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Voice of India

NEHRU AND JEFFERSON

By Agnes Smedley

MAN OF TOMORROW?

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SOME IMPRESSIONS OF INDIA

By Lin Yutang

GANDHI-JINNAH CONFERENCE

(An Editorial)

By Anup Singh

NOVEMBER, 1944



WASHINGTON, D. C.

To Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Citizen of the World, on his 55th birthday (Nov. 14th), we dedicate this issue of the VOICE OF INDIA. His sacrifices have been great. We earnestly hope that he may soon be released from prison so that India—and the world—may benefit by his great qualities of mind and soul.

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No, there is no sign yet that Asia will be in on the great decisions. The Chinese long knocked on the door of Washington in vain, were "called in for coffee after dinner" at the first Quebec conference, actually got there at Cairo but were told not to bring up certain topics such as Hong Kong, and sat at second table at Dumbarton Oaks for a hurried gulp of left-overs. At Bretton Woods the Indians spoke up about their money matters, but were hushed by the Americans as well as the British. In no international meeting thus far has there been any evidence that our people know that the Chinese are more than one-fifth of the world and the

Indians almost another fifth, and Asia altogether one-half. Nehru's voice may in good time be heard in Chungking and Bangkok, in Teheran and Batavia, in Cairo and in Moscow—but not likely in London or Washington.

Yet all this is on the risky assumption that he will get out of jail. What if he is kept in for another year or two? What if he comes out broken in health or spirits? If that should be, then we must set another black mark against the record of the Tories who never knew or did not care what was for the good of their own people.

Nehru and Jefferson

By Agnes Smedley

TURNING idly to a few men and women about me in a social group recently, I asked them what they thought of when the name of Jawaharlal Nehru of India was mentioned. One man, a professor, impatiently exclaimed:

"To speak frankly, I am damned tired of the British Empire, and this includes the way they handle the Indians. Nehru embodies all the principles for which we are supposed to be fighting, yet they've locked him up for the eighth time. They've taken half his adult life! God, but I'm fed up!"

Katherine Anne Porter, the eminent writer whose book, *The Leaning Tower*, has just been hailed as one of the finest examples of American literature, replied to my question:

"I'm appalled at the basically stupid way the British are treating India . . . of the way they've treated it from the beginning . . . stupid, cruel. They've managed to martyrize Nehru and other Indian leaders, thereby shortsightedly increasing their prestige and power and arousing the indignation and sympathy of civilized people all over the world. If their purpose is really to destroy Indian leadership, they make a great mistake in publicizing their base motives and cruel behavior."

"What do you think?" I asked of Mrs. Elizabeth Ames, the executive director of the big Yaddo writers' colony, who was listening, she replied:

"When I think of Nehru as a political prisoner, I remember the British passion for conferring honors, making Knights of their own distinguished men, but honoring men like Nehru by casting them in prison. Really, this is a war within a war within a war, and within it we must find and defend our own. . . . Nehru is one of our own. This war will not end with the defeat of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo. We must get a breathing space by defeating them, but we do not intend to stop with them."

I once heard a British official talking with the most distinguished woman novelist of the United States, about ways to counteract the growth of anti-British feeling in this country. This woman said:

"To tell you the truth, the best step you could take to that end would be to release Jawaharlal Nehru and allow him to come on a lecture tour of this country."

Shortly after America entered the war, I sent some books to a Seabee Battalion in the south Pacific. Among them was Nehru's *Towards Freedom* and *Glimpses of World History*. At the time that battalion had no other books. They read Nehru's writings, discussed them, and then one of the men wrote me:

"What I want to know is what we are fighting for. If a man like Nehru can spend years in prison, what in hell is this war about? What am I doing out here?"

You cannot mention the name of Nehru to any Chinese without receiving a much more decided opinion. There is hardly a Chinese soldier or officer, let alone men and women of the educated classes, but that regards Nehru as the embodiment of the struggle against every form of oppression of man by man. Scratch almost any Chinese, and you will get an anti-British reaction. This is due not only to the long record of British aggression in Asia, but to British attempts to crush the Indian movement for freedom, of which Nehru is the most advanced leader. Chinese are informed about his life and struggle, and one of the Chinese guerrilla armies, the New Fourth Army, translated his *Toward Freedom* into Chinese and ran it serially in their monthly magazine, *Resistance*. When Nehru made a short trip to China in September, 1939, he was not only a State guest, but the entire press devoted space to him and to the Indian independence movement throughout his stay in China.

No American correspondent has gone to India without at least trying to meet and talk with Nehru. They

recognized him as the supreme type of modern cosmopolitan who embodies in himself the best of eastern and western civilizations. In his last book, *People on Our Side*, Edgar Snow tells of meeting Nehru shortly before his last imprisonment. Nehru looked tired and ill, and "still had the pallor of prison about him." He had been out of jail only a few months. Snow wrote:

"He was handsome as he had never been in his earlier middle age. In repose there was nobility in his face and I could not but agree with Clare Boothe that this was surely one of the finest human heads ever made. . . . Yet his bitterness had deepened his sorrow and martyrdom. It seemed a grievous personal disappointment to him to find that Cripps was no different from any other Englishman when it came to negotiating India's freedom."

Speaking of his negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps, Nehru said to Snow:

"We explained to Cripps what we wanted clearly enough—real control of the ministries with the exception of defense. We were willing to leave defense in British hands, but we wanted enough to say about it to be able to control some of the scandalous practices in the army, and to carry issues over the Viceroy's head to the British Cabinet, if necessary. Cripps finally said it wasn't in his power to give it to us. . . . Churchill was much too smart for him. You know that this combination of Churchill, Amery and Linlithgow is the worst we've ever had to face for many years. Amery was the man who sided with the Japanese in Manchuria, you may remember. He said Britain could not logically oppose the conquest because the Japanese were doing just what Britain herself had done in India. And that's perfectly true, you know."

What I personally think of Nehru can be expressed only inadequately, for there are no words in the English language to really describe the depths of my feelings and convictions. Of all the public figures on the stage of world events in the past quarter century, I cannot think of more than one or two who can measure up to him in grandeur of human spirit, in vision, or in knowledge and intelligence. He is amazingly like our own Thomas Jefferson, and in numerous ways he might be Jefferson reborn again. Both were men of great erudition, selflessness, and unblemished intellectual integrity. Both had that spark of wisdom and vision that serves as a beacon in the civilized world. Powerful writers, poor speakers, yet they embody or embodied principles that arouse the loyalty of millions of the poor and oppressed. Both sacrificed their personal interests, including their families and personal property, to the common welfare. The words of Jefferson battling against what he called "every form of tyranny over the mind

of man," sound amazingly like the words of Nehru. Both were or are condemned by reactionary interests as "visionaries" and "idealists," Jefferson was called a "filthy democrat," and Nehru has been called worse.

It may sound sissified in this corrupt and cruel era to state, as I do, that wherever Nehru has appeared in any part of the world in the past quarter century, something new and pure had entered. Search as his enemies may, nothing evil or anti-social can be found in his actions or his life. He supported the Spanish Republican Government, and when the Japanese attacked China he mobilized his people to help China. He organized the first Medical Mission of Indian doctors to aid the Chinese wounded.

Consider the conduct of Britain and America in comparison: Nehru never sold one ounce of steel scrap, oil, or anything else to the Japanese. He engineered no loans to Hitler or Mussolini, gave no aid or comfort to the Japanese. For years before the war began, he deplored the atrocious conduct of the Chinese Government against its own progressive forces. He did not advocate, sign, or approve the Munich Pact. He never helped burn a human being to death. He imprisoned no man. He never robbed, either directly or indirectly, any man of the product of his labor. He opposed child labor, racial and color prejudice, class and caste injustice, the inequality and subjection of women, and, unlike those who rule his unfortunate country, he never sold or profited by the opium traffic.

Who can say as much? Yet for all his purity in personal and public life, he has spent the best part of his adult life in British prisons. This, to me, is the chief atrocity of the modern age. Nothing can excuse it. Today, while millions of men of the Allied Nations are giving their lives for what they are told is a better world, we permit one of our Allies to shut off from the light of day the one man whose life and thought represents what they are supposed to be fighting for. To liberate Nehru should become one of our battle cries. To let his voice become a power in the councils of the Allied Nations should become one of our concrete immediate aims. Without this, countless people of the east and the west must continue to regard this war as just another war like those of the past. Nehru represents us, the people, and we have allowed him to be imprisoned, while our enemies and his sit in the seats of power.

On Nehru's fifty-fifth birthday, I shall think and honor him as I honor Thomas Jefferson who was the source of the best there is in American life. Jefferson is dead and we cannot call him back. Nehru is living, and it is up to us to liberate him—not after the war, but now, and to see that his voice and principles are heard and respected in all preparations for the post-war world.