

GREAT BRITAIN MUST BE SUPPORTED

The views that India should support Great Britain in the War is expressed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, President of the Independent Labour Party, outlining the parties attitude, in a statement to the press—Editors

The Executive Council of the Independent Labour Party has authorised the President of the Party to issue the following statement defining the attitude of the Party towards the European War.

Ever since the War was declared, there has been a stream of statements flowing from representative Indians expressing their views as to the duty of Indians in this War. Although there is a preponderance of opinion that India should join the war on the side of Great Britain there is no enthusiasm. On the contrary, there is noticable quite a degree of hesitancy and unwillingness to throw in their lot with Great Britain. It is obvious that if help is to be rendered then there must be no lukewarmness or unfriendliness.

Between the lukewarm who are prepared to do no more than co-operate for the purpose only of inactive defence and the unfriendly anything except cause passive obstacle anything by way of real help will be neutralized. It is, therefore, necessary to enlist the support of all classes and sections, and for that it is necessary to examine and understand the reasons which are responsible for this want of enthusiasm.

Chamberlain's Lethargy

Analysing the causes of this want of enthusiasm it appears to the Independent Labour Party that it undoubtedly arises from the conduct of Great Britain and France in the past. Great Britain and France have been very slow in taking action against Germany.

Instead of putting down the aggression by Germany on the first available opportunity by collective action they have allowed Germany to commit acts of aggression one after the other and have pursued the policy of appeasing Germany of sacrificing the life and liberty of nations particularly Czecho-Slovakia whom it was their sacred duty to protect. Hitler has been allowed five victories and Poland may be his sixth.

The Independent Labour Party feels that he ought to have been dealt with long ago by the Powers who have now come forward to oppose him.

By their being ready to buy peace from Germany by sacrificing the life and liberty of smaller and weaker nations a great deal of the moral basis of this Call to Arms is lost.

The Independent Labour Party feels that wars are fought without and sincere desire to establish peace on just and lasting terms and to preserve the terms of peace from being trampled upon after it is made.

Three Essential Conditions

Great Britain and France never realized that while collective security is good it is not enough. In the 1914 war, there was nothing wanting in collective security. There was a great array of nations out to put down the aggressor and the aggressor was put down. But the aggressor rose again from his grave and is now on the top of every body.

This shows that mere victory is not enough to put down the aggressor. The Independent Labour Party feels that certain other precautions such as the following must be taken if war is to result in a lasting peace.

First:—Victory must result in a peace which is just.

Second :—Peace must be protected by collective action.

Third:—The Protagonists of peace must be prepared to vindicate any breach of the peace no matter where it occurs, near or far and no matter who is the victim of it.

Without these precautions it is not possible to put an end to war. Indeed, the Independent Labour Party is so strongly impressed by these considerations that it feels that as a preliminary step the Allies should forthwith establish a Council of the representatives of nations who are ready to fight on their side to determine the terms of peace and announce them to the world so that they may be known to all and also to the German people.

Nothing in the opinion of the Independent Labour Party can convince the world better of the justice of the Allies' cause than such an announcement. It will assure every one that the Allies'

claim is to have a just peace and are determined to maintain it when obtained. Only such a war can truly be said to be a war to end war. In such a war no one person can have any hesitation to join.

India And Empire Foreign Policy

There is one other defect in the situation which the Independent Labour Party thinks is responsible for this attitude of hesitancy on the part of Indians to help Great Britain. As the position stands to-day India is tied to the chariot wheels of the British Cabinet. The British Statesmen are free to pursue any kind of foreign policy and make any kind of international commitments. They are free to declare or not to declare war as they please and they are free to make any kind of peace they like. India has no voice in their foreign policy in declaring war nor in the making of peace.

If a particular foreign policy succeeds very little of its advantage comes to India. But if the policy leads to war then Indians are called upon to help in men and money.

India has no '*locus standi*' in the making of events that bring on war. She has no *locus standi*¹ in the making of terms which often instead of ending war only adjourn war. Her duty is to be present only when war is on. Such a position is, to say the least anomalous and unfair to a country like India.

Unquestionable Right

It is true that at the time of the Versailles Treaty Indian delegates were allowed to attest the terms of the Treaty. But it is no compensation to India to have the honour of attesting the peace terms when they are made. India has a greater claim to participate in the foreign policy of the British Empire and in the making of the peace terms than any dominion.

The Dominions have the right to be neutral. Consequently they are not bound to undergo the consequences of a war resulting from a particular foreign policy if they do not approve of the justness or propriety of the war. But India has no escape from any war which the British Cabinet chooses to involve themselves in. If India is to be committed to war or peace then she has an absolute right to be consulted, which sadly is not the case to-day.

Menace To All Nations

The Independent Labour Party has taken into consideration all these grounds of hesitancy. It cannot be denied that they have considerable weight in them. If the war was being fought just to save Poland they might have acquired more decisive force. For in the opinion of the Independent Labour Party there is not much virtue on the side of Poland. Poland has put democracy to death long ago. The treatment of Jews by Poland was not less cruel than the treatment accorded to them by the Germans. Poland, even in this emergency, was prepared to die rather than be saved with the help of Russia. But as the Independent Labour Party sees it the war is not fought merely for the sake of Poland.

The Polish issue is only an incident in the war. Nobody can deny that the war between Germany and Poland has a deeper significance and a wider range. It is a war in which 'Germany claims that she is not merely a nation, one among many, but that she must be acknowledged as a superior nation high above and over the rest, whose will he obeyed without question and that in case of disobedience she has the right to impose her will upon those who disagree with her by means of violence. Such a claim is a menace to all nations and not merely to Poland.

Insult To India

In a situation like this it is obvious that those nation who believe that all nations are equal, that each of them has equal right to live, pursue its happiness without being hampered by its fellows and * total of human civilization must combine to resist this preposterous claim.

The claim made on behalf of the German nation is an insult to other nations. But it is particularly obnoxious to India. It runs counter to aspirations and ambitions of the Indian people and is calculated to defeat and destroy them. India is aspiring to be a nation of self governing people and her ambition is that in spite of all difficulties she will not only attain that status but will strive to maintain that status.

When Germany insists that the Nordic race alone must dominate the word and that every other nation of another race must take a subordinate place, she throws a challenge to all other races.

* Few words are illegibles.

Having regard to the aspirations and ambitions of the Indian people and having regard to the fundamental conflict between them and the German, ideal India cannot avoid taking up the challenge of Germany, assert herself and show her readiness to vindicate her right to reach her destiny.

That being the view of what is involved in this war the Independent Labour Party has no hesitation in saying that this is war which the Indian people in their own interest should support and help Great Britain to prosecute the same.

Empty Phrase

The Independent Labour party is aware that there is also a certain degree of hesitancy on the part of other political parties. But that hesitancy is not based on principle, but is based on considerations of tactics. They want to make England's need India's opportunity, The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha want to exploit this 'hour of need' to have the Communal balance of power in the Indian Constitution rectified in their favour. It is unnecessary to consider this sectional attitude.

The more important section is the section which wants to make England's hour of need India's opportunity for emancipation. It is difficult to understand what is meant by 'India's opportunity.'

If it means that India can now by her own inherent strength successfully dictate her own terms to Britain then every one must admit that 'India's opportunity' is only an empty phrase which has no substance in it. The Gandhian method of civil disobedience is too exhausting and no one wants to have a second exercise in it.

If it means that this is an occasion for Indians to invite some enemy of Great Britain to emancipate them from British domination then it is the greatest snare. Knowing that there is every possibility of the guest remaining here and becoming the host of the Indians, no Indian whose power of judgment is not submerged beneath an excess of emotion could regard such a move as wise and prudent.

No New Masters, Please !

The Independent Labour Party believes that as far as one can visualize the near future, keeping one's feet on the firm ground of practical politics, the best thing for India is to remain within the British Commonwealth of nations and strive to achieve the status of equal partnership therein.

A good long part of the road to that status has already been covered. The part that remains is comparatively shorter and is also within reach. To give up this advantage in the hope of being emancipated by some supposed friend of India would be an act of folly if not of political suicide for the nation. There is no knowing what would be the fate of India under a new master. No same Indian can advise his countrymen to enter upon a policy so speculative and so uncertain if not disastrous, in its consequences.

Britain's Duty to India

While it is in the interest of the Indian people to co-operate with Great Britain in this war with Germany, the British also must recognise that they owe certain duties to India the fulfilment of which cannot long be postponed.

The first and foremost duty of the British towards India is to take steps to prepare Indians to defend their country.

India is a country which is exposed to attack from all sides. Yet to-day India is a most defenceless country in the world. By itself it has no resources to withstand any attack from land, sea or air. For its defence it is largely if not wholly dependent upon the aid of the British Army, British Navy and British Air Force. In the Round Table conference it was agreed that the defence of India was to be treated as the responsibility of India and yet nothing so far has been done to give effect to that principle. Much has been talked about opening Military Colleges and Indianizing the Officers' grades. The Independent Labour Party is frankly of opinion that these are the least parts of this business of training Indians to defend their country.

The most important part of it is to introduce compulsory Military Service in India for all persons within certain ages without distinction as to caste, class or creed. Such a policy alone can succeed in training Indians for the defence of their Country.

The magnitude of India's manpower is beyond measure. If it is given the requisite military training it is capable of defending not only India but it is capable of defending the whole of the British Empire from any aggressor, no matter how strong. It is, therefore, astonishing that British Government should not think of training the manhood of India for national defence. It is astonishing that Government should call Indians to become combatants only when the war is won and allow them to lapse into unserviceable non-combatants as soon as the war is over.

Compulsory Military Training

Why is the British Government not prepared to keep the Indian people in trim from a military point of view in peace as in war is a question which is asked on all sides. There is a feeling that the reason why the British do not wish to introduce compulsory Military training is that they cannot trust Indians with military training. Steps must be taken to remove such a suspicion. The British if they wish Indians to help them and defend them must learn to trust Indians and divert them to the access of military training. Only trust can beget trust.

Similarly recruitment for the Standing Army must be open to all communities and the distinction between martial and non-martial classes must be done away with. Indianization of the officers' grade must be worked out sincerely and fairly.

At present only sons of the rich can get admission in Naval and Military schools not because they constitute the right sort of material but they have the money to meet the high cost of training. In other words, the monopolization of the higher grades in the military service by the rich and by some specially chosen communities must be abandoned with a view to inspire trust and confidence in the British Government.

India's Status Within Empire

The second duty of the British towards India is to reassure her of the status she is to occupy in the British Empire the reluctance of the British Parliament to embody in the preamble to the Government of India Act that India is ultimately to occupy the status of a Dominion has caused much heart-burning.

The faith of many in the British has received a rude shock by realization of the fact that Parliament should have refused to give formal sanction to the declaration in favour of Dominion Status in 1935 which was made informally but authoritatively by Lord Irwin in 1929. The British must see that the doubts of India on this point are removed as early as possible. India cannot willingly and heartily fight for principles if she is not assured that the benefit of these principles would be extended to her, when the war is won.

This explains the position of the Independent Labour Party. The Independent Labour Party supports the appeal made by His Excellency the Viceroy to India to help British in this war for the reasons given in this statement.

The Independent Labour Party agrees that this is no time for making conditions. At the same time the Independent Labour Party believes that the British as well as the Indian should know and understand what they are fighting for and what they expect of each other.”¹

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1. : Vividh Vritta; 17th September 1939.