

Danger Ahead

FORWARD BLOC

A POLITICAL WEEKLY

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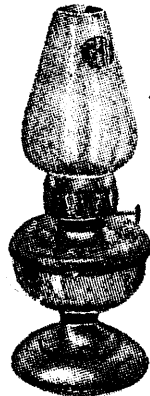
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SATURDAY, JANUARY 6

Danger Ahead

In our last issue we drew attention to the latest move of the Congress Working Committee viz., their demand for a Constituent Assembly. Neither the idea of, nor the demand for, a Constituent Assembly is an innovation. The Congress has repeatedly referred to it in its resolutions. But the form of the present demand and the manner and the circumstances in which it is being put forward is a novelty and an undesirable novelty at that. And the most dangerous feature consists in the fact that this demand has slipped in unnoticed as a virtual substitute for our National Demand for Purna Swaraj. As a piece of political strategy the move is undoubtedly a master-stroke and will confound a large number of Congressmen, including Leftists, who may not be extra-vigilant.

In order to comprehend fully the dangerous character of the above move, we should clarify our minds as to what a Constituent Assembly really signifies. It means no doubt an Assembly elected for the express purpose of framing a Constitution. But who is to convene this Assembly? When and under what circumstances should it be convened or should it actually meet? How will effect be given to its decisions and by whom? These are pertinent questions to be answered in connection with a Constituent Assembly.

When the idea of a Constituent Assembly was first mooted by the

Congress, those who have some knowledge of History and Politics naturally inferred that the idea was to have the Assembly convened after the conquest of power, following a national struggle. After a successful fight when power would be transferred to the representatives of the people, they would form the National Government, or the Provisional National Government. This Government would summon a Constituent Assembly for framing a Constitution for the people. Under the aegis of such a government actually in power after a successful struggle, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for mischievous agencies, Indian or alien, to frustrate the object of the Assembly in any way. But what will happen if the present demand is fulfilled by the British Government now? The Constituent Assembly will be convened by the British Government. It will be elected on the basis of separate electorate. It will meet under the aegis of the present Imperialist Government. There will be no guarantee that the decisions of the Assembly will be given effect to by the British Government and it will be a glorified Debating Society. The floor of the Assembly will become, moreover, the battle ground for all the communal forces in the country. The present Government standing in the background will be in a position to do all the wire-pulling that they consider necessary. Unless a miracle happens, the squabbles within the Assembly will end in a complete deadlock and the Assembly will prove to be abortive. The British Government will then point their fingers at the Congress as the author of the tragedy and they will take credit for the fact that they responded to the Congress demand unreservedly.

What answer will the Congress be able to give in such a predicament?

No, this move is a most dangerous one and we can only hope that the Government for reasons of their own will not agree to it. If they do, then the Congress will land itself in disaster.

For the man in the street it is difficult to understand how the Congress Working Committee could put forward a demand of this sort at this juncture. It has agreed to separate electorate, knowing what its consequences would be. It has not demanded that there should be a prior announcement that the decisions of the Assembly would necessarily be implemented by the British Government. Consequently, even if the Assembly arrives at some agreed solution, it will be open to the British Government or the British Parliament to review, revise or alter it, as in the case of the Round Table Conference on India.

Indications are not wanting that this demand has a reasonable chance of being accepted by the British Government. And why not? They do not stand to lose but to gain therefrom. Messengers from Great Britain who have recently visited India have pleaded with the Congress authorities for a postponement of the struggle. They have also held out hopes that the British Government would be in a position to come to some settlement over the Indian issue within the next few months and that even conservative opinion is veering round now. In normal circumstances, this sort of allurements should fall flat on a nationalist leader, but not so in the case of the present Working Committee who are anxious to find any excuse or justification for postponing the struggle *sine die*. In future, we

shall probably hear of more messengers coming from Great Britain with frequency and regularity.

There is another practical consideration which should further open our eyes to the danger that is ahead of us. After a victorious struggle the leaders of the nation always emerge with tremendous influence and prestige and are therefore able to guide the public and shape public opinion. The public, too, develop so much confidence in the leaders that it almost amounts to blind faith. In such circumstances, it is the leaders who can influence and control the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly and it then becomes impossible for mischief-mongers or reactionaries to frustrate the purpose of that body. A Constituent Assembly to-day as demanded by the Congress will most surely become a platform for intrigues and manoeuvres. It is extremely doubtful if there will be any individual or organisation with so much influence and prestige as to be able to guide and control its deliberations. Among Congressmen themselves, the Rightists being in charge of the Congress machinery to-day, will be returned in much larger numbers than the Leftists. If through good luck, a settlement is reached, the greatest common measure of agreement will be determined not by the most progressive but by the most moderate opinion. Considered from every point of view, therefore, the demand for a fake Constituent Assembly should be repudiated in the most emphatic manner.

While on this subject, we are reminded of a scene when the Constituent Assembly was meeting in Russia after the Revolution of 1917. It was a large gathering composed of all shades of opinion opposed to the Tsarist regime. The

Bolsheviks, who were the most progressive group there, were in a hopeless minority. The heterogeneous Assembly was swayed more by platform orators and doctrinaire revolutionaries of the Kerensky type. The Bolsheviks watched and waited till they were convinced that nothing fruitful would come out of it. They then left the Assembly and ordered its dissolution. What followed is now history. The Constituent Assembly died but the Revolution lived what would have happened if the Bolsheviks had stuck to the Constituent Assembly, one could easily imagine now.

In the case of the Russian Constituent Assembly, there was little or no danger from foreign agencies. The Bolsheviks only apprehended that Mensheviks, moderates and reactionaries would dominate the Assembly and manipulate the deliberations in their own way. Hence they felt called upon to dissolve it.

The Irish analogy is even more relevant and interesting than the Russian. After the Great War, when the Irish people—and particularly the Sinn Fein Party—were showing fight, the then Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Lloyd George, tried a similar experiment. He called upon the Irish people to frame their own constitution through an Irish Convention—an Irish variant of the Constituent Assembly now demanded by the Congress Working Committee. The Sinn Fein leaders, who were more clever and far-sighted than our own, left the Irish Convention severely alone and continued their work outside. The Convention met and debated for sometime, but in the absence of the Sinn Fein Party it proved to be a farce. The Convention broke up; the Sinn Feiners continued the fight and what freedom Ireland won was the result of their efforts.

Let us lose no time in raising our voice of protest against this dangerous move of the Congress Working Committee and let us repudiate the proposed Constituent Assembly in advance, while there is time to prevent its inauguration. And let us tell the Committee plainly that if they are unable to lead the country along the path of struggle, the least they can do is to refrain from adopting such harmful and dangerous tactics.

Sethuram Sundararaman

THE INDIAN PROBLEM

Under the caption "Our Indian Problem" the *Manchester Guardian* writes a longish editorial article to plead with the Government of Great Britain to come to an "agreement with India". The organ of British Liberalism has earned a reputation for being "pro-Indian" in its attitude towards India and in its approach of Indian problems. The sentiments expressed in the article under discussion are laudable, specially its candid admission that "the Moslems, no less than the Hindus, are impatient of the continuance of British rule." Its plea for a final Indian settlement however is induced by motives which, though quite honourable for an Englishman, should serve as a warning to the Indian nationalists. Reformist or revolutionary, a final Indian settlement is welcome to both. There can be nothing repugnant in the idea of Swaraj by peaceful consultation. But any "agreement with India, so far as Indians are concerned, can only be on the basis of a recognition of Indian independence. The *Manchester Guardian* does not plead from the inherent justice of the Indian demand for

independence but argues from the point of view of a bargain in which Great Britain will be on the winning side. The present moment is the most opportune time for Great Britain to negotiate "a final Indian settlement."

Because, "*Congress is inclined to accept a reasonable basis for the negotiation of a final Indian settlement.*" If the Government of Britain pursue a policy of drift, Indian nationalism will "shake off its *present pro-British leaders* and put itself in the power of rasher and less scrupulous men" and the Government will be "faced with the alternative of forcibly repressing a nation-wide agitation of the Indian majority or surrendering to its threats of violence without regard to the rights of minorities."

Let us give another extract from the article of the *Manchester Guardian* :

"Our vested interests no doubt, give us ground for anxiety. But that is perhaps a reason for choosing this moment to come to an agreement with India, *when India is unusually friendly disposed to us* and when she feels that in these dangerous days she may need our support no less than we need hers. The present danger may teach her too, to approach the problem of defence with caution."

We invite our readers to closely examine the quotations we have inserted from the editorial article of the *Manchester Guardian*. Great Britain has been looking for her chance for a *final* Indian settlement. The *reasonable* attitude of the present Congress leadership is an inducement. Before long the *present pro-British leaders* of the Congress may be shaken off, and leadership may soon pass into the hands of *rasher* men. A settlement now will considerably safeguard

Britain's "vested interests" because "India (that is, to say, the present Congress leadership) is *unusually friendly disposed* to Britain. All this is a warning to Indian nationalism. It should see that a settlement with Britain with all Britain's vested interests intact may not be made possible. Indian nationalism should also guard against the pro-British leaders sabotaging the demand for Purna Swaraj.

We have already noticed how the present Congress leadership quietly dropped the demand for independence and substituted the demand for a Constituent Assembly. The *Manchester Guardian* has pleaded with the Government of Great-Britain that in this Constituent Assembly was their chance. "In a Constituent Assembly under the supervision of the British Government, with the Viceroy concerned to make it a success" the British Government will have a determining part to play. A Constituent Assembly under the aegis of the British Government "would be another all-parties Conference" which will either decide nothing or leave things to be decided by British arbitration. Let us not fall into the trap.

CURRENT COMMENTS

Leader or the Country ?

Who is greater, the leader or the country--this is the question that Dr. Rajendra Prasad virtually posed before the Nagpur Provincial Congress Workers' Wardha Camp recently. The reply that he himself put forward could be anticipated readily. The arguments, if they are so at all, by which he sought to buttress up his conclusion, have even lost the grace of novelty by repetition for no less than

a thousand times. Dr. Prasad has said with a sense of boastful complacency that "he is criticised for blindly following Gandhiji but he is not ashamed to do so, as his experience reveals that he has always gained a good deal, instead of losing." But he has conveniently forgotten one thing : not only he but the whole country gained when the General, true to his vocation, led struggles and did not raise a specious smoke-screen to befog the national vision. The "constructive programme" has been before the country for no less than twenty years and it may be said with truth that it has never been carried out to the extent that the Mahatma would wish. But still he did not shirk fights. Besides, during this long period, the country has much sobered by "experience". Large sections of people have lost faith in the magical potency of charkha as a weapon in national fight. The General has been failing to tune himself up to the moving spirit of the country. Is it still up to the nation to keep waiting for the General in this fateful hour of its history ? Or, should it forge ahead to its goal ? Our answer too, like that of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, is too apparent to call for its fresh statement once again.

Finland

There is much confusion in press and among people as to the nature of the struggle that is going on in the Arctic region. *Reuter* has been informing us since the outbreak of hostility that the Red soldiers are dying and thawing in thousands and Mannerheim's White Guards are steadily breaking through the frontier to Russia. Great Britain, France, and America from across the Atlantic, like the spectators of a cricket gallery, are

clapping and cheering up the pupils of Mannerheim for their wizardly knock-outs. But amidst these turmoils and lying propaganda the real issue remains clouded as it has always been before.

The issue is clear. The People's Republic that was set up in Finland under M. Kuissinen has not been recognised as legal by the Mannerheim-Tanner gang, the agents of European imperialists. The war is between the Finnish people and this reactionary ruling clique of Finland. Russia is bound by the Pact of Mutual Assistance to help Finnish People's Government. That is Russia's role in this conflict and it can fairly be compared with the role of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. The superiority of the Red Army is a widely accepted truth and even a child cannot be caressed to believe the mischievous propaganda of the *Reuter*. We are getting *communiqués* almost daily from Helsinki, but where are the *communiqués* from Leningrad or Moscow? Or the one-tenth of the globe has totally been devastated by a small gang of a tiny island? Not Reds, but Truths are the casualties in this war.

Presidential Address of the Science Congress

The Science Congress has now concluded its annual session at Madras. The Presidential address of Mr. B. Sahni was, strangely enough, a hymn about the imperfections of science. The President revealed the mystic strain in his nature when he said, "The student of science lives in a world of fragments. Nothing in that vast array of visible things that we call Nature appears to our restricted vision as a complete picture. True Artist that he is, the Creator never reveals the whole of His design at once." Mr. Sahni, among

the scientists today, does not stand alone with his mysticism; he can count within his fold such distinguished names as Jeans, Eddington and others. They are pitted against an array of equally brilliant names, who believe in the omnipotence of science as a solvent of the riddle of the universe. And when the masters controvert each other, the layman finds himself into a veritable wilderness. It may be that the advancing science will finally be able to resolve the mystery of life; or at the end of journey—if there be an end of it—it will still find itself staggering before the immensity of the riddle. In the meantime the search has to go on, not in a spirit of dogmatism, but with humble inquisitiveness. The President's timely reference to the "ignoble ends" to which science has been harnessed today, will find an echo in every heart. He might have proceeded to say that only a radical change in the basic relations of society could end this awful travesty of science.

Students and Politics

The address that Mr. Muqimuddin Farooqui delivered as the Chairman of the Reception Committee to the All-India Students' Federation Convention at Delhi, contains much gold but some alloy too. The programme of work that he set before the Convention has undoubtedly many good points in it, but we think he gave a good deal of his case away when he advised the students "to talk less of politics and take up seriously the work of strengthening their organisation." The theory that the students should keep away from politics has now hardly any ground left to it on which it can continue its stand. As a matter of fact, in all the advanced countries of the West to-day, the students have formed the vanguard of the political phalanx. If such is the case

in free countries, the necessity of students' participating in politics in dependent ones is all the more greater. Politics is bound to be the life-breath of people in lands in bondage, and there is no reason why the students, with all their youthful idealism, should be deprived of the high privilege of getting into the thick of it. We are not, however, sure if the Chairman forbade "talking" as being antithetical to "doing", for, elsewhere in the address we find that he counselled the formation of study circles in schools and colleges "with a view to creating political consciousness among students." His address may naturally give rise to confusion; so it is better that he should make a further statement for clearing his position.

Check on Profiteering

It was only the other day that the Government of Bengal fixed up the prices of various commodities. But the wily traders have managed to torpedo the official plans and are having their own unscrupulous ways. By resorting to various subterfuges they have screwed up the prices of many articles, specially the food-stuffs. It is needless to say that the abnormal rise in prices has pressed hard on the people at large; but the poorer classes are being mercilessly fleeced by it. Reports have been pouring in from villages that the dealers there are exacting any prices they like from the stricken customers. Cannot the Government do anything to enforce the schedule that they have fixed, not only in towns but in villages as well? Already serious disturbances have broken out in certain places due to the present rise in prices, and if they go on looking up unchecked, more of them are likely to follow. For, it is merely a truism that hunger is no respecter of laws.

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Celebrate "INDEPENDENCE DAY" Befitting Kisans

The Independence Day, the 26th of January, is fast approaching and lest it be celebrated formally like a number of previous years, the Kisans, their workers and sympathisers and the Kisans' organisations throughout the country must awake betimes and observe it in a truly Kisan way. It has achieved an importance and significance of its own, owing to the Imperialist World War and also to the renewed and sustained efforts on the part of the Zemindars, their likes, the monied men and their mainstay, not to allow, as far as lies in them, any rest or relief to the famished Kisans of India. There is a well-organised move on their behalf to suppress mercilessly the ever-increasing restlessness and power of resistance in the Kisans, with a view to condemn them to a life of dreadful despair in perpetuity.

Hundreds of the Kisans and their beloved leaders are still rotting behind iron bars, not as politicals, but as so many criminals, being treated inhumanly, and the powers have turned a deaf ear to all the protests against it.

Then there is this devil of the European war creating an all-round havoc. On the one hand, the Kisans are forced to buy all their bare necessities of life at prohibitive prices and there is no serious endeavour to stop this ferocious loot. And, on the other hand, there is no guarantee of proportionately high prices for the agricultural products. Rather there is every attempt to keep these prices at the lowest possible level, as is evident with regard to jute, sugar cane etc. Thus the Kisans find themselves between the devil and the deep sea.

And the problem of the deliverance of the Kisans and the masses of India from the political, economic and social bondage has receded as though to the background because of the stalemate created by the attempt and move of our national leadership for a compromise with those who are responsible for our triple bondage. They have turned their eyes to the Whitehall and Delhi instead of to the Kisans and other masses as heretofore and thus created a terribly soul-killing atmosphere.

It is against this background that we are to celebrate the Independence Day this year. This unholy alliance to stunt deliberately the growth of the Kisans, the studied and colossal indifference to our demands regarding Kisan prisoners, the anarchy in the prices of commodities and this political stalemate and swing to compromise—all these must be put a stop to and the Kisans must assert themselves on the 26th January by declaring that they are going to tolerate all these no longer. Monster meetings, giant rallies and huge processions should be arranged that day as far as possible, in full co-operation with other bodies and associations, in every nook and corner of the country and more particularly in the provincial and district headquarters, cities and towns and for these, preparations should start in right earnest from now. I hope and believe that Kisan comrades and our organisations will not be found lacking in their efforts to make it a glorious success.

Sd/- Swami Sahajanand Saraswati

FORWARD BLOC

News

BRANCH TO BE FORMED AT MANIKGANJ

With a view to devise ways and means to organise a subdivisional branch of the Forward Bloc, meeting of the Leftist workers (Congress) of the subdivision was held on the 26th December last. A resolution was unanimously adopted appointing Messrs. Chandra Nath Saha and Pramatha Nandy as joint organisers to take necessary steps to organise a subdivisional branch of the Forward Bloc as early as possible. Another resolution was also unanimously passed electing an Advisory Committee to render all possible co-operation to the organisers in the task and empowering the Committee to co-opt additional members not exceeding one third of the total strength of the Committee.

PABNA FORWARD BLOC

Unions being formed

As yet ten Union Forward Blocs have been formed throughout the district of Pabna by the consistent efforts of S. Surendra Sarkar, A. I. Secretary, Pabna District Forward Bloc, and some more will be formed very soon. The places where Union Bloc have already been set up are noted below :—(1) Ruppur (2) Sujanagore (3) Masundia (4) Puran Bharenga (5) Raninagore (6) Dapunia (7) Prannathpur (8) Lakmi Kunda (9) Dasuria (10) Sahapur.

MR. ANNAPURNAIAH'S HOUSE SEARCHED

The residence of Mr. M. Annapurniah, member, All India Forward Bloc Working Committee was searched at Rajahmundry by the Local Police, on the 20th December last. But nothing incriminating was found, and nothing was seized. The search lasted for an hour, the Police throughout, being scrupulously polite and courteous.

HABIGANJ FORWARD BLOC

In a meeting held on the 17th November last a branch of the Forward Bloc was formed at Habiganj with Mr. Sibendra Chandra Biswas as President and Kusum Ranjan Chowdhury as Secretary. The total number of members on the executive Committee is twenty-one.

