

An Open Letter to the Workers of India

samedi 9 septembre 2023, par [TROTSKY Leon / TROTSKI Léon / TROTSKY Léon](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 25 juillet 1939).

Dear Friends :

Titanic and terrible events are approaching with implacable force. Mankind lives in expectation of war which will, of course, also draw into its maelstrom the colonial countries and which is of vital significance for their destiny. Agents of the British government depict the matter as though the war will be waged for principles of “democracy” which must be saved from fascism. All classes and peoples must rally around the “peaceful” “democratic” governments so as to repel the fascist aggressors. Then “democracy” will be saved and peace stabilized forever. This gospel rests on a deliberate lie. If the British government were really concerned with the flowering of democracy then a very simple opportunity to demonstrate this exists : let the government give complete freedom to India. The right of national independence is one of the elementary democratic rights. But actually, the London government is ready to hand over all the democracies in the world in return for one tenth of its colonies.

If the Indian people do not wish to remain as slaves for all eternity, then they must expose and reject those false preachers who assert that the sole enemy of the people is fascism. Hitler and Mussolini are, beyond doubt, the bitterest enemies of the toilers and oppressed. They are gory executioners, deserving of the greatest hatred from the toilers and oppressed of the world. But they are, before everything, the enemies of the German and Italian peoples on whose backs they sit. The oppressed classes and peoples - as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Liebknecht have taught us - must always seek out their main enemy at home, cast in the role of their own immediate oppressors and exploiters. In India that enemy above all is the British bourgeoisie. The overthrow of British imperialism would deliver a terrible blow at all the oppressors, including the fascist dictators. In the long run the imperialists are distinguished from one another in form - not in essence. German imperialism, deprived of colonies, puts on the fearful mask of fascism with its saber teeth protruding. British imperialism, gorged, because it possesses immense colonies, hides its saber teeth behind a mask of democracy. But this democracy exists only for the metropolitan center, for the 45,000,000 souls - or more correctly, for the ruling bourgeoisie - in the metropolitan center. India is deprived not only of democracy but of the most elementary right of national independence. Imperialist democracy is thus the democracy of slave owners fed by the lifeblood of the colonies. But India seeks her own democracy, and not to serve as fertilizer for the slave owners.

Those who desire to end fascism, reaction and all forms of oppression must overthrow imperialism. There is no other road. This task cannot, however, be accomplished by peaceful methods, by negotiations and pledges. Never before in history have slave owners voluntarily freed their slaves. Only a bold, resolute struggle of the Indian people for their economic and national emancipation can free India.

The Indian bourgeoisie is incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle. They are closely bound up with and dependent upon British capitalism. They tremble for their own property. They stand in fear of the masses. They seek compromises with British imperialism no matter what the price and lull the Indian masses with hopes of reforms from above. The leader and prophet of this bourgeoisie is Gandhi. A fake leader and a false prophet ! Gandhi and his compeers have developed a theory that

India's position will constantly improve, that her liberties will continually be enlarged and that India will gradually become a Dominion on the road of peaceful reforms. Later on, perhaps even achieve full independence. This entire perspective is false to the core. The imperialist classes were able to make concessions to colonial peoples as well as to their own workers, only so long as capitalism marched uphill, so long as the exploiters could firmly bank on the further growth of profits. Nowadays there cannot even be talk of this. World imperialism is in decline. The condition of all imperialist nations daily becomes more difficult while the contradictions between them become more and more aggravated. Monstrous armaments devour an ever greater share of national incomes. The imperialists can no longer make serious concessions either to their own toiling masses or to the colonies. On the contrary, they are compelled to resort to an ever more bestial exploitation. It is precisely in this that capitalism's death agony is expressed. To retain their colonies, markets and concessions, from Germany, Italy and Japan, the London government stands ready to mow down millions of people. Is it possible, without losing one's senses, to pin any hopes that this greedy and savage financial oligarchy will voluntarily free India ?

True enough, a government of the so-called Labor Party may replace the Tory government. But this will alter nothing. The Labor Party - as witness its entire past and present program - is in no way distinguished from the Tories on the colonial question. The Labor Party in reality expresses not the interests of the working class, but only the interests of the British labor bureaucracy and labor aristocracy. It is to this stratum that the bourgeoisie can toss juicy morsels, due to the fact that they themselves ruthlessly exploit the colonies, above all India. The British labor bureaucracy - in the Labor Party as well as in the trade unions - is directly interested in the exploitation of colonies. It has not the slightest desire to think of the emancipation of India. All these gentlemen - Major Atlee, Sir Walter Citrine & Co. - are ready at any moment to brand the revolutionary movement of the Indian people as "betrayal", as aid to Hitler and Mussolini and to resort to military measures for its suppression.

In no way superior is the policy of the present day Communist International. To be sure, 20 years ago the Third, or Communist, International was founded as a genuine revolutionary organization. One of its most important tasks was the liberation of the colonial peoples. Only recollections today remain of this program, however. The leaders of the Communist International have long since become the mere tools of the Moscow bureaucracy which has stifled the Soviet working masses and which has become transformed into a new aristocracy. In the ranks of the Communist Parties of various countries - including India - there are no doubt many honest workers, students, etc. : but they do not fix the politics of the Comintern. The deciding word belongs to the Kremlin which is guided not by the interests of the oppressed, but by those of the USSR's new aristocracy.

Stalin and his clique, for the sake of an alliance with the imperialist governments, have completely renounced the revolutionary program for the emancipation of the colonies. This was openly avowed at the last Congress of Stalin's party in Moscow in March of the current year by Manuilski, one of the leaders of the Comintern, who declared : "The Communists advance to the forefront the struggle for the realization of the right of self-determination of nationalities enslaved by fascist governments. They demand free self-determination for Austria ... the Sudeten regions ... Korea, Formosa, Abyssinia" And what about India, Indo-China, Algeria and other colonies of England and France ? The Comintern representative answers this question as follows, "The Communists demand of the imperialist governments of the so called bourgeois democratic states the immediate [sic] drastic [!] improvement in the living standards of the toiling masses in the colonies and the granting of broad democratic rights and liberties to the colonies." (*Pravda*, issue No.70, March 12, 1939.) In other words, as regards the colonies of England and France the Comintern has completely gone over to Gandhi's position and the position of the conciliationist colonial bourgeoisie in general. The Comintern has completely renounced revolutionary struggle for India's independence. It "demands"

(on its hands and knees) the “granting” of “democratic liberties” to India by British imperialism. The words “immediate drastic improvement in the living standards of the toiling masses in the colonies”, have an especially false and cynical ring. Modern capitalism – declining, gangrenous, disintegrating – is more and more compelled to worsen the position of workers in the metropolitan center itself. How then can it improve the position of the toilers in the colonies from whom it is compelled to squeeze out all the juices of life so as to maintain its own state of equilibrium ? The improvement of the conditions of the toiling masses in the colonies is possible only on the road to the complete overthrow of imperialism.

But the Communist International has traveled even further on this road of betrayal. Communists, according to Manuilski, “subordinate the realization of this right of secession ... in the interests of defeating fascism.” In other words, in the event of war between England and France over colonies, the Indian people must support their present slave owners, the British imperialists. That is to say, must shed their blood not for their own emancipation, but for the preservation of the rule of “the City” over India. And these cheaply bought scoundrels dare to quote Marx and Lenin ! As a matter of fact, their teacher and leader is none other than Stalin, the head of a new bureaucratic aristocracy, the butcher of the Bolshevik Party, the strangler of workers and peasants.

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The Stalinists cover up their policy of servitude to British, French and USA imperialism with the formula of “People’s Front”. What a mockery of the people ! “People’s Front” is only a new name for that old policy, the gist of which lies in class collaboration, in a coalition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In every such coalition, the leadership invariably turns out to be in the hands of the right wing, that is, in the hands of the propertied class. The Indian bourgeoisie, as has already been stated, wants a peaceful horse trade and not a struggle. Coalition with the bourgeoisie leads to the proletariat’s abnegating the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. The policy of coalition implies marking time on one spot, temporizing, cherishing false hopes, engaging in hollow maneuvers and intrigues. As a result of this policy disillusionment inevitably sets in among the working masses, while the peasants turn their backs on the proletariat, and fall into apathy. The German revolution, the Austrian revolution, the Chinese revolution and the Spanish revolution have all perished as a result of the policy of coalition. [1] The self same danger also menaces the Indian revolution where the Stalinists, under the guise of “People’s Front”, are putting across a policy of subordinating the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. This signifies, in action, a rejection of the revolutionary agrarian program, a rejection of arming the workers, a rejection of the struggle for power, a rejection of revolution.

In the event that the Indian bourgeoisie finds itself compelled to take even the tiniest step on the road of struggle against the arbitrary rule of Great Britain, the proletariat will naturally support such a step. But they will support it with their own methods : mass meetings, bold slogans, strikes, demonstrations and more decisive combat actions, depending on the relationship of forces and the circumstances. Precisely to do this must the proletariat have its hands free. Complete independence from the bourgeoisie is indispensable to the proletariat, above all in order to exert influence on the peasantry, the predominant mass of India’s population. Only the proletariat is capable of advancing a bold, revolutionary agrarian program, of rousing and rallying tens of millions of peasants and leading them in struggle against the native oppressors and British imperialism. The alliance of workers and poor peasants is the only honest, reliable alliance that can assure the final victory of the Indian revolution.

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All peacetime questions will preserve their full force in time of war, except that they will be invested

with a far sharper expression. First of all, exploitation of the colonies will become greatly intensified. The metropolitan centers will not only pump from the colonies foodstuffs and raw materials, but they will also mobilize vast numbers of colonial slaves who are to die on the battlefields for their masters. Meanwhile, the colonial bourgeoisie will have its snout deep in the trough of war orders and will naturally renounce opposition in the name of patriotism and profits. Gandhi is already preparing the ground for such a policy. These gentlemen will keep drumming : "We must wait patiently till the war ends - and then London will reward us for the assistance we have given." As a matter of fact, the imperialists will redouble and triple their exploitation of the toilers both at home and especially in the colonies so as to rehabilitate the country after the havoc and devastation of the war. In these circumstances there cannot even be talk of new social reforms in the metropolitan centers or of grants of liberties to the colonies. Double chains of slavery - that will be the inevitable consequence of the war if the masses of India follow the politics of Gandhi, the Stalinists and their friends.

The war, however, may bring to India as well as to the other colonies not a redoubled slavery but, 'on the contrary, complete liberty : the proviso for this is a correct revolutionary policy. The Indian people must divorce their fate from the very outset from that of British imperialism. The oppressors and the oppressed stand on opposite sides of the trenches. No aid whatsoever to the slave owners ! On the contrary, those immense difficulties which the war will bring in its wake must be utilized so as to deal a mortal blow to all the ruling classes. That is how the oppressed classes and peoples in all countries should act, irrespective of whether Messrs. Imperialists don democratic or fascist masks.

To realize such a policy a revolutionary party, basing itself on the vanguard of the proletariat, is necessary. Such a party does not yet exist in India. The Fourth International offers this party its program, its experience, its collaboration. The basic conditions for this party are : complete independence from imperialist democracy, complete independence from the Second and Third Internationals and complete independence from the national Indian bourgeoisie.

In a number of colonial and semi-colonial countries sections of the Fourth International already exist and are making successful progress. First place among them is unquestionably held by our section in French Indo-China which is conducting an irreconcilable struggle against French imperialism and "People's Front" mystifications. "The Stalinist leaders," it is stated in the newspaper of the Saigon workers (*The Struggle - La Lutte*), of April 7, 1939, "have taken yet another step on the road of betrayal. Throwing off their masks as revolutionists, they have become champions of imperialism and openly speak out against emancipation of the oppressed colonial peoples." Owing to their bold revolutionary politics, the Saigon proletarians, members of the Fourth International, scored a brilliant victory over the bloc of the ruling party and the Stalinists at the elections to the colonial council held in April of this year.

The very same policy ought to be pursued by the advanced workers of British India. We must cast away false hopes and repel false friends. We must pin hope only upon ourselves, our own revolutionary forces. The struggle for national independence, for an independent Indian republic is indissolubly linked up with the agrarian revolution, with the nationalization of banks and trusts, with a number of other economic measures aiming to raise the living standard of the country and to make the toiling masses the masters of their own destiny. Only the proletariat in an alliance with the peasantry is capable of executing these tasks.

In its initial stage the revolutionary party will no doubt comprise a tiny minority. In contrast to other parties, however, it will render a clear accounting of the situation and fearlessly march towards its great goal. It is indispensable in all the industrial centers and cities to establish workers groups, standing under the banner of the Fourth International. Only those intellectuals who have completely come over to the side of the proletariat must be allowed into these groups. Alien to sectarian self-immersion, the revolutionary worker - Marxists must actively participate in the work of the trade

unions, educational societies, the Congress Socialist Party and, in general, all mass organizations. Everywhere they remain as the extreme left wing, everywhere they set the example of courage in action, everywhere, in a patient and comradely manner, they explain their program to the workers, peasants and revolutionary intellectuals. Impending events will come to the aid of the Indian Bolshevik-Leninists, revealing to the masses the correctness of their path. The party will grow swiftly and become tempered in the fire. Allow me to express my firm hope that the revolutionary struggle for the emancipation of India will unfold under the banner of the Fourth International.

With warmest comradely greetings,

Leon Trotsky,
Coyoacan, Mexico
July 25, 1939.

P.-S.

• Leon Trotsky Internet Archive :
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Notes

[1] The experience of the Chinese Revolution of 1925-1927 is of the most direct significance for India. I heartily recommend to the Indian revolutionists Harold Isaacs' excellent book, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*.