

WHAT SHALL WE DO ABOUT INDIA'S CRISIS?

India is vital to our war effort. Washington and London must take the initiative to resolve the crisis. The peril of London's present policy. Gandhi's rule.

THAT the British government's effort to smash the All-India National Congress comes as a deep shock to Americans is to put it mildly. On the first anniversary of the Atlantic Charter, the crisis in India was a test of whether this charter was to be a truly universal document, enrolling our friends and potential allies of Asia in a common cause, or whether an effort was being made to win this war without in any way changing the status of half the human race that lives in Asia.

On top of the prolonged delay in the second front—which is likewise an issue of whether we are to go forward in a truly liberationist struggle—the arrest of thousands of Indian patriots throws the democratic world into confusion. From deadlock in India, we go to unprecedented chaos. It is terribly dangerous for China and the Soviet Union and all the United Nations. It means an extremely insidious accentuation of anti-British propaganda to the delight of our enemies. It complicates every aspect of an already immensely complicated situation.

There is only one yardstick by which to measure all nations, all classes, all forces in the present crisis. And that is whether any particular action helps to win the war. In India this was, and remains, the yardstick by which to measure the present events: will they help to mobilize India? will they help to develop her vast resources? or will they not?

By this yardstick the decision of the All-India National Congress to launch a civil disobedience drive was unquestionably unfortunate. Granted. Granted that by calling for strikes, the shutting down of all shops, processions in the public squares, Gandhi was playing into the hands of Japan. Granted also that Nehru has proved himself incapable thus far of breaking away from the spell of the Mahatma's leadership. Granted also that the Congress Party does not represent as much of India as it claims to. But the fact remains that the slogan: "*karnenges ya marenges*"—liberty or death—which is now echoing in front of India's police stations, expresses the deep desire of India's millions for partnership with the democratic countries against the common enemy. It expresses India's desire to help win this war as an equal rather than a servant.

THE British Cabinet had the responsibility of recognizing this. After all, have we forgotten that we were defeated in southeastern Asia—not only because of disunified strategy—but primarily because we did not rally the peoples of these countries to resistance as our equals? They were treated as property; no effort was made to cancel out

a hundred years of their grievances. And so where they did not actually cooperate with Japan, they certainly did nothing to help us.

It was the responsibility of the British Cabinet to draw the conclusions from this humiliating experience and get India's participation in the war effort as an equal. The most elementary form of this participation was a provisional national government. This is what the British Cabinet refused to do. Sir Stafford Cripps made elaborate pledges for the future; but he left the immediate situation unchanged. Moreover, when he returned to London, he announced that things had improved in India, whereas exactly the opposite was true and the Indians resented Mr. Cripps' self-satisfaction. On July 3rd, the British government ostentatiously invited a few old-line stooges into the viceroy's War Cabinet, a clear indication that they were making no concessions whatsoever. Leopold Amery, Secretary of the State for Colonies, announced two weeks ago that the Congress would be suppressed by force—a clear indication of the bullheadedness that animates the British Cabinet.

All of which simply played into Gandhi's hands. Last April he had sharply criticized the presence of British and American troops in India. By May he was changing his tune: he favored "non-violent, non-cooperation" in case of a Japanese invasion. In June he was speaking in such demagogic terms that he even welcomed British and American troops, and praised the cause of the United Nations. In other words, he was steadily taking the wind out of the sails of the true progressives in India, firmly seating himself in the leadership of the Congress. And this he was permitted to do—because the British government made no effort whatsoever to cooperate with those elements of the Congress that might have been able to prevent Gandhi's return to power.

Now it is all very well for British spokesmen to say that it would be suicide to turn India over to the Congress leadership. Agreed. Agreed that a provisional government with Gandhi at its head might have negotiated with Japan. But let us be under no illusion that by this show of force the British government is now really in a position to mobilize India. Will this policy work to win the war? That is the pragmatic yardstick by which to judge it. The answer is that it will not work.

On the contrary. Even if the civil disobedience movement is crushed without much more bloodshed, which is doubtful, the illusion of strength and unity in India is no more than an illusion. The people will sulk, despair, resist where they can; some will go

over to the Japanese; they will be divided among themselves. Tear-gas and bamboo sticks leave indelible memories.

Force—yes, under many circumstances it is necessary. But force—with what perspective? based on what policy? *What has happened here is that the British policy of force and the Gandhi policy of civil disobedience are now equated to each other.* Both are useless and hopeless from the point of view of solving India's crisis. They equal each other, but they do not cancel each other out. On the contrary, they make things incredibly more difficult at a time when everything else in our struggle is fraught with such difficulties.

WE AMERICANS cannot adopt a high and mighty attitude, telling Indians what to do and what not to do, when a whole century of their fight for freedom is at stake. Neither can we say that India must take a back seat in the war whether she likes it or not, trusting to the war's outcome. On the contrary, if Mr. Amery can use tear gas and bayonets at this juncture, he is not to be trusted to deal any less stupidly with India when the war is over. Neither can we simply bemoan the crisis, berate the British Cabinet in the irresponsible fashion of the appeasers, and evade our responsibilities by the luxury of despair.

On the contrary, it is because India is vital to our war effort, just as we are vital to India's future that Americans and Englishmen alike must face up to their *own responsibility* for a constructive solution to this crisis before it goes completely beyond all control. Our responsibility is to challenge the wisdom of the course which Mr. Amery and Mr. Cripps have adopted, a course which does not leave India any stronger, but leaves it weaker, disunited, an easier prey for the vultures at the gates.

There must be an immediate cessation to the mass arrests. A free India, with the right to determine its own future must be pledged. As proof of this pledge a national government must be formed of all forces—not the old line bureaucrats—but the new and living forces that want to mobilize India for her own, and *our own* defense. Those forces are there: from the Moslem elements, the Untouchables, the trade union leaders, the students, the peasant union leaders, men like Nehru and Maulana Azad, realistic businessmen like Rajagopalachariar, liberals like Tej Sapru and the Indian Communists, newly legalized.

The initiative must come from London. The pressure for this initiative is long overdue from Washington.

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