

# British Imperialism and India

The following article by Comrade Saklatvala, member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and member of the British parliament was written by him for the Communist press after his return from a visit to his native land. Saklatvala is the only Communist in the British parliament and his constituency is the working class district of Battersea, where he is extremely popular among the workers despite the opposition of the reactionary labor leaders.—Editor.

I HAVE been to India and I have come back. Whilst I was there events were daily happening which would make me pity Great Britain more than India, and after I returned I see events happening here which, without the imperialist hold over India, would not have been possible and which are dragging the British working class on their downward path.

The British race has a reputation for being conservative on the whole and (though several of its members wear different political labels and trade marks), has betrayed its conservatism at every turn of events. At the same time the history of the world and the modern geography of the world, give you instances that the British race is enterprising, is daring, and possesses many men and women of revolutionary spirit. I often ask myself, are the British and in their innermost nature really conservative temperamentally or do they appear conservative as an economic effect of tremendous advantage gained by them through their spirit of enterprise and revolutionary temperament? I feel more inclined towards this latter belief.

Somehow or other, large numbers and members of the working class have been permitted to believe in the possibility of a stationary life, even in inevitable and gradual progress coming whilst you wait. With the qualities of daring and enterprise and unscrupulousness of method of some of her sons, the economic resources of this island country became so vast in a comparatively poor world that men and women began to feel that their share in the distribution of it, however unjust or unfair it is, would be ample enough for all purposes of life, and this spirit of complacency sustained the whole of the nation for over a century, till it has created a state of mind much akin to the fatalism of their Oriental brethren.

The world's conditions have changed. Capitalism has grown, capitalistic competition has become keener; class interest has become sharper, imperialism has stepped in as a powerful instrument with which to undermine the standard of life in Britain, and yet through all these changes, in spite of the thunder and quaking shocks of the revolution of Russia and mighty changes in Europe the habit of the mind of the Briton still drags on in the same groove. He does not realize that what appeared to him to be a stationary condition was nothing but continuous replenishment from inexhaustible sources of loot from abroad. There is neither an assured continuity of economic or political rights, much less an inevitable and gradual progress.

The neglect of the British working class to study British imperialism in its proper light is leading to the accomplishment of two processes, namely, a rapid Britainizing of a capitalist master-class in India and a rapid Indianizing of the large working class in Britain. In Britain within the class struggle one sees gigantic efforts on the part of the workers

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to level up their conditions of life and their political rights to those of the upper classes. Then one travels in India and sees a picture of sharp contrast, a transplanted life of modern European luxury and comfort and a little away from it a stagnant life of the human being, even as it used to be a thousand years ago.

Take your worst slums, your most congested lodging-houses and yet you cannot conceive of that broken-down mud-hut to enter which even a stature of 5 feet of humanity has got to nearly double up. There is no other ventilation or opening for light and there is even nothing to see inside these huts, which are invariably completely unfurnished. I am not talking now of villages; I am talking of large industrial centers like Nagpur and Cawnpore where exist cotton mills more flourishing than most cotton mills in Lancashire, and where several thousand workers are still consigned to these death-traps.

You struggle here by forming organizations, conducting agitations and fighting for various rights to improve the health of the working class population and to reduce their death-rate. Then one goes in India, and there is to be seen openly modern Western industrialism, under European or Indian capitalist control, bare-facedly worsening the health conditions of the workers, increasing the toll of death till infantile mortality which normally in India would be as high as nearly 206 per 1,000 reached the appalling figure of 600 to 800 per 1,000 amongst children born to parents working in factories. Poverty, misery, human degradation seem to be a rightful heritage of the workers in the new industries in the East. The people out there seem to accept it with philosophical calm. The Westernized Indian himself looks upon it as something that matters neither seriously nor immediately and which he seriously believes would be remedied as soon as political power is seized by him from the foreign intruder. He does not realize that any nation, in order to wrench power from a foreign conqueror or oppressor, would require national strength and consciousness of tremendous dimensions and this could not be obtained and consolidated without the workers and the peasants in his land being well organized.

## THE PATIENT PLODDER

His driven stride grows sullen with the weight  
That he has carried through long centuries;  
His famished soul is wreckage of the seas  
Of life; his hope becomes disconsolate  
As he plods on. O, who dared relegate  
Upon his beaten back these calumnies?  
And whom can this maligned apostle please  
But brutes with brutish moods to satiate?

When will eyes peer into his abode  
And send a beam of light to chase away  
The shadows that have lingered there so long?  
It almost seems this human antipode  
Has staggered on, unable to relay  
Aloud his sorry, unmelodic song.

—TRAIL THAISIS.

On the other hand, in order to alleviate the mental agony of his suffering poor, or simply through the accustomed unfeelingness of the capitalist profiteer, the educated Indian tries to instil a philosophical contentment in the workers and the peasants and to prevent as far as possible any self-consciousness dawning upon them. Thus is accomplished with success a vast experiment of the British imperialist of producing modern goods and services of public utility through human agency at a cost incomparably lower than at home. He also succeeds in personal domination by keeping large masses of humanity as bond-slaves, rigorously tied to their jobs through the necessity of staving off starvation and through the severity of legislative enactments.

In the midst of this process some of us cried out against it in Britain, but in vain, to tell the Briton that his immediate task lay in levelling up the conditions of his fellow-workers in India. But the appeal failed to touch the British worker. His leaders and his organizations worked like machines that were invented and perfected before the advent of economic imperialism and peril, and proved incapable of devoting themselves to better their conditions.

An almost concerted view was taken that the low level of the Indian was well deserved and that the higher level of the British workers was something that was permanently secure by his own merit. The shrewd capitalist class on the other hand awaited stabilization of conditions to the difference between two standards of human life under its control which were well marked and were capable of being brought to play their part under one and the same common imperial commercialism. Then, by exerting the ordinary pressure of a competitive system of life he compels the British worker to level down to the economic position of the Indian worker, which process will naturally continue till a common level is reached either one as low as that of the Indian, or one as high as that to which the British organizations assist the Indian workers to reach.

For the last four years the cry of the Indian workers went out unheeded by British ears to secure for them trade union rights similar to their own and to save them from proposals which were not conferring special rights for the Indian workers but which were tightening the bonds of serfdom upon them.

Here once again the British worker dreamt that his own position was secure forever, up to a certain stage and it would be the lookout of the Indian worker to safely reach that stage of advancement. However, under economic imperialism, such dreams are soon shattered, today the challenge goes forth to the British workers to level down to the serfdom of the Indian workers. I see therefore two rapid developments, the Britainizing of a master-class in India and the Indianizing of the working class of Britain. To me it is as clear as daylight that the primary duty of the British workers is to form an international solidarity with the Indian and Oriental workers and to level them up for the sake of securing a world standard and not to look upon such an act of solidarity as a mere spasmodic expression of internationalism or as an act of secondary charity from the stronger to the weaker group.

More words are useless and unnecessary; events will prove the correctness or otherwise of this forecast.