

FORWARD BLOC

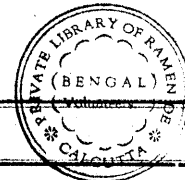
A POLITICAL WEEKLY

Editor :—SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE

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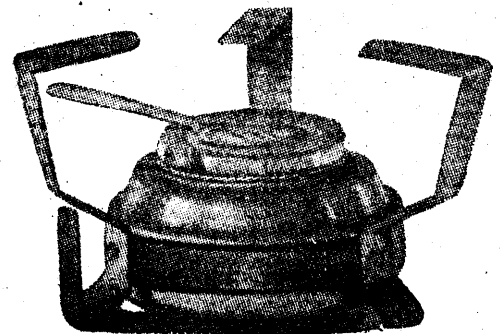
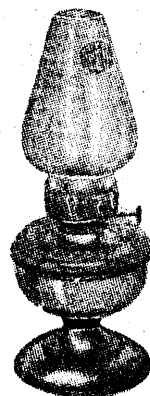
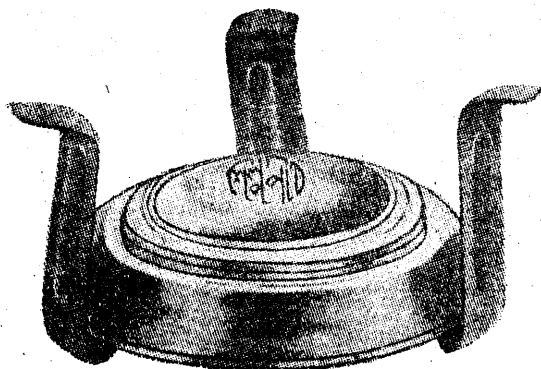
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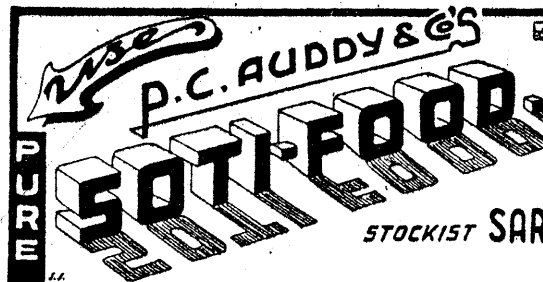
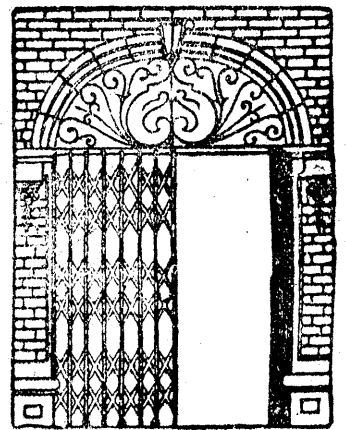
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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23

The Correct Line

In life and particularly in politics, there is nothing so harmful or dangerous as an attitude of indecision. This is more so when indecision masquerades in a borrowed mantle. Let us consider the attitude of the Congress Working Committee since September last. Mahatma Gandhi's initial stand on War-policy was perfectly intelligible, though it was not in consonance with public opinion in the country. He advised unconditional co-operation with the British Government on the question of war, but this was in direct opposition to repeated resolution of the Congress and particularly of the Haripura Congress of 1938. The Congress Working Committee, which invariably follows the lead of the Mahatma, did not venture to do so in the present crisis. Instead, it passed a lengthy finely-worded resolution which gave the man in the street the impression that the Congress was on the war-path, but which in reality camouflaged a mind that was altogether undecided about the future. On one pretext or other, the Committee has been putting off its final decision from meeting to meeting. The first time it postponed a decision, namely in September, it sought to ascertain from the British Government their war-aims as well as their policy regarding India. But after the Viceroy's reply which was nothing less than a slap on the face of the Congress Working Committee, there has been no valid excuse for indecision or procrastination.

Several leaders of the Gandhian Party, headed by the ex-Premier

of Madras, expressed their profound disappointment at the Viceregal pronouncement. Their deep disappointment presupposed a hopeful outlook at the start, but we wonder what had led them to expect anything else from the Government. We, on our part, had correctly predicted what was coming; consequently neither surprise nor disappointment overtook us when the reply of the British Government became known.

Smarting under an unexpected blow, the Congress Working Committee promptly decided to direct the Congress Cabinets in the provinces to resign. In the prevailing atmosphere the decision was good so far as it went, but it was not in keeping with what we regard as sound tactics. Instead of throwing up the sponge, the Congress Ministers should have stuck to their posts, should have gone on implementing the Congress programme and should have invited dismissal while discharging their legitimate duties. If this policy had been followed, then by the time the last Ministry was dismissed, public feeling would have reached the boiling-point.

Nevertheless, we welcomed the resignation of the Congress Cabinets, hoping that it would prove to be the first step in a forward policy. In *'Real Politik'*, there can be no such thing as marking-time. One has to move either forward or backward. Consequently, we hoped that once the Ministries were out of our way, the pressure from below would force the Congress Working Committee into a bold and dynamic policy.

The mass-pressure is there all right, but the Committee, including our erstwhile Leftist leader Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, has, under the Mahatma's leadership, succeeded in resisting it so far. The Committee

today has no existence of its own—it is but the shadow of Mahatma Gandhi in whose favour it has voluntarily abdicated. But Mahatma Gandhi is no longer the dictator of the Indian National Congress. He is the dictator only of the Right-Wing of that great institution and of some erstwhile Leftist leaders—for the Left-Wing will most definitely not take order from him blindly.

To examine how the Congress Working Committee has so far succeeded in resisting mass pressure would be indeed an interesting study. Having suspended the fight with Imperialism, it has been conducting a ruthless and continuous drive against the Left and particularly against the Forward Bloc. This serves to divert public attention from the path and the duty that lie ahead of us. To bewilder the public and thereafter scare it away from the path of struggle, bogeys have been created from time to time. Before the war, we were told that a forward move was impossible, because there was corruption within the Congress and because a forward move, when launched, would lead to an outbreak of violence. Since September last, they have had a brain-wave and we are now told that if the Congress starts a 'Satyagraha' Campaign, Hindu-Muslim riots will inevitably follow. We are awaiting the invention of fresh argument for desisting from a dynamic policy. The tragedy that has overtaken the upper ranks of Congress leadership is due primarily to demoralisation that followed in the wake of office-acceptance. This demoralisation was altogether unexpected. Who had ever expected that even those who have fought for years for India's freedom and who have braved the rigours of prison-life would thus

fail us in the most fateful hour of our history?

While carrying on the drive against the Left and inventing bogeys of the above sort, the Congress Working Committee has not failed to keep up appearances. Leftist phraseology it has never stinted and hopes are consistently held out that the Congress will soon be on the move. Reports that we are receiving from several provinces and particularly from ex-Ministerial circles belie such hopes. On all sides there are whispers that the Congress Cabinets will stage a come-back and that negotiations are going on behind the scenes for that purpose. It is a hard thing to make the allegation—but we are reluctantly compelled to do so—that the Congress Working Committee and Mahatma Gandhi are today out of touch with radical and progressive elements in the country.

The tension and the struggle between the Right and the Left in this country are important and interesting as an historical phenomenon. Lust for power has seized the upper ranks of our leadership—not the power that follows from Independence, but such power as will come through a compromise with Imperialism. Consequently, the Right-Wing will not shrink from a compromise when the opportunity appears, but will not think of an understanding with the Left, in spite of a national crisis which demands national unity. This is 'Macht-Politik' or 'Power-Politics' at its worst. We have no doubt that behind the facade of a party-struggle within the Congress, there is in reality a class-struggle going on all the time.

The latest stunt which has been devised to stave off a struggle and which may in time prove to be the greatest fraud perpetrated on the

Indian people by their own leaders, is the proposal of a Constituent Assembly under the aegis of an Imperialist Government. We have made some serious study of History and Politics and in our view, a Constituent Assembly, if it is not a misnomer, can come into existence only after the seizure of power. If, for instance the Congress and the British Government are engaged in a struggle over the Indian problem, the Congress will first have to come out victorious and from a provisional Government to take over power. Only such a Provisional National Government can summon a Constituent Assembly for framing a detailed Constitution for India. The Assembly that is now being proposed by the Congress Working Committee may be a glorified All-Parties Conference, but it is certainly not a Constituent Assembly. It will meet with the fate of the Irish Convention which was the creature of Mr. Lloyd George. The Indian people should have nothing to do with such an Assembly the only purpose of which would be to side-track us from our principal task, as the Harijan Movement did in 1932 and 1933.

Our own path is clear. We are now passing through the anti-imperialist phase of our movement. We have to rally all uncompromisingly anti-imperialist elements for the next move. The problem today is not merely to force the hands of the Congress Working Committee. That we must do. But even if we succeed therein, with Mahatma Gandhi at our helm, there will always be the danger of another Chauri-Chaura, or another Harijan Movement or another Gandhi-Irwin Pact. For that danger we must prepare in advance, so that we may be able to meet it successfully when the time comes.

Let the Congress Working Committee have the leadership of the nation for all time—we have no objection to that. But a leader must lead. We still hope against hope that the Committee will soon make a move. But if they do not, then we must act. We are confident that the masses will follow, no matter who gives the lead.

When Imperialism is ended, the Socialist phase of our movement will commence. Those who win power must undertake the task of post-struggle reconstruction.

Sukha Chandra Bose

No Whittling Down The Demand.

The *Manchester Guardian* has given out in one of its recent leaders that the Congress is inclined to accept a reasonable basis for negotiation for a final Indian settlement. The article has been based on reports cabled from India by the *Reuter*. A few days ago, it was published in the newspapers that Mr. Jayakar, equipped with his past experiences in this line, was coming down to India to act as a mediator between Wardha and Whitehall. Mr. Jayakar's mission, coupled with the *Manchester Guardian's* editorial, have naturally given rise to various speculations. The Working Committee is at present in session; and though it is displaying an unholy zeal in rushing through lesser matters in a manner that carries its own commentary with it, it has not as yet come to any decision regarding the all-important question of National Demand and its immediate fulfilment. Perhaps it is waiting for another call from Delhi;

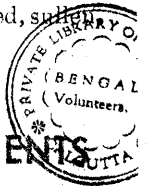
perhaps this time too, it will decide to remain indecisive.

In the meantime, Lord Linlithgow, after a fairly long spell of silence, opened his lips the other day at the annual meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce. To characterise his peroration on this occasion as disappointing, is saying much less than what is appropriate for it. It is the same old imperialist song to which we have become thoroughly used. It has not even the redeeming grace of any novelty in language. The same cautious, halting and miserly tone characterises it from beginning to end. The same old imperialist game of divide and rule has cast its vicious shadow on it. His Excellency has regretted the constitutional deadlocks that have resulted from the withdrawal of Congress Ministries. He has showered encomiums on the Governments of Bengal and the Punjab, and has not even withheld his blessings from the newly-formed Saadullah Ministry that has stepped into the vacancy created by the resignation of the Bardoli Cabinet. He has grieved copiously over the fact that the repeated declarations of the British statesmen in regard to their war aims have not gone home to political India. Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose's recent speech in the Bengal Assembly is an admirable reply to this part of Lord Linlithgow's utterance. In the last Great War too, Britain indulged in the same sort of exuberance in her professions; and how they were carried out into practice on the termination of the War is a matter of history to-day. Sir Stafford Cripps is reported to have said in one of his press interviews that in spite of best intentions, the present pre-occupations with the War are only preventing Britain from coming to an immediate settlement with India.

With all respects for Sir Stafford, we cannot but accept this explanation with a grain of salt. If Britain is really bent on striking up an honourable settlement with India, the War cannot have stood in her way of doing so. A simple declaration accepting India's right to self-determination may do. As regards the form of constitution that India will choose for herself, well, that is for her to decide. Britain has only to accept that decision.

Frankly speaking, we cannot disabuse our mind of the apprehension that the National Demand is going to undergo much watering down—an apprehension that the present attitude of the Working Committee is bound to give rise to. Freedom can be nothing but freedom, not a whit less than what it is. Any dilution will spoil its very substance. In the age of the stories that have been cropping up at present that the Congress intends to arrive at a compromise with the Government, it behoves the Working Committee to re-iterate once more the National Demand and declare that it stands firm by it; that not a iota less will satisfy India. Lord Linlithgow has put in a full-throated plea for India's co-operation in the War. But the nation, disillusioned by its past experiences, can hardly agree to throw in its weight on the side of Britain when her professed war aims have been put to the test and found wanting in sincerity and substance. India, as *The New Statesman and Nation* remarked sometime ago, is a test case. By granting her the right of self-determination, Britain can win a moral victory and reduce Hitler to insignificance by enlisting the overwhelming support of the enlightened world opinion on her side. In the meantime the Punjab

Assembly has passed a resolution offering unconditional support to Britain; the Bengal Assembly too, has followed suit. Let not these puny performances delude the Government into the belief that the people of India stand at its back in the present crisis. Let those who like, barter away the birth-right of the nation for a mess of pottage. They are a mere handful of the country. The heart of the Indian masses is sound. They know what they want, and are determined to achieve it. If the Working Committee cannot give a suitable lead to them, there are others in the country who will not fail them in the present hour. They are now vibrating with a new life and will stoutly resist any effort, open or subterranean, to a prolongation of their bondage, under whatever specious name and plea that may be. Let the Government and others who are concerned in the matter, read the signs of times aright. A free India will surely contribute her mite to bring in a new era of real democracy and peace in the world to-morrow. But an India in chains is bound to remain discontented, sullied, fermented, if not revolting.



CURRENT COMMENTS

Bengal Congress

The Congress Working Committee has passed its judgment upon the B. P. C. C. in the grand Inquisition manner. The B.P.C.C. executive, in essential matters, have been superseded, and their powers have been vested upon an *ad hoc* committee which is altogether a packed and partisan body. The High Command must have all their own way—and will brook no opposition. The voice of protest must be hushed. Criticism must be

suppressed. And they must keep themselves safe in power by suppressing and superseding whoever and whatever stands on their way.

Huq Has Not Backed Out

Mr. Fazlul Huq, the Premier of Bengal, is not a man to be beaten, at least in words. Some time ago he afforded us great relief by declaring that he had backed out of the controversy in which he had been engaged with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru over the alleged injustices done to the Muslims in the Congress-governed provinces. Now he has again turned back and roared in characteristic vein that he has not left the ring. Mr. Huq has published the first instalment of his "charge-sheet" against the Congress Ministries and it is yet unknown how many instalments he has still in reserve. But in the absence of a thorough scrutiny by an impartial body the "charges" can hardly be taken as anything more than a tissue of interested assumptions. Mr. Huq has fallen foul of Pandit Nehru because he has disapproved of the idea of a Royal Commission to investigate into League allegations. It is useless to remind him and Mr. Jinnah that no self-respecting Indian in his senses can accept this proposal. The League stalwarts may construe this as shirking an enquiry, but the verdict of the country at large is bound to be otherwise. One thing is particularly surprising about the matter: wrongs done to the minorities in the Congress-governed provinces could not certainly have escaped the notice of the Governors. But why have they chosen to keep mum so long? *The Statesman*, if we remember aright, characterised before some of the charges of the League as fantastic. But now it is maintaining a studied reticence. This conspiracy of silence is not without its signi-

ficance and it is needless to offer comments on it.

A Peep Into The League Affairs

Sir Sikander suddenly disappeared from Lahore without giving any notice even to his Private Secretary and naturally there cropped up speculations about his destination and the object of his visit. Now the news has reached us that he has safely arrived in Bombay. Sir Sikander has affirmed that no political significance is to be attached to his present visit. But since he differs from Mr. Jinnah on almost all the vital issues that now confront the League, and since he will have a talk with the latter "on the recent development in the country with particular reference to the communal problem," it is difficult to dismiss his visit to Bombay as a mere courtesy call and his talk mere *tete-a-tete* round a tea-table. Has he inwardly realised that Mr. Jinnah's leadership of the League is doing untold harm to the Mussalmans of India and therefore, a squaring up of accounts with him has become sorely necessary at present? His Highness the Aga Khan is believed to be coming to India very soon. Will he and Sir Sikander combine together to knock down Mr. Jinnah from the League *quidde*? Even if that turn out to be true, will that improve the prospects of a League-Congress *entente*? Sir Sikander has already committed himself to a definite position in regard to the War and his Highness the Aga Khan is not likely to differ from him much in this respect. The Congress stand, on the other hand, is as poles asunder from it. How can these two opposites be made to meet?

"Common Sense At Discount."

In opening the All-India Khadi and Swadeshi Exhibition at Con-

gress House, Madras, Sir Mirza Ismail deprecated "the undue emphasis which we in India are apt to lay on our religious and cultural differences." Sentiment is allowed to play too large a part, while commonsense is at a discount. Sir Mirza Ismail distrusts politics, for "politics divide," and his solvent is economic enterprise. "Large scale industries, cottage industries and all kinds of industries in which people of different castes and creeds can be associated for their mutual gain" will, it is trusted, bring about a fusion of diverse groups. This also is his programme for the attainment of Swaraj, that is, the kind of Swaraj which he can contemplate. Gandhiji has sent his message to this Exhibition, and the message is characteristic of Gandhiji. It is as un-political as the message of Sir Mirza Ismail. "I believe," this is the credo of Gandhiji, "we can surely spin our way to Swaraj through Charkha." Spin our way to Swaraj! For aught we know, our great-grand parents span, and span, and did nothing else. A Hundred years ago, India did not import only a few bales of cotton goods. India span. And India was not free. She span herself into a pathetic, placid contentment—and was bemused into unconsciousness of the political yoke.

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