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NEWS-LETTER

ALL INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE
Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad (INDIA)

FOREIGN DEPARTMENT

New Series No. 4.

23rd March, 1946.

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BRITISH CABINET MISSION

The news of the forthcoming visit of three British Cabinet members to India has on the whole been welcomed here. Mahatma Gandhi has asked his countrymen to "accept Government professions at their face value and believe that Swaraj is within sight inside of a few months." The surprising thing is that despite repeated disillusionment, bitter memories of the Cripps Mission and the evidence of our own blood that has flowed so freely in the streets of Calcutta and Bombay, Indians are able to receive British professions in good faith.

Such forbearance is possible only because of the great influence of Gandhiji's personality on the temper of the people. If that influence were removed from Indian politics today, this country would become a vast battlefield. The horrors of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 would be repeated a hundred-fold. The international situation being what it is, Britain would be faced with the prospect of a third

world war. Gandhiji knows it and is determined to avoid the catastrophe, if it is humanly possible.

We hope that British statesmen who are coming to India are adequately aware of the momentousness of their mission. The fate of their country no less than of ours hangs on the sincerity of their motives and on their capacity to rise equal to the occasion. If they are coming determined to part with power, they will succeed in their mission. But if they are coming with reservations in their mind and hope to sidetrack the main issue of immediate independence by repeating the old plea of lack of agreement among the different elements of Indian national life, then they will only make a bad situation worse. Sir Stafford Cripps tried it once. The result was disastrous.

How can we be expected to believe that responsible British statesmen seriously consider it possible or even desirable for all political parties to agree on every major issue? Does British history during the last 300 years bear it out? Do Mr. Attlee and Mr. Churchill agree today on so important an issue as the nationalisation of one of Britain's major industries? It is only in Bolshevist Russia and in Nazi Germany that all men agree on every issue. When parties disagree, people decide. This is the essence of democratic practice. If a foreign power insists on agreement between parties as a pre-condition of the fitness of the people for democracy, then it is only an argument for denial of freedom. If Hitler had offered to quit France provided Marshal Petain and General de Gaulle agreed first on the future constitution of France, would the world have taken his offer seriously?

However, Mr. Attlee's speech in the House of Commons on March 15 was a happy departure from what we have been used to bearing so far. For the first time a British Prime Minister seems to have faced the Indian issue frankly and soberly. The speech has created a healthy impression in India and has been welcomed by almost all Indian leaders except Mr. Jinnah. If the British statesmen are really determined to solve the Indian "problem", they will find that the problem has already solved itself.

MOUNTING TENSION IN INDIA

The disturbances breaking out from day to day in different parts of the country are danger signals of the growing unrest among the masses which has spread even to the Indian armed forces. On February 18 some ratings of the Royal Indian Navy struck work because their grievances regarding pay and allowances, better food, speedy demobilisation and post-war settlement had for long been disregarded. Their demands included some of a political nature, like withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia and the release of political prisoners detained without trial.

A strike by the armed forces was not a unique phenomenon because American and British servicemen had gone on strike before, but in this case the situation rapidly deteriorated on account of the rude behaviour and insulting language of a British naval officer. The strike spread fast, involving about 15000 Hindu and Muslim ratings of Bombay, Karachi and other places. In Bombay and Karachi the British military police and opened fire on the strikers who retaliated causing some casualties on both sides. The disturbances spread to the city of Bombay where the police fired on crowds of both Hindus and Muslims, as many as twenty times in one day. There was widespread rioting in the streets, the transport system was completely paralysed, shops closed and three hundred thousand workers were idle. The official estimate of casualties places them at over 200 killed and over a thousand injured. Eventually the Congress leaders who had all along been trying to restore order and negotiate a peaceful settlement persuaded the naval ratings to agree to the authorities' demand for surrender.

On February 27 above 200 Indian sepoy went on strike in Jubbul-pore in sympathy with the R.I.N. ratings and demonstrated in the streets; the number of strikers swelled later to 1716 according to official figures. In a bayonet attack made on the strikers 35 persons were wounded. Rioting also broke out in Delhi during a demonstration against the victory-week celebrations on March 7. The police firing on crowds killed five and injured ten. In all these cases police and military excesses caused peaceful demonstrations to degenerate into riots, thus providing an opportunity to unruly elements for violence, arson and looting.

But for the restraint imposed by the Congress and its strong hold upon the people any one of these incidents might have set the whole country ablaze. Mahatma Gandhi as well as other congress leaders have strongly denounced violence and disorder and appealed to the people to remain calm and give the British what may be their last chance for a peaceful settlement.

PROVINCIAL MINISTRIES

So far popular governments have been formed in four provinces, Assam, Punjab, Sind and the North-West Frontier Province. All these four provinces have been claimed by Mr. Jinnah as part of his Pakistan zone on the ground that the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants want a separate and sovereign homeland of their own. The Muslim League fought the election on the Pakistan issue. The election results, however, tell a different tale. In the North-West Frontier Province, where the Muslims constitute 91.79 per cent of the population, the Muslim League could win only 17 seats in a House of 50, as against the Congress which has 30 seats. In Assam the Muslim League has a strength of 31 as against 58 of the Congress. In both these provinces the Congress had formed the government. In the Punjab the Muslim League has a voting strength of 79 as against 89 of the Congress-Unionist-Sikh coalition which has formed the government. In Sind alone the Muslim League was invited by the Governor to form the Ministry, though its strength was only 28, as against 29 of the Congress-Muslim coalition. The Governor's action has been universally criticised as a flagrant breach of constitutional practice. The League Ministry can maintain itself in the saddle only with the help of the three European votes. Since the European members will vote as the Governor wants them to, the whip-hand will be the Governor's. In any case the verdict of the electorate in all the four provinces hardly bears out the League's claim to be the sole arbiter of the destiny of these provinces.

INDIAN RAILWAYS

Presenting the Railway Budget to the Central Assembly on 18th February, the Railway and War Transport Member, Sir Edward Benthall, stated that "financially the position of the railways is far sounder

than it has ever been at any stage in the history of the railways." The railway member has reason to congratulate himself, for during the difficult war years the railways have not only been able to sustain the increased expenditure but have also yielded a surplus amounting to some 200 crores (a crore is equal to ten million, and a rupee to about 1 s. 6 d.).

Much of this profit has gone to the General Revenues. While the profits were mounting, the lot of the poor railway passenger went on proportionately worsening. We do not think that at any time in the history of the railways, they were run with such utter disregard of the convenience of the civil passengers, specially the third class passengers who provide the bulk of the revenue. There is also no denying the fact that much of the tragedy of the Bengal Famine could have been avoided if the railways had not operated with such utter callousness to the needs of the people. It is a well-known scandal that while rice could not be imported into Bengal, race horses could.

Today the Indian railways are still dependent on foreign countries for the supply of engines, wagons and coaching stock. It is a sorry state of affairs. Why weren't the phenomenal profits of the war years invested in locomotive and other allied industry so as to make the railway work-shops self-sufficient? The reason is obvious. The British post-war industry would lose a valuable market in India. That a free and prosperous India, with its 400 million consumer-public might provide a bigger and a richer market to British industries, does not strike even the socialists in Britain.

FREEDOM OF PRESS IN BRITISH EMPIRE

For writing a letter to the "Colonial Times" of Nairobi, in which he described India as "virtually a big Belsen camp", an Indian by name W.H. Sohan has been sentenced to four months' rigorous imprisonment. Nairobi is the capital of Kenya, the British Colony of East Africa. When Indians are ill treated in South Africa, the British Government pleads its helplessness to intervene in the internal administration of a self-governing Dominion. But Kenya is directly governed by the Colonial Office of His Majesty's Government. The white magistrate who convicted Mr. Sohan for what in England and America would be considered a

legitimate expression of opinion and the Socialist Government that allows such convictions to remain have by their acts only confirmed the accused's charge that Hitler's ways did not disappear with him.

MAHATMA GANDHI ON FOOD CRISIS

"Given hearty co-operation by Government servants and the general public, I have not the slightest doubt that the country can tide over the difficulty. Just as panic is the surest way to defeat, so also will be the case when there is widespread distress impending and prompt action is not taken. Let us not think of the causes of the distress. Whatever the cause, the fact is that if the Government and the public do not approach the crisis patiently and courageously, disaster is a certainty. We must fight this foreign Government on all other fronts except this one, and even on this we shall fight them if they betray callousness or contempt for reasoned public opinion. In this connection I invite the public to share my opinion that we should accept Government professions at their face value and believe that Swaraj is within sight inside of a few months."

RESOLUTIONS PASSED BY THE CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE, 16th March, 46.

FOOD CRISIS

"Where-as the war and its after effects have already created a serious food situation which has been materially aggravated by the failure of rains in many parts of India with the result that the country is faced with both food and cloth famine, it is essential that the policy of the Government and the people should be one at this time of crisis. Hunger makes no distinction between high and low, Hindu and Muslim or any other. But the real burden of suffering however, inevitably will fall on the poor. In the circumstances, the Working Committee would like to make its policy clear.

(1) The first thing in these difficult times is for the people not to lose heart. Everyone should realise his personal duty and perform it to the best of his ability, believing that if everyone acted likewise, India will be able to surmount all difficulties with courage and confidence and be able to save thousands of poor lives. Every villager and townsman should, therefore, do the best he can for his neighbour and

for himself.

(2) Everyone who possesses any land should in the shortest time grow such foodstuffs on it as he can. Cultivable land lying waste should be speedily brought under the plough and every facility should be given for this purpose by the State.

(3) After fulfilling his own minimum requirements from his produce, he should make the remainder available for others who may be in need.

(4) Preference should be given to food crops over money crops wherever practicable.

(5) People should sink ordinary wells and dig tanks wherever there is scarcity of water and all facilities for this purpose should be given by the State and local bodies.

(6) It is the duty of the rich to-day to live simply and divert their energy and wealth towards productive and constructive activities for the relief of distress.

(7) Every effort should be made to secure supplies from abroad, but we should not feel helpless in any case. On the contrary, we must produce all we can in India and be prepared to face all emergencies with the resources available. It must be remembered that even the receipt of additional crops will not serve the purpose in view unless the supplies reach in time the starving places and are equitably distributed there.

(8) All food should be economically used and expenditure on occasions of marriages and other ceremonies must be avoided.

(9) Processes of canning and preservation of fruits should be encouraged and widely adopted so that full use may be made of all available fruits and no part thereof may be wasted.

(10) It is the duty of the State to put all their available resources of man-power, technical skill and mechanical appliances, whether civil or military, for growing, preserving and transporting food to wherever necessary. All exports of cereals, foodstuffs, oil-seeds, oilcakes, groundnuts, oil and other edibles should be absolutely prohibited.

(11) The State should sink deep wells and adopt other means of water supply wherever necessary. Demobilised and discharged personnel

from the defence services including the I.N.A. should be utilised for increasing the production of foodstuffs.

(12) The Committee expects the nation to make all necessary sacrifices for relieving distress in the country and for making successful any reasonable schemes of rationing and procurement and any measures for checking hoarding, black-marketing and corruption that may have to be taken on hand.

(13) It is clear that just as it is the duty of the public to cooperate in all helpful ways, it is the primary duty of the Government to understand and fulfil the essential needs of the people. Measures for meeting the serious situation cannot be fully successful and effective unless power vests in the people.

(14) So far as want of cloth is concerned, it is the duty of the State and the people alike to render every assistance to the villagers in order to enable them to produce by their own effort enough khadi in the villages. The State should provide facilities for cotton growing or cotton itself and instruments of production and instructors where necessary.

(15) Congress Committees and Congressmen are advised to help in every way to give effect to the recommendations in this resolution."

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

"The Working Committee have noted with grave concern the growing tension in the international situation, resulting in open recrimination between the great powers and attempts on their part to secure or hold on to colonial areas and vantage points and create satellite States, which may lead to possible future conflicts. The war that has recently ended has, in spite of the professions made in the course of it, neither ended the imperialist domination of subject countries nor the era of power politics. The old imperialism still continues and in addition new types of imperialism are growing. The recent U.N.O. Conference in London is startling evidence of the fact that instead of a new order of free and United Nations evolving, there is disunity among the leading nations and a lack of freedom over vast areas. Oil is still the lure of imperial domination, and security and preservation of the so-called

life-lines of empire or strategic outposts are made the excuses for expansion as well as retention of colonial areas. This continuation of the old and discredited policy which has led already to two disastrous World Wars, is likely to result in yet another war, on a more colossal and destructive scale.

It is evident that peace and freedom cannot grow out of these seeds of continuing conflict and war. Imperialist policy has to be discarded not only in the interests of subject nations but also to rid the world of the peril that might overwhelm humanity. It has thus become urgently necessary to end foreign domination over the countries of Asia and Africa, and for foreign armies to be withdrawn from all such countries, and notably from Indonesia, Manchuria, Indo-China, Iran and Egypt. India will remain the crux of the problem of Asian freedom and on the independence of India depends the freedom of many countries and the peace of the world."

INDIANS IN SOUTH-AFRICA

"The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress are of opinion that the disabilities of the Indian settlers in South Africa constitute a blot on humanity and a slur on the civilization of the West. As the submission to His Excellency the Viceroy of the Indian Deputation from South Africa shows, the disabilities are an unbroken tale of progressive prejudice against the Asiatics defined as "any Turk and any member of a race or tribe whose national home is in Asia but which does not include any member of the Jewish or the Syrian race or a person belonging to the race or class known as the Cape Malay." and of broken promises and declarations. A civilization that requires for its protection a series of legal enactments imposing political and economic restrictions on coloured and Asiatic peoples must contain seeds of future wars and its own destruction.

The Committee are of opinion that the contemplated breach of trade relations between India and the Union of South Africa is the mildest step that the Government of India could have taken. The Committee would ask the Government of India forthwith to withdraw their High Commissioner, if the Union Government would not suspend the proposed legislation, pending the convening of a Round Table Conference between the two governments to

consider the whole policy of the Union Government against non-white peoples of the earth.

The Committee are painfully surprised to find Field-Marshal Smuts, the Premier of the Union, dismissing on the untenable plea of regarding the proposed anti-Asiatic Bill as a domestic affair, the right of the Indian Government and, by parity of reasoning, of the other Allied powers, of friendly intervention. The Committee hold that at this time of the day it is not open to any state, however powerful it may be, to refuse to listen to the public opinion of the world as voiced through its different States with reference to any legislation regarded by them as of an inhuman character or as amounting to a slur on the self-respect of the races comprising such a State.

The Committee venture to advise the victorious allies to take notice of the contemplated action of the Government of South Africa inasmuch as the war would have been fought in vain if now the persistence by the Union Government of South Africa in the bar sinister against Asiatic races and coloured peoples inhabiting the sub-continent is maintained.

To the Indian Deputation from South Africa the committee would say that whilst they (the Committee) and, indeed, the whole of India, irrespective of parties or communities, are with them in their just struggle and would lend them all the moral weight they can, they should realise that the brunt of the unequal struggle will have to be borne by them, and the Committee feel assured that the Indians in South Africa will worthily carry out the example set by them years ago of vindicating their self-respect and that of the Motherland by the noble rule of self-suffering.

The Committee would, however, faint hope, even at the eleventh hour, that in the place of the indefensible law of the jungle, which the policy as revealed by the contemplated legislation enunciates, the Government of the Union of South Africa and its white settlers would listen to reason and the appeal of the moral law by which mankind lives."

RECENT DISTURBANCES

"The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress are of opinion that the recent disturbances created by the people in Bombay,

Delhi, Calcutta and other places were in every way harmful and were an obstacle in the way of the Congress. These included arson and incendiarism whether of private shops or public places, looting specially destruction of foodstuffs, frightening pedestrians, compelling people to shout slogans, compelling Europeans to remove their hats and otherwise molesting them. All these acts were manifestly against the policy of non-violence adopted by the Congress and were derogatory to national dignity. Whilst there is nothing but unmixed condemnation of popular frenzy, this Committee, without prejudging the military action taken in order to deal with the recent outbursts of violence, are of opinion that the popular belief, generally and justly, has been that such action has been taken in excess of necessity and in order to strike terror in the hearts of the people and that therefore the military have bulletted passersby and even innocent people, men, women or children standing in their own galleries. Any such action, at the present moment, instead of cowering down the populace, has the effect of infuriating it.

The Committee, therefore, ask the Government to institute an enquiry into the military action taken in the various places and hope that the inquiry will be open and public and will have on it representatives with judicial qualifications and enjoying public confidence. At the same time the Committee hope that the people will observe restraint, befitting the Congress and help the conference between the Cabinet Mission and the representatives of the people to carry on their work in a calm atmosphere."