

WHAT NEXT FOR INDIA?

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London (by wireless).

PRESENT events in India are a warning signal. The whole of India is in open revolt against the continuation of British rule and the casualty lists indicate the seriousness of the situation—a situation calling for instant action.

In a famous speech during the First World War, Lloyd George once summed up allied effort at that point as “too little and too late.” Will “too little and too late” prove the epitaph of British rule in India? It has been announced that a British cabinet mission of three ministers will go to India at the end of March—after the whole country is already ablaze, after the shadow of famine, many times greater than in 1943, stretches over the land, and after demonstrations of national revolt have not only united Hindus and Moslems in common fraternity but equally united civilians and the armed forces in a manner unprecedented in the modern history of British rule in India.

The strike of Indian naval ratings—which began as a protest against absolutely indefensible discrimination against them as compared with men in the Royal Navy—over pay conditions and demobilization plans is only part of a wider nationwide movement of revolt against British rule and the conditions it brought about. The Indian people are united in their demand for independence and solid in support of the naval ratings. Force and threats of more force, and wholesale arrests in Bombay and elsewhere, can only serve to inflame the situation, which is full of disastrous consequences for the future of our people.

What must be the feeling in the labor movement and the people of Britain that the government which they put in power last summer to end Tory reaction now is engaged in wholesale violent repression and the shooting down of the popular movement in Egypt, India, and Indonesia? The situation is more serious in view of the desperate food position, the cutting down of an already low cereal ration to twelve ounces daily and the prospect of a famine on the scale now declared to be comparable to the most terrific famine in modern times in India—that of 1900. The situation far exceeds that of 1943, which the government famine commission officially admitted to have caused 1,500,000 deaths.

Even the minimum of imports recommended by the Food Grain Policy Committee of 1943 to meet normal deficits have not been fulfilled by the combined Food Board in Washington, on which India is not represented. It is further reported that the surplus rice stocks from Siam which could go a little way toward helping India is being demanded by the occupation authorities to feed Japan. The dilatory procedure of sending a cabinet mission at the end of March without even any definite new proposals does not meet the urgent requirements of the present critical situation.

There is not any evidence that the British cabinet mission brings any new policy other than the old terms already set out in the ill-fated Cripps offer four years ago—an offer rejected by every Indian political organization and nonetheless reaffirmed by the Viceroy and the British government last September. According to Premier Attlee, the mission will be required to act “within the terms laid down by the cabinet decisions.” Lord Pethick-Lawrence explained to the House of Lords that “the announcement doesn’t in any way alter the statement made by the Viceroy in September.”

A decisive change will have to be made in policy if a settlement is to be reached. What is the prospect? Both the Indian Congress and the Moslem League leadership welcome the mission and expressed a readiness to negotiate in order to reach a settlement. A settlement can be reached. But it is necessary to be absolutely clear that there is no room for a settlement upon the basis of the old type of offer of a heavily shackled and controlled “self-government” while the substance of power remains in Britain’s hands.

ANY settlement will need to: (1) Concede to the demand for Indian independence: that is, place the substance of power in the hands of the Indian people with future relations between Britain and India to be settled by negotiation between equals; (2) enable the Indian people to determine their own internal problems and forms of state constitution upon the only democratic basis: that is, by a constituent assembly elected by adult suffrage from all parts of India including territories of the

Princes states; (3) upon this basis, provide for the immediate establishment of the widest possible representative provisional national government without prejudice to the future decisions of all constitutional questions by a democratically elected constituent assembly.

The solution of the problem of Pakistan, of a separate Moslem state, can be reached provided the principle of national self-determination is honestly followed.

Similarly it is essential in relation to the Princes that there be no attempt to maintain these as a continuing basis of concealed British power in India. The democratic settlement for India must extend to the whole of India. Will the cabinet mission work for settlement along these lines? It is here that the British labor movement and democratic opinion everywhere has the responsibility to make its wishes felt and effective. We do not want the cabinet mission to be only a prelude to final breakdown and conflict—a familiar type of whitewashing device to throw on the Indian leaders the responsibility for a breakdown and then proceed to endeavor to impose a dictated solution, embarking on a course of violent repression of the Indian national struggle.

We demand that the British government prevent the shedding of British and Indian blood in this unnecessary conflict and grant India independence. It should make an immediate declaration of Indian independence with the transference of power to representatives of the people. It is for the Indian people, for them alone, to determine through their democratically elected constituent assembly their wishes for the future constitution of free India.

At the same time, the government of India must be instructed to cease fire and stop using British troops against Indian naval forces and the civilian population so that against the background of a declaration of independence negotiations may be peacefully conducted for the immediate remedy of grievances without victimization.

The storm signals in India are clear for all to see. The Indian people want freedom and they mean to have their freedom.

There is no time to lose.