

# India's Part in World Revolution

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## I.—INDIA'S PART IN THE WORLD REVOLUTION

**T**HE importance of the role played by the colonial countries in the world proletarian revolution was clearly stated by Lenin and is formulated in the theses of the Communist International. The world-shaking events of the Chinese revolution have afforded a practical demonstration of the correctness of these theses and enable us through an analysis of these experiences to extend, to amplify and to make more concrete the conclusion's already obtained. Next to China, India is the most important colonial country in the world. Taken together, these two countries will play a dominant part in the fate of world imperialism. Hence it is hardly necessary to emphasise the importance of studying to the fullest possible extent the problems presented by the developing situation in India and of applying the lessons derived from our experience in China.

It is true that there can be no mechanical transference of the conclusions arrived at as a result of the experience in China. India has its own problems and its own special characteristics. The complete domination by one imperialist power to the exclusion of the others, the single centralised government, the different social institutions such as the caste system, the part played by the different races, particularly Hindoos and Mohammedans, all these things distinguish the Indian problem from that of China. In certain, wide outstanding features, nevertheless, the national-colonial revolution in India presents the same problems as in China and the development and experience of the one plays its part in affecting the developing and experience of the other. What has happened in China has given a great impetus to the movement for national emancipation in India, an impetus which is still growing and has not yet reached its climax.

The Indian revolution develops as part of the world proletarian revolution and is profoundly influenced by the general world situation. At the same time, as in the case of China, it plays a role which will be of decisive importance for the future of the revolution in the rest of the world. Recent events indicate that India is on the eve of a new phase of mass national struggle. Moreover, it is already clear that this struggle will bear a different character from the abortive revolution of 1921. The new revolutionary upheaval will take place under the leadership of the revolutionary masses and will lead to the possibility of the establishment of a revolutionary government of the workers and peasants. This possibility brings more than ever to the forefront the question, already raised in the Chinese revolution, of the possibility of transition from the national revolution to the social revolution without a long intervening period of capitalist development.

## II.—THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF INDIA AND THE POLICY OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

The outstanding feature of the recent policy of British imperialism in India is its aggressive character. The policy of concessions has given place to the policy of the mailed-fist, to forcible demonstration of the supremacy of the British power.

In examining the economic background for this policy, it should be noted first that in spite of the shocks occasioned by the war and post-war crises, British imperialism has been successful in maintaining all key positions of control in its hands. There has been no decolonisation of India. India remains a classic example of a colonial country exploited to the full by foreign imperialism. Especially the monopolist hold over currency, banking and finance generally, and over foreign trade, with predominance in industrial production and the direction of internal trade, serve to secure the position registered politically in subordination to the British Parliament and control from the India Office in London.

British imperialism has been successful in achieving a temporary stabilisation of its power in India. But it remains to be examined what are the prospects for the continuance of this stabilisation. The new situation arising with the war was met by a fundamental change of policy on the part of the British bourgeoisie. The central feature of the new policy was the industrialisation of India under the control of British finance capital. At the same time political reforms were introduced enfranchising and giving a semblance of power to the upper propertied section of the Indian bourgeoisie.

The work of the Industrial Commission set up in 1916, furthered by the introduction of a protective tariff system laid the foundations for industrialisation. Nevertheless, the new economic policy met with redoubtable obstacles which have made necessary a modification if not a definite alteration of the original course. In the first place it was difficult to grant concessions to the Indian bourgeoisie which would not react to the detriment of British capitalism, and the value of India as a market for British manufactured goods. Especially in the critical period after the General Strike, British industry could not afford to allow the Indian market to be curtailed. Secondly, the severe protracted crisis of British capitalism in the home country, reaching its climax in the period immediately following the General Strike, put great difficulties in the way of providing the necessary means for the carrying out of industrialisation in India. In the slump following the post-war boom, the immature Indian industries faced with intense foreign competition, suffered severely. Further, the existing state of Indian economy was not adequate for intensive industrialisation and for exploitation by British finance capital under the new conditions of British imperialism. In particular, there was necessary a thorough-going overhauling of the financial system and the adoption of

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measures to increase agricultural production and the buying capacity of the peasants.

All these have combined to bring about a modification of the policy of promoting industrialisation with concessions to the Indian bourgeoisie. In the first place, steps were taken to remodel the currency and banking system. The fixing of the rupee exchange at the higher ratio of one shilling and sixpence instead of one shilling and fourpence, in the teeth of the opposition of Indian industrial interests, brought about a deflation crisis comparable to that occurring in England. The bitter fight between the British and Indian bourgeoisie over the Central Reserve Bank scheme is sufficient proof that the scheme is intended to serve the interests of British finance-capital at whatever cost in antagonising the Indian bourgeoisie.

A clear indication of the new attitude towards industrialisation, with refusal of concessions to Indian capitalists, is seen in relation to the tariff question. The recommendations of the special Textile Tariff Board have been ignored. The Indian demand for protection for the glass and chemical industries, largely in Indian hands, has not even received the consideration of the Tariff Board. At the same time a special amendment of the Steel Protection Act was hastily passed last March granting a protective duty against the import of steel railway wagons, and at the instance of the Burma Oil Company (British concern), after propaganda against the import of Russian oil, the question of protection for Indian petroleum has been immediately referred to the Tariff Board. Again, in 1924, the Tariff Board recommended a protective duty on imported wire and wire nails. Since then the chief factory in India, the Wire Products Company, changed hands, being acquired by Indian interests and now the Tariff Board has withdrawn the protection granted in 1924.

This policy of promoting only such industries that are securely in British hands, or essential for war needs, and in any case acting so as not to damage British capitalist interests, became marked on the introduction of a preferential duty for British steel in March, 1927. Owing to the causes mentioned above, there has undoubtedly been a check in the process of industrialisation. It is necessary to examine how far this check implies a deliberate reversal of the previous policy and what are the prospectives of its being removed in the near future. The heavy drop in British capital exports to India, even as a proportion of the total capital exports, indicates that British capitalists are deliberately refraining from making investments in India. The stagnation of the industrial departments of the Provincial Governments in India shows that the British Government has suspended the rapid developments anticipated by the Report of the Industrial Commission. On the other hand, all attention is being rivetted on carrying through the new financial reforms which are intended to make India safe for British investment. The deflation crisis is accompanied by severe industrial depression. The Indian bourgeoisie is bitterly antagonistic to the present financial policy. In April, 1928, the president of the Indian Chamber of Commerce declared that the "present situation is all right for the government, but

all wrong as far as the interests of Indian trade and industry are concerned."

It is clear that not only is there a halt in the process of industrialising India through British capital, but the Indian bourgeoisie also are being definitely discouraged from investing their capital in Indian industries. It is significant that Sir Basil Blackett, who has been in charge of Indian finances during the last five years, at a farewell dinner given to him by the European Association last March, expressed the wish to see more Indian capital invested abroad. He announced that a considerable sum had recently been invested in Brazilian Bonds from Bombay and he considered this "a development of extraordinary importance for India," for nothing would do more to promote racial equality between British and Indians than the "consciousness among Indian capitalists that they are the creditors of European and other debtors."

It is, however, not necessary to conclude that the policy of industrialisation has been abandoned. It may be noted, in passing, that in spite of the general industrial depression, the production of iron and steel in India is still rapidly expanding. It is necessary to look beyond the present deflation crisis to the period when, as in England after deflation, on the new financial basis there will be a renewed outburst of capitalist activity and a renewed impetus to British investment in India and the development of nominally Indian industries. It is in expectation of this period that British imperialism is content to meet with unyielding resistance the economic and political demands of the Indian bourgeoisie. It would be natural to expect that, in the present period of considerable economic difficulties in India, British imperialism would be prepared to make some show of political concessions in order to conciliate at least a section of the Indian bourgeoisie. On the contrary, British imperialism is refusing to give way even in small matters and clearly expects to wear down the Indian resistance in the course of time. In this calculation it is probably looking to the development of a more favourable economic situation when the new financial measures shall have been carried into effect.

**III.—THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM**

In estimating the possibility of the development of a revolutionary situation in India, the agrarian question will naturally play a very big part. The agrarian problem is created by the penetration of capitalism into agriculture, coming into conflict with feudal elements in village economy, intensifying exploitation and upsetting the previous character of agricultural production and the relations of the classes engaged in it. The progressive undermining of the basis of Indian agriculture is seen, firstly, in the stagnation as regards production, secondly, in the pauperisation and proletarianisation of the peasants together with minute fragmentation of land holdings and the accumulation of a gigantic burden of debts, and thirdly, in the resulting development of revolutionary unrest among the peasants.

The situation has been sufficiently alarming to British imperialism to cause them to send out a special Royal Commission on Agriculture. The latter has been at work for two years and the nature of its conclusions

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is now fairly easily estimated. Since it was specifically precluded from dealing with the root questions of land ownership, it can safely be said that its results will be insignificant as far as the main social problems giving rise to the agricultural revolution are concerned. The proposals of British imperialism to meet the developing agricultural crisis are of two kinds, agricultural and organisational. The first includes schemes for the development and rationalisation of agriculture so as directly to increase the volume of production. The second includes proposals for consolidation of holdings, on the lines of the recent Bill in the Bombay Legislative Council, which will involve the buying out and proletarianisation of peasants cultivating uneconomic holdings and organisational measures such as the development of co-operation and improved methods of marketing produce.

None of these things will affect the root problems. Nor can the situation be met by the reactionary proposals of the Indian petty bourgeoisie who advocate the return to pre-capitalist forms in their propaganda of the "charka" (hand spinning wheel) and of so-called "village reconstruction." The perspective of inevitable agricultural revolution remains and it is not too much to say that the agricultural revolution will be the central axis of the coming mass national revolutionary upheaval.

At the present time, however, although the agrarian problem becomes increasingly more acute, there is as yet no such mass rebellion among the peasants as marked the period immediately following the war. It is true that even now mass movements among the peasants are occurring, as, for instance, the resistance to increased land taxation among the Bombay peasantry, the peasant movement of the Akali Sikhs in the Punjab, and peasant revolts among even some of the most backward peasants of the native States and in Rajputane; but these are not on the same scale as those of previous years. By comparison with the rising ferment among the industrial workers, the peasant movement is at present quiescent. Undoubtedly there are here a number of factors which have to be taken into account. In the first place, the last five years have on the whole been years of comparatively good harvests. In the second place, it should be remembered that the revolutionary wave among the peasants after the world war took place

in circumstances of an unprecedented increase in prices, while under the present deflation policy prices are actually falling. In the case of the industrial workers, this is counter-balanced by the capitalist offensive against wage standards, but the peasants are not so immediately affected. Further, the betrayal of Gandhism disrupted the peasant movement. Nevertheless, the signs of a rising movement are present and with only a slight sharpening of the crisis, and if ideological leadership is provided, the peasant revolution may expand to gigantic dimensions.

#### IV.—THE RISE OF NEW FORCES IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE INDIAN BOURGEOISIE

The last year has been one of marked revival, especially during the last few months, in regard to the national struggle against imperialism. What is the basis and nature of this revival and what light does it throw on the relations of the classes in the impending revolutionary clash?

In 1921, the national struggle took on the appearance of a gigantic mass movement, but it presented certain features which sharply distinguish it from the growing movement of to-day. In 1921, the central role in the movement was played by the Indian bourgeoisie. There was no party representing the independent interests of the toilers, and the movement took place definitely under bourgeois domination and leadership. Even at the climax, the bourgeoisie retained full control as can be judged from the immediate and general obedience to the veto on the movement imposed by the Indian bourgeoisie at Bardoli in 1922. Further movement in 1921 took place during the period characterised internationally by the post-war collapse of the revolutionary tempo. The Bardoli surrender was nearly a year later than the Black Friday betrayal in England.

Since 1921 there has been a period of rapid class differentiation. The Indian bourgeoisie have abandoned the revolutionary national struggle. Their petty-bourgeois agent, Gandhi, has been completely discredited. The pauperisation of the petty bourgeoisie has gone further and further. The Government itself is compelled to make an investigation into the causes of "middle class" unemployment. The working class has grown stronger and more capable of leading an independent political struggle. Internationally, the new struggle is developing in a period of preparations for a new imperialist war, and after the experience of the revolutionary struggle in China and of the betrayal of the revolution by the Chinese bourgeoisie.

Thus, the revival of the national movement takes place under changed circumstances. The new movement that is now gathering strength is of a different character to the old one. Its development is also proceeding more slowly than in the post-war period, but this is compensated for by the more fundamental nature of its social basis.

The basis of the new movement which distinguishes it from the old is the conscious union of a struggle for national emancipation, centred on the fight against imperialism, on the one hand, with the social-economic struggle of the masses against exploitation on the other. This was only partially and then unconsciously and instinctively expressed in the mass movement of 1921.

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The grounds for the new revival must be looked for in the causes underlying the development of this twofold struggle. Briefly formulated, the most important of these are: (1) the strengthening of the proletariat and its schooling in the class struggle as a result of industrialisation and increased exploitation; (2) the impoverishment and revolutionisation of wide strata of the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry; (3) the development of the international working class struggle against capitalism and imperialism; and (4) the repercussion of the establishment of working class power in the U.S.S.R., and of the events in China.

It is necessary also to examine the role played by the Indian bourgeoisie in the new movement. An exact estimate is made difficult owing to the operation of several contradictory factors. On the one hand, the demands of the Indian bourgeoisie cannot be satisfied under the conditions of the domination of British imperialism. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie cannot participate in a movement directed towards the overthrow of social exploitation. The whole experience of the action of the Indian bourgeoisie, and of their counterparts in China goes to show that their opposition to the working class is more fundamental than their opposition to foreign imperialism. Not only is it impossible for the Indian bourgeoisie to play a central role in the new movement, but it is demonstrable (?) that their role is a counter-revolutionary one. Nevertheless, particularly under the conditions of the present aggressive drive of British imperialism, the antagonism between the British and the Indian bourgeoisie is by no means liquidated. The check to the policy of industrialisation and economic and political concessions does not convert the Indian bourgeoisie into a revolutionary force but it does involve them in an opposition to British imperialism which must be taken into account in characterising the conditions for the development of the mass revolutionary struggle.

The significance of the boycott movement in reply to the Simon Commission, of the anti-imperialist decisions of the Indian National Congress, and of the series of defeats inflicted on the Government in the Legislatures must be judged from this standpoint, as also from the reciprocal standpoint of their meaning as a barometer of the general leftward pressure from outside the ranks of the bourgeoisie. At the same time that the National Congress at Madras adopted a series of "left" decisions, including the demand for complete national independence and support for the League against imperialism, it received back into its ranks prominent representatives of the reactionary right wing of the nationalist movement. The move towards unity of all the parties of the Indian bourgeoisie involves the rejection of revolutionary struggle and is in itself sufficient to explain the collapse of the hartel and boycott policy advocated at the Madras Congress.

The rise of new forces in the nationalist movement is seen most clearly in the rapid growth in importance of the Workers' and Peasants' Party. Originally deriving its composition mainly from the petty bourgeois left groups in the Nationalist Congress ranks, this party has lacked a mass basis and a clear independent line; but that it is in accord with the new mass national revolu-

tionary impetus is seen in its success as actual leaders of mass activity, both political and economic. The Workers' and Peasants' Party has proved the strongest where it has come out most independently as the leader of strike struggles and anti-imperialist demonstrations. It represents the beginning of a mass national revolutionary party based on the leadership of the proletariat in the national struggle.

**V.—THE FORWARD MOVEMENT OF THE PROLETARIAT**

The outstanding feature of the present movement in India is the rising wave of strike actions on the part of the industrial workers. This strike wave was slowly developing during 1927, but during the latter part of the year its importance was overshadowed by the attention concentrated on the nationalist campaign against the Simon Commission. Already the bourgeois nationalist campaign has dwindled to small proportions, but the strike movement has continued to grow until it has forced itself into the forefront of attention.

The immediate occasion of the strike movement has evoked a continued capitalist offensive and the attempted carrying through of nationalisation proposals. The railway strikes in the Bengal Nagpur Railway last year and on the East Indian Railway this year arose on the issue of reorganisation and retrenchment proposals involving large-scale dismissals. The general strike in Bombay was provoked by the introduction of speeding-up methods. In many cases, partly as a result of the one and sixpenny rupee, further wage cuts have been introduced following on wage reductions carried out during the last few years. The working class has emerged from the depression of the defeats experienced in 1922-25 and is now coming out in mass resistance to the capitalist attacks. Further, in looking for the immediate causes of the present movement, account must be taken of the influence of the news about the Chinese revolution.

The present strike movement displays several notable characteristics. In the first place it is very widespread, strikes taking place in all parts of India. Secondly, the strikes are of a mass character, all workers whether organised or not taking part, and very frequently being assisted by sympathetic strikes among workers not immediately affected. This is seen also in the persistent threats of a general strike, as in the case of the Madras strikes last year where the Madras workers as a whole threatened to come out in support of the strikers of the Burma Oil Company, etc., and in the threats of a general strike on all the Indian railways. Thirdly, it is very conspicuous that the official trade union organisations play no part in calling or leading strikes, but even betray them openly. The official report of the Executive Committee of the All-Indian Trade Union Congress, made to the Cawnpore session in November, 1927, announces that no strike had been sanctioned by the Executive of the A.I.T.U.C. during the past year, but that, nevertheless, certain strikes took place "in which the officials of the Congress had to interest themselves."

The trade union leaders openly sabotaged and helped to crush the strikes that have occurred, and are actively supporting the proposals for introduction of schemes for industrial arbitration.