held in the northwest opened its one session today with expulsions of three well-known militant workers.

C. R. Hedlund presented credentials from the Railroad Council of Minneapolis, the only militant group of railroad workers in this city. His credential was not only turned down by the credential committee, but he was denounced in the conference as a "Trotskyist". Further than this the railroad workers' problems were not considered.

The same treatment was accorded Arnold Ronn of Superior who presented credentials from the Central Co-operative Exchange of that city.

Representing the women's section of the co-operatives, Helen Ronkenan, who came down from the Twin-Ports as a fraternal delegate, was also refused a seat.

The complexion of the conference was anything but reassuring to one at all familiar with the workers' movement in this section. Of the fifty men and women present, less than a half dozen represented any one except themselves. The Stalinist functionaries were there in force. The district had been carefully worked. The result was a party membership meeting—not a Trade Union convention. A long list of speeches by party bureaucrats, a still longer list of resolutions presented by the same people, together with the maneuvers both before and after the expulsions, give a fairly good picture of the meeting. If anything really constructive was accomplished it was not apparent to the writer. The great harm that would proceed from the narrow sectarian line given at the conference, in other circumstances, is minimized by the fact that the official party apparatus and its hangers-on have little contact with the workers movement here and still less authority.

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\$81,000,000 CORPORATION REFUSES TO PAY 37 CENTS AN HOUR

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—Rather than pay the extra 2 cents an hour provided by the state's minimum wage law, the wealthy Harvard University corporation has fired 20 scrubwomen without notice. The Harvard Scrub Women's Protective Aid Society, believed to have been started by students, is soliciting pennies to make up the Harvard budget so the women may not be jobless. They were getting 35 cents an hour, or \$10.50 a week.

Some of the discharged scrub women were reemployed as chambermaids for the dormitories at 32 cents an hour. Chambermaids do not come under the minimum wage provisions. Harvard investments, listed at \$81,000,000, have been swelled another \$5,000,000 by a recent donation.

N. Y. TELEPHONE GRABS \$14,000,000 MORE

NEW YORK—"To prevent confiscation of its property", the New York Telephone Co., Bell subsidiary, has announced a flat increase of \$1.25 a month in business rates and 50 cents for residence phones. The increase, to net \$14,000,000 for the already profitable company, was obtained through the courtesy of the federal courts.