

## SOCIALISM UNITES—IMPERIALISM DIVIDES

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## SELF-DETERMINATION OR SUBJECTION?

IN the preceding sections we have surveyed the rise and fall of the Czarist Empire and described the transformation of that vast imperial structure into a new kind of State—a Multi-National Federated Socialist Commonwealth based on the common ownership of the means of production and distribution and a planned economy. We have in the course of our survey traced the tremendous political, economic and social changes which have taken place in the territories which, just over a quarter of a century ago, formed the Asiatic colonies of the now defunct Czarist Empire. There is no doubt that the peoples of those erstwhile colonies have undergone the most radical transformation recorded by history in such a short space of time.

There is only one other political aggregate in the world today which includes such a heterogeneous multitude of peoples as the Soviet Union. That is the British Empire, which is made up of the white Dominions, forming, together with the United Kingdom, the British Commonwealth of Nations; and the dependent coloured Empire, composed of India, Burma, Africa, and a number of territories scattered throughout the world, variously described as Crown Colonies, Protectorates, Mandates, Condominiums. The white population is 70,000,000, and the coloured over 500,000,000.

In the light of the experiences attending the war we may well profit from a comparative examination of the attitude of the non-European or coloured peoples of the U.S.S.R., and those of the British Colonial and Indian Empires. This comparison provides the most definite illustration of the fundamental difference between the non-Imperialist Soviet and the

Imperialist British systems. Here we are not concerned with the white self-governing Dominions of the Commonwealth,<sup>1</sup> but with those parts of the dependent Empire—India, Burma, Malaya, Africa, etc.—inhabited largely by coloured races. For the acid test of the stability of any multi-racial and multi-national political structure is the spontaneous loyalty and enthusiasm demonstrated by the diverse ethnic elements constituting that political system in times of crisis. What does the application of this test reveal?

It reveals, on the one hand, the U.S.S.R., a union of peoples at varying stages of social and cultural development, of many races and colours, forming a monolithic phalanx before the enemy, inspired by an enthusiastic fanaticism which evoked the admiration of friend and foe alike. These comrades-in-arms, these European Slavs—Great Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians—and Asiatics—Georgians and Azerbaijanians, Turkmans and Tajiks, Kazaks and Kalmuks, Bashkirs and Tartars, Buriat-Mongols, and other descendants of Jenghis Khan's hordes, have fought tenaciously to preserve that way of life which, despite many shortcomings, gives them so much hope of a happy future.

"The German-Fascists stupidly expected that the Soviet Union would fall apart at the first onslaught," writes a leading Soviet authority on the National Question. "Not a single Soviet Republic withdrew from the Union, not one of them so much as thought of taking advantage of its right freely to secede from the Union. Far from it—in the years of war the moral and political unity of the Soviet people has become so firm that the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., in its session of February, 1944, found it possible to extend the sovereign rights of the Union Republics, and to grant them the right to have their own military formations, and enter into direct relations with foreign States."<sup>2</sup>

It was not the German-Fascists alone who expected the Soviet State structure to disintegrate under the impact of war. There was a large section of opinion in Britain which held

<sup>1</sup> According to the Government of Eire External Relations Act, Eire is a sovereign independent State, associated for certain purposes with the British Commonwealth of Nations.

<sup>2</sup> *Soviet War News*, June 28, 1944. Article entitled "Force and Vitality of Soviet National Policy," by V. Karpinsky.

this same view, and its standpoint was given expression by the leading Right-wing publicist, Frederick A. Voigt, editor of the influential journal, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, who predicted uprisings from among the Ukrainians and Georgians, who "have suffered under the Muscovite despotism."<sup>1</sup>

How chagrined these reactionary anti-Soviet elements must have felt to witness how solidly the Soviet Union held together as against the contrasting development in East Asia, where events have graphically exposed the inherent weakness of the Colonial structures—British, Dutch, French, etc. According to the Singapore Correspondent of that venerable organ of British Imperialism, *The Times*, "After nearly 120 years of British rule the vast majority of the Asiatics were not sufficiently interested in the continuance of this rule to take any steps to ensure its continuance."<sup>2</sup> What a damning indictment of British Colonial administration!

Why is it that these Asiatic peoples—Malayans and Burmese—after enjoying more than a century of British rule, with its culture, 'trusteeship,' and the rest, display such ingratitude for the gifts which the British imperialists have brought them that they desert their 'trustees' and 'benefactors' just at the time when they are most in need of support? The answer to this question is to be found in the economic and social conditions prevailing in those Colonial countries at the time of the Japanese invasion, which it will do no harm to review.

### 1. Malaya.

Malaya represented the wealthiest unit of the British Empire. With 50 per cent of the world's tin and 70 per cent of the world's rubber, it was a veritable Eldorado for predatory capitalism; it was the dream of the City of London come true. The alien conquerer came into this rich land and took possession of most of the wealth after "a long, a harassing, and expensive war which was only brought to a conclusion by hunting the rebels out of Pahang, and even

<sup>1</sup> *The Nineteenth Century and After*, August 1941.

<sup>2</sup> This sentence was omitted from the dispatch as published in *The Times*, but was printed in *The Manchester Guardian* (18 2 1942), for which paper the same Correspondent reported.

following them into the independent neighbouring states."<sup>1</sup> The conqueror did not even give the Malayans the Bible in return for their lands, for they remained Mohammedans. The nabobs, having taken possession of the best areas of the country, turned to India, whence they brought indentured labour into Malaya to develop their lands and mines. This they did because foreign coolie labour was even cheaper than the indigenous kind, the Malayans having showed no desire to work for the Europeans at the prevailing wages paid for labour in the tin mines and on the rubber plantations. Those people who believe that Imperialism is a philanthropic institution creating jobs for backward races need not look farther than Malaya to see how wrong they are.

The pukka sahibs were in Malaya to line their pockets. These 'birds of passage' were feathering their nests as fast as they possibly could. Even now they hope to return and develop resources at the point where they were forced to leave the Japanese in charge. That is the reason why, while they duly admired at a great distance the scorched earth policy operated in the Soviet Union, they left things in order for Japanese interim control. They look forward to a speedy return and a renewal of the 'good old times.' And when that time comes, "we must regard our imperial heritage as our responsibility in the investment of our surplus cash,"<sup>2</sup> the Tory M.P., Captain Gammans, exhorts the old gang.

Wages in Malaya averaged one shilling to 1s. 6d. a day for men and eightpence to ninepence for women. These were the ruling rates in factories, mines and on plantations, and the legal maximum working day was fixed at nine hours. During December 1940, workers on an estate of the Dunlop Rubber Company demanded higher wages and went on strike when they were refused. Three strikers were shot and others wounded when military forces were called in to quell the workers. At Selangor during May 1941, seven thousand workers went on strike, and five of them were killed in the clashes with the police which followed.

These labour disturbances were ascribed to "subversive propaganda," questions in Parliament drawing the reply that

<sup>1</sup> *British Malaya*, by Governor Swettenham, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> *Singapore Sequel*, by Capt. L. D. Gammans. Signpost Booklets.

there was no economic justification for them. Members of Parliament may, of course, consider one shilling to 1s. 6d. a day sufficient wages for colonials. At any rate, these were the wages which caused the strikes, and the fact that the trade union law forbade peaceful picketing gave an excuse for the official attacks upon the workers. At the same time extremely handsome profits were being pocketed by the rubber companies.

Not even the semblance of political or industrial democracy was enjoyed by the indigenous people. "The Societies Ordinance makes political organisations illegal, and prior to 1940 also made trade unions illegal. Now, as the result of tremendous labour unrest, trade unions are legalised under the Trade Union Enactment in the Straits Settlements but this enactment seeks merely to bring the unions under the control of the Governor, and it makes all trade union activities—strikes, political activities, etc., illegal. The Official Secrets Enactment and the Sedition Ordinance give the Governor tremendously wide and vague powers. Under these ordinances persons can be convicted not only for actions but for 'seditious tendencies' and 'purposes detrimental to the interests of the British Empire.'

"The freedom of the press, of publication, of the importation of books, of the showing of films, of meetings, etc., are all severely restricted. In all the Malay States freedom of conscience is infringed by the power of the sultans to compel attendance at the mosques and to declare 'false doctrines' illegal. Everywhere police services are highly developed, particularly political police. Judges are usually colonial service officials. Deportation without trial is very frequent."<sup>1</sup>

One of the moral justifications of Imperialism, used particularly by the British, is that European occupation of backward territories will abolish slavery and kindred practices incompatible with modern standards of civilisation. Child slavery, however, flourished in Hong Kong and the Malay States. Known as *Mui Tsai*, it fed on the grinding poverty of the people, who were only too glad to receive a few dollars in exchange for the children they could not afford to feed and clothe. The girls, from the very youngest age (even

<sup>1</sup> *Civil Liberty*—Journal of the National Council for Civil Liberties. March, 1941.

under three years), were as a rule sold into domestic slavery and very often passed over into brothels. Boys were bought to work in factories and for other kinds of labour.

When he was Secretary of State for Colonies in 1922, Mr. Winston Churchill told Parliament that he desired "to make it clear that both the Governor (of Hong Kong, the distributing centre) and I are determined to effect the abolition of the system at the earliest practicable date, and I have indicated to the Governor that I expect the change to be carried out within a year."

That expectation was too optimistic, for Lady Simon, writing in 1929, told that the system still flourished in Hong Kong,<sup>1</sup> and on May 29, 1941, Mr. Creech Jones, M.P., asked the Under-Secretary of State for Colonies "whether steps are being taken by legislative action in the Straits Settlements to prohibit the traffic in boys, who are sold for employment in factories and industries outside the territories, for domestic service and for training in circuses and theatres?"<sup>2</sup> Replying to this question, Labour's representative, Mr. George Hall, then Colonial Under-Secretary, completely evaded it and talked some drivel about there being a traffic of some extent in boys from China ports to Malaya since the extension of hostilities in the Sino-Japanese conflict.

The Secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, which for some time had concerned itself with this question of *Mui Tsai*, addressed a communication to the Colonial Office on June 17, 1941, in which attention was invited "to the statement, in the report of the Governor of the Straits Settlements on the *Mui Tsai* System for the second half of 1939 (Ref. S.C.A. 1003 1939), that there is no legislation in the Straits Settlements to prevent the traffic in boys. The fact is recorded without comment, without any suggestion of its being a hitherto undiscovered omission in the law of the Colony, and without any indication of any intention to remedy the law."<sup>3</sup>

According to Mr. Hall's reply to Mr. Creech Jones, of the 29th May, 1941, the Governor of the Straits Settlements had decided to take steps to prevent the traffic, but unfor-

<sup>1</sup> Lady Simon: *Slavery*, see pp. 96-114.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, May 29, 1941.

<sup>3</sup> *Anti-Slavery Report*, October, 1941.

Unfortunately for the victims history does not wait upon the leisurely reforms of pro-consuls. For over a hundred years Britain had been in Malaya and she had failed to eradicate the evil which has been one of her avowed reasons for taking up the burden of imperial rule. Now the Japanese have taken the situation into their hands, and it is too much to hope that these perpetrators of horrible outrages in Hong Kong will play the role of social reformers in Malaya.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Singapore.

And what was it like in Singapore? At the Singapore headquarters of the British administration, the Governor, the representative of the Imperial Power, combined in his person the office of High Commissioner, with control over the sultans of the Federated and Unfederated States, who governed the native subjects in those territories. The system of Indirect Rule was the only contact between the imperial 'trustees' and their native 'wards.' Unfortunately the 'wards' did not recognise any benefits from the 'trustees.'

The Legislative Council of Singapore, the Crown Colony area, was composed of 13 officials, heads of the various civil and military departments, and 11 members hand-picked by the Governor. Only two members were elected, and they represented the European Chambers of Commerce of Singapore and Penang. The Singapore natives, like those of the mainland, had no voice in their own affairs. Surely it is not really surprising that when the crisis came the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, was unable to mobilise the common people—Malayans, Chinese, Indians—to withstand the Japanese onslaught? How could a people whose existence had been entirely ignored, presumably because they were considered unfit to participate in the government of the country, suddenly resuscitate themselves as it were and assume responsibility in defence of the system which had until then failed to recognise their existence?

These Colonial people, exploited, oppressed, victims of colour bar practices and theocracy, subjected to the racial arrogance of the ruling *Herrenvolk*, recognised only the enemy

<sup>1</sup> The best detailed study on the subject is *Child Slavery in Hong Kong*, by Lieut. Comdr. and Mrs. H. L. Haslewood. The Sheldon Press.

already entrenched in their land. For while Colonial intellectuals and Socialists have no illusions about Japanese Imperialism, which, despite its demagogic appeal of 'Asia for the Asiatics,' is equally as predatory and brutal as Western Imperialism, it cannot be expected that illiterate native masses should be able to make this differentiation. They have a feeling of *omni ignatum pro magnifico*: the untried master is the best. The word 'Briton' to the native Colonial peoples, like the word 'Russian' to the former subject peoples of Czarism, is synonymous with 'oppressor.'

"The British had no roots in the people," asserted the *Times* Correspondent. But why, we ask, did they have no roots in the people after a hundred years? Because an Imperialist Power can have no roots in a subject people except the roots of bayonets. The very nature of Imperialism is a negation of fraternal relations between peoples. Its only relationship with the subject peoples can be that of the rider to the horse: the one on the back of the other. And he who carries the White Man's Burden has to have a strong back.

Describing the status of the white overlords in Malaya, a distinguished authority on the Far East says: "The functions of the white man in a colony are limited to ruling, owning and managing. Any other form of occupation is degrading and damaging to the white prestige on which the whole system rests . . . Even national lines, so bitterly held at home, have a way of softening down as against the overwhelming numbers of the coloured races; all who are of the white race are Europeans and stand potentially together in the face of the enemy, who is being ruled and exploited."<sup>1</sup>

Tired of carrying this burden, the masses of the coloured population of Singapore showed no enthusiasm when the Japanese attacked the island fortress. "With the exception of certain sections of the Chinese community—some inspired by Free China's struggle for survival, others by Soviet precept and example—the bulk of the Asiatic population remained spectators from start to finish. Their inclination was to get as far as possible from the scene of hostilities. In Singapore this caused acute difficulties in the field of labour. . . . There was no native labour at the docks. Soldiers had to be taken away from military duties to load and unload ships."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, February 18, 1942.

Being politically educated, the people of Britain may argue and debate the ideological character of the war: Whether it is an inter-imperialist conflict; whether it is a struggle between Fascism and Democracy, or just Good against Evil. To the natives of Malaya—whom their British rulers describe as 'backward' and, therefore, as unfit to enjoy the benefits of democracy—it was simply a fight between two bands of marauders who were overrunning their country; a fight in which they were not concerned except as the prize. Their attitude was 'a plague on both camps.'

And when all is said and done, what example did the 20,000 Europeans set for them? While the fate of their Empire was being decided on the Malayan peninsula, the pukka sahibs in Singapore were having a good time, declared Lady Brooke-Popham, wife of the Commander-in-Chief, on her return to England. "The majority of the civilians," she asserted, "were immersed in a long round of tennis and dancing. I tried to wake them up, but it was hopeless. . . . They were too busy with their social engagements." They were so obsessed with white prestige and their own importance that even Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's offer to send crack Chinese forces to Singapore to help defend the fortress was declined. The Japanese overran the whole peninsula in nine weeks!

In a handbook published about the time of the fall of Singapore, inspired by the Colonial Office and entitled *The British Colonial Empire*, the author assured us that "The wealth of Malaya . . . is laid on secure foundations, and its future, under British administration and protection, is equally secure. . . . Malaya is today a contented and peaceful country, and one of the most successful examples of British colonial administration."<sup>1</sup> How these official apologists misled the British people, and how history has given them the lie!

But taking everything as a whole, the pukka sahibs have no legitimate reason for complaint. For over a century they had been living on the fat of the land. Three British tin mining companies, Tronoh Mines, Southern Tronoh Mines

<sup>1</sup> *The British Colonial Empire*, p. 125. By W. E. Simnett, a former editor of *Crown Colonist*, official organ of the Crown Agents for the Colonies.

and Sungei Besi Mines published profits in 1942 of phenomenal size.

"Tronoh, with a capital of £300,000, made a net profit after taxation, etc., of £169,196, and paid a dividend of 55 per cent, the profits being well over half of the capital. Southern Tronoh, with a capital of £200,000, made profits on the same basis of £69,762 and paid 30 per cent. Sungei Besi, with a capital of only £144,000, made no less than £95,731 and paid 58.1/3 per cent dividend, the profits being two-thirds of the capital. The colossal profits from these and similar undertakings will now be flowing into Japanese coffers instead of back to London. Those are the stakes for which Britain fights!"<sup>1</sup>

The pukka sahibs would not even pay taxes for the defence of their properties. A war-time bill re-introducing income tax—which had ceased in 1922—was passed in February 1941. The tax ranged from 2 per cent up to a maximum of 8 per cent on incomes over £3,400. The re-introduction of this war emergency tax almost caused a revolution among the 'patriots.' Assuredly, Sir Shenton Thomas could have had no easy time with those "whisky drinking rubber planters and tin miners."

It was the Chinese and Malaysians who paid for the upkeep of Singapore, from revenue derived largely from the Government opium monopoly. Out of the taxes squeezed from the Malayan peasants the sultans contributed over £20,000,000 toward imperial defence between the two world wars.<sup>2</sup> And when the enemy struck the natives were left defenceless. Most of the European planters and mine owners were evacuated with their families.

### Burma.

Even before the war in the Pacific broke out, the Burmese people made their attitude to Britain plainly known through U Saw, at the time Prime Minister of the Colony. His claim for Dominion status for the 17-million natives of Burma was categorically rejected by Mr. Churchill and Mr. Amery, Secretary of State for India and Burma, when U Saw visited

<sup>1</sup> Don Bateman, *The New Leader*, January 31, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> See John Gunther: *Inside Asia*, Ch. 19, in which he described how the trade in opium helped to pay for Singapore's defence.

London in November 1941. "Burma," declared U Saw, was brought into the war by an edict of the Governor. The elected representatives of the people were not consulted. . . . Burmese people were convinced that they were fighting for their freedom as well as for that of the rest of the world. Even there can be no question about it—Burma's war effort could be increased fourfold." He made it quite obvious that "There is a small section of Burmese opinion which believes that to aid Britain win the war means to aid Britain to keep us in subjection. . . . There is another section, which while it cherishes no love for the Japanese, feels that if it is Burma's destiny to remain a subject nation, then it might prefer to be governed by a nation that is of the same blood and of the same religion." U Saw is now held somewhere as a potential enemy of Britain's imperial interests.

U Saw himself did not enjoy any mass backing in Burma. He was a reactionary nationalist, the son of a feudal landowner whom the British officials made use of to combat the growing agrarian movement headed by Dr. Ba Maw, the former Prime Minister and leader of the Sinyetha (or Poor Man) Party. Dr. Ba Maw was arrested and sent to prison in 1940 for making anti-British speeches. U Saw formed his own party, the Myochit (or Patriot) Party in September 1940, and was made Prime Minister. He was subsequently accused of treachery to his masters and for making contact with the Japanese after Pearl Harbour. As in Malaya, so in Burma the British authorities were completely isolated from the native masses. With the progressive leaders in gaol and U Saw under arrest, their last link was severed.

As a result of this isolation the Japanese, on invading Burma, instead of being met by a hostile population, were joined by 'Free Burmans,' organised by the extremist national associations, chief of which was the Thakin Movement.

Imperialism is incapable of saving itself from the trap which it creates of its own volition. British Imperialism is incapable of offering freedom to its subject peoples, the only means by which it can secure their unswerving loyalty and enthusiastic support. To do so would be to commit *hara-kiri*. "The Colonial Empire is essential to our economic

well-being," observes Captain Gammons, "else we become a small island on the fringe of Europe unable to defend ourselves or to feed ourselves. Without our overseas dependencies we should become like Austria after the last war."

#### 4. Postscript on Burma.

Like the Bourbons, the British Tories learn nothing and forget nothing. Thus, no sooner had the Japanese evacuated Rangoon, the capital of Burma, than the Tory Secretary of State, Mr. Amery, issued an official statement in the form of a White Paper setting forth the Government's proposals for the future of Burma.

As soon as the military hand over the capital to the civil authorities, the Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, will exercise complete autocratic powers "until conditions permit" the country to return to the *status quo ante*.

It is proposed that when the 1935 Constitution (suspended in 1942) is restored, a government formed from an elected Legislature, controlling matters excluding finance, defence and foreign affairs, will be set up. And from this political level Burma will gradually proceed along the slippery constitutional road to "full self-government within the British Commonwealth", arriving at that goal at some unspecified time. This, in brief, is the political blank-cheque offered 17 million Burmese.

Considering the fact that the Burmese enjoyed a much greater measure of self-government during the Japanese occupation than they even had before the invasion, it is very unlikely that the political parties and organisations associated with the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League will cooperate with the Governor in carrying out Mr. Amery's plans.

When the Japanese first entered Burma, the various anti-imperialist organisations formed a Burma National Army under the command of General Aung San. This army cooperated with the Japanese against the British. But when the Burmese discovered that the Japanese military commander in Burma had no intention of implementing the promise of the Japanese Foreign Office to grant Burma complete independence, the National Army withdrew its support and later joined with the British 14th Army in expelling the Japanese from Rangoon.

The Burmese, the first Asiatic people to be 'liberated,' have discovered that the Japanese are just as imperialistic as the whites, despite their slogan: 'Asia for the Asiatics'. And that they will have to depend upon themselves in the future if real freedom is to be achieved.

"Their nationalism is intense", observes *The Times* Special Correspondent in Rangoon. "Their aim," he asserts, "is simple—full independence for Burma. It is this aim which has dictated their actions during the past four years. Dominion status, it may be frankly said, makes little appeal for them, although many realise the advantages of membership of the Commonwealth, they do not realise that Dominion status would give them freedom to decide for themselves whether to remain in the Commonwealth, and freedom also to conduct their foreign affairs and conclude alliances if desirable with their neighbours, India, China and Siam."<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious that the Tories are preparing to resolve this fundamental conflict between the political aspirations of the Burmese people and die-hard Imperialism by force of arms. Not without reason, Mr. W. G. Cove, M.P., declared that "we are prolonging British dictatorship in Burma," during the debate on the second reading of the Bill vesting autocratic powers in the Governor. However, Mr. Cove advised the Tories to learn from their Russian ally. "The only country in the world that is solving the problem of nationality is Russia," he asserted. "She has the means and a policy whereby she can meet the aspirations of these people. The old die-hard Imperialist Tory outlook will not fit in with the modern world."<sup>2</sup>

##### 5. India.

There is little need to dilate upon the problem of this "jewel in the Crown of the British Raj." The causes of the present deadlock are too well known. India has for some time been the running sore in the imperial body politic. Only a major political operation can now save the situation. But this is impossible within the framework of imperialist-colonial relations. It is possible by means of the Leninist method alone. It must be fully understood that the Indian

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*—May 31, "Nationalism in Burma"

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*—June 1, 1945.

problem is fundamentally economic and social, and while political hegemony remains with British Imperialism the problem can never be solved. A culturally backward India is essential to British Imperialism, and that is why we say it is quite incapable of solving the Indian question. India, of all the Imperial possessions, provides the greatest tribute to the ruling class.

"If China means much in the life of every Britisher, India means much more," declared Upton Close in 1927. "Trade with this possession still totals more than that with any of the White Dominions. It oversteps every national item of British commerce save that of the United States. No railway crosses the six-thousand-mile-long British border between Persia and Indo-China, but 119 million dollars' worth of trade passes over it yearly on the backs of men and animals. The products carried between Bhamo, Burma, and Yunnanfu in China are worth annually eight million dollars. Can Great Britain keep this trade in her hands and yet stand out against the native nationalist aspirations?"<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Winston Churchill himself answered this question in 1930, when he addressed the Indian Empire Society. "We have no intention of casting away that most truly bright and precious jewel in the Crown of the King, which more than all our other Dominions and dependencies constitutes the glory and strength of the British Empire,"<sup>2</sup> he proclaimed.

Since that time Mr. Churchill has not changed his view. He has unequivocally asserted that he has not become the King's first minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. This position, however, is clearly understandable. The continuance of British Imperialism is a vital necessity for the British ruling class. What is deplorable is the attitude of certain so-called Socialists like Sir Stafford Cripps, who allow themselves to be used as the servants of British Imperialism. There was a time when Sir Stafford Cripps was outspoken in his condemnation of imperialist rule and posed as an aggressive supporter of self-determination for India and other Colonial countries.<sup>3</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> Upton Close: *The Revolt of Asia*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>2</sup> December 12, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> Speech delivered at the Conference on Peace and Empire under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru at Friends House, London, July 15-16, 1938.

seems, however, that quite a number of people on the Left become ardent patriots as soon as the 'mother' country goes to war and, like Sir Stafford Cripps, undergo a sea-change in political outlook. There are a number of people on the Left who support some kind of Indian self-government which they would make dependent upon that country's support of Britain's war effort. These people are prepared to support any scheme for the "liquidation" of Imperialism providing that it is put off for an indefinite period, while meantime the Indian people can be utilised, in return for a few precarious concessions, as adjuncts to the struggle against rival Imperialisms.

These Social-Imperialists do not see the claims of the subject peoples to Self-Determination as a fundamental right of *all* peoples, regardless of their stage of social development, but as a bargaining weapon in the game of power politics. Indians, Africans, Ceylonese, Burmese, West Indians, Arabs—all Colonial peoples, no less than Europeans—have an inalienable right to their freedom without being under any obligation to help their Imperialist masters pull their chestnuts out of the fire. The principle of Self-Determination admits of no equivocation. People have a right to be free—today and not tomorrow. And those Socialists who assume the pontifical right of determining who will be free today and who tomorrow are reflecting the typical arrogance of the British ruling class towards the coloured peoples of the Empire.

There is also a widely held view that the populations of Colonial territories do not generally wish to be rid of British rule, and that claims for independence are largely instigated by disgruntled agitators, pursuing selfish aims. Quite a large section of the so-called Left also shares this view, by which they give support to the Imperialists who use it as a pretext for continuing their domination. "We hear it said of India, of Ireland, of the Negro, of the proletariat that they would be perfectly contented if it were not for agitators who work up the people to demand a freedom of which they are incapable and which they do not really want. The peculiar fact is the recurrence of this phenomenon in every case where there is repression. It is not true, as is alleged, that the agitators are merely psychological or moral perverts who are evacuated

by self-interest. Their type is much the same in whichever of the groups they are found. They are symbols of the psychosis of the group, and are the stuff of which martyrs are made. Sometimes they are personally normal and eminent, and sometimes they are excitable and fanatical, but in either case they are the product of the condition under which they develop. They discover that, as members of the nationality or class to which they belong, there are limitations placed upon them of which they cannot help becoming conscious, and they react to that consciousness on behalf of the whole group. When the movement has gained some momentum, the leaders become identified with it in a peculiar way, so that the mass feels that any attack on the leader or agitator, according to the point of view, is an attack upon themselves. It is a customary procedure to try to suppress these leaders, and invariably the result is an increase in the solidarity of the group behind them, which it is the real object to suppress."<sup>1</sup>

*Right of Self-Determination is Indivisible.*

All these arguments are subterfuges disguising the refusal to recognise the right of all peoples to Self-Determination. And this right carries with it the privilege of the people concerned to decide themselves whether or not they want to fight in any particular war. The acid test of national freedom is this right of peoples to decide their own foreign policy. It is conceivable in the concrete situation today that if the Indian peoples enjoyed national freedom they would voluntarily give their wholehearted support to the war, not for British Imperialism, but to defend their newly won freedom against Japanese aggression. It is not for any of us to determine the future policy of a free India. That is a matter for the Indians to decide.

A subject people may be dragged into imperialist struggle through open nor disguised coercion, but such 'co-operation' carries no enthusiasm and in the nature of modern warfare is more or less worthless. A people can only give of its best when it feels it has something to fight for. The Soviet peoples, and the Chinese—the most civilised and

<sup>1</sup> Herbert A. Miller: *Races, Nations and Classes*, pp. 120 ff. Quoted by Hans Kohn in *Imperialism and Nationalism*, pp. 64-65.

peaceful of people—have demonstrated to the world what a tremendous and heroic self-sacrifice a people can exhibit once it is inspired by some ideal in whose achievement it feels it will have a part.

The peoples of the Soviet East, Moslem races, former subjects of an Empire even more oppressive than the British, achieved just over a quarter of a century ago not only national freedom but social emancipation, thanks to Lenin's policy. Today, the Russian people, having disencumbered themselves of their Imperialist baggage, have found among these millions of the Soviet East enthusiastic friends and allies, who flew to arms at once in the common cause. The Asiatic peoples of the Soviet Union are not fighting *for* the Russian people, but *with* the Russians and other peoples of the U.S.S.R. in defence of a common heritage. This point, frequently stressed by Soviet leaders, is, for reasons which will be quite obvious, conveniently ignored by Anglo-American commentators. Illustrative of the present attitude of the former Colonial peoples of the Czarist Empire is that of the Uzbeks, as expressed in a collective letter to their sons at the front, carrying 2,412,000 signatures. In this they "compare the Soviet Union to a fortress in which sixteen brothers live in friendship and together defend it against enemies from without. They address their warrior children in these words: 'Free sons and daughters of the Uzbek people! The German robber has broken into the home of your elder brother, Russia, into the homes of your elder brothers, the Byelorussians and Ukrainians. He brings a brown plague, the gallows, the knout, hunger and death. But the home of the Russian is also our home, the home of the Byelorussian and Ukrainian is our home. For the Soviet Union is a courtyard and the economy is one and indivisible. . . . Be among the best sons of your family, and among the best fighters of the Soviet peoples.'"<sup>1</sup>

Can anyone imagine such a manifesto being written by coloured races of any part of the far-flung Indian and British Colonial Empires? Even so-called British Socialists do not seem to be able to recognise the fundamental distinction between fighting 'for' and fighting 'with'. For instance, in their support of India's right to Self-Determination (or is

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Soviet War News*, June 28, 1944.

it Dominion status?) they approach the problem like petty shopkeepers. To them it is not a question of India's inviolable right to independence, regardless of the attitude of the Indian peoples to Britain's war. Theirs is a purely opportunistic tactic: if India is prepared to support British imperialists against their Japanese rivals, then, and only then, are they prepared to recognise India's claim to Self-Determination. With Lenin how different. He and his party demanded and fought for the right of Self-Determination of the subject peoples of the Czarist Empire even to the point of secession; that is, regardless of whether they wanted to come within the Soviet and help to fight the enemies of the Revolution. Hence the contrasting picture today of united Soviet peoples opposing in fraternal solidarity the common enemy, and disgruntled Colonial peoples of the British Empire, many of whom, as in Malaya and Burma, actively supported Japan.

The facts which we have recited are historically incontrovertible, and are largely admitted even by Imperialist commentators. We have emphasised them in an attempt to make convincing the reasons for the different attitudes of the Asiatic peoples of the Soviet Union and those of the British Empire in Asia. The Soviet Union is far from being an earthly paradise, but the October Revolution was not used simply to secure the social emancipation of the Great Russians and other Slav peoples only. It was used to break the yoke of Czarist Imperialism which had for so many centuries been bearing down the non-Russian peoples of the Empire.

As equal citizens, the coloured races of the Soviet East look forward to the future with hope, but those subject peoples bound to Western European Imperialism have no reason to hope. Has not Mr. Churchill declared that they are not included within the scope of the Atlantic Charter? While the democratic principles for which Britain professes to stand may be operative to a greater or lesser degree among the white peoples of her Empire, they are consistently denied to her coloured subjects. British democracy is fundamentally a democracy of colour; a minority of less than 70 million whites enjoy rights denied to 500 million coloured people. Civil and political disabilities do exist in the Soviet Union, but they exist for all—Europeans and Asiatics, Russians and

non-Russians alike. Stalin does not use pigmentation as a screen for the denial of popular rights. And this is the reason, all the criticism notwithstanding, for the greater admiration among the coloured races of Asia and Africa for the Soviet system than for Anglo-Saxon democracy. Political democracy, as we know it, is circumscribed at the present time in the U.S.S.R., but this shortcoming is not inherent in a socialised economic system. On the contrary, one of the basic postulates of Socialist ideology and one much stressed by Lenin is the broader popular democratic base which such a Soviet system provides. The restrictions which have been the main target of British Left-Wing and Liberal critics of the Soviet Union living comfortably in the metropolis of the Empire and enjoying directly or indirectly the spoils of Imperialism, can be traced immediately to the isolation in which the failure of the Socialist Revolution in the West left the U.S.S.R. If those same Left-wing critics had been as diligent in exposing the inequalities of Imperialist exploitation in which they shared and in eradicating that system of racial inequality which exists within their Empire, they would have contributed excessively to the liberalising of political democracy and the widening of civil liberties in the Soviet Union. It is a pity that those who deprecate the shortcomings of the Soviet system refuse to recognise the greater lack of political, economic and ethnic democracy obtaining in their Colonial Empire. Surrounded by hostile capitalist and Imperialist States, attempting in the face of tremendous difficulties and obstacles to build up an industrial structure in an overwhelmingly agrarian country, forced to establish, maintain and expand an army against the constant threat of external intervention, the Soviet leaders are not altogether to blame for imposing a curtailment of democracy. To a very large extent this curtailment of political democracy was the result of circumstances, and now that the stability of the State has proved itself in the course of the war steps will undoubtedly be taken to widen its scope. For once the economic power of the capitalists has been broken, the groundwork has been laid for political and racial democracy. The signs all point to a progressive increase in democratic rights in the Soviet Union. And the coloured peoples of the Soviet East will share these equally with the rest of the population.

### *Race, Politics and War.*

Ethnic democracy in 'plural' or multi-racial societies is as important as political democracy. The whole question of 'race' has been made one of the principal ideological instruments of aggressive Imperialism. Hitler has used it in Europe to promote his 'New Order,' and the Japanese Imperialists are using it in Asia to advance Japan's 'East Asia Co-Prosperity' policy. Projected as this question of race has been into the forefront of power politics, it urgently demands solution. A decisive solution, however, is impossible within the framework of the present system of Capitalism-Imperialism, since the problem of 'race' is but one of the sharper facets of the crisis in which the whole system now finds itself, and has direct connection with the Colonial Question and the present World War. "Every war," maintained Lenin, "is inseparably connected with the political system which gives rise to it. The politics which a certain country, a certain class in that country, pursued for a long period before the war are invariably pursued by that very same class during the war; it merely changes its form of action."<sup>1</sup>

Examined on the basis of this determining principle, the war has fallen into three main and distinct categories:

1. *The purely inter-Imperialist conflict between Anglo-American capitalism on the one hand, and Axis capitalisms and their satellites on the other.*
2. *The defensive war of the Soviet Union—a collectivistic state—against predatory German Imperialism. The principal consideration of the U.S.S.R. is security against hostile capitalist intervention. This can best be achieved by the socialist revolution in Western Europe, but failing this the Soviet leaders are forced to rely upon military and diplomatic methods.*
3. *The Sino-Japanese conflict, in which we have a semi-colonial country (China) defending itself against Imperialist aggression and annexation.*

These three wars, therefore, have had distinctive and separate political objectives. As a result, however, of Axis action they have been merged militarily on a global scale. The

<sup>1</sup> Lenin: *War and the Workers*, pp. 6-7. Little Lenin Library, Vol. XX.

resultant combined anti-Fascist front is being exploited by certain sections of the Left in Britain to justify support for British Imperialism and Tory foreign policy.

Germany and Japan embarked on aggression, attempting to redistribute the world to their advantage. On the other side, Britain and America are opposed to any such redivision, since it can only be made at their expense, as the acquisition of territories by Japan in the Pacific and Far East has shown. These colonies, offering sources of raw materials and markets, are the spoils for which Germany and Japan went to war against the Anglo-American and Dutch Imperialists who controlled them. For Japan it was a comparatively easy matter to wrest the Pacific Islands and the territories bringing her on to the Indian frontier, since they are, so to speak, on her doorstep. Germany, however, in order to reach out to the rich colonial territories of Asia and Africa had first to attempt the conquest of Europe. In the course of her march on the road of Imperial aggrandisement, Germany widened her productive resources by the acquisition of the output of the European countries she had conquered. Such acquisition added to her arsenals of war. Her geographical position, however, dictated these preliminary conquests, which in no wise affected the ultimate objective of a world-wide Colonial Empire.

"The fundamental fact about these wars," observed an organ of American monopoly-capitalism, "is that they are being waged to decide who is going to control business in the future, and how it is going to be done. That is why we have sent a force of American soldiers to protect the bauxite deposits of Dutch Guiana, and why American warships guard the sea lanes to the Orient. . . . The trade which now flows across national frontiers is essential to the maintenance of an industrial economy. All the nations of the world are deciding how that economy will operate in future years."<sup>1</sup> Big business is well aware of the aims of the war, knows that the struggle between the Axis and the 'democratic' Powers constitutes an Imperialist conflict.

Modern war, by its very nature and because of its strategy, cannot be confined to any particular geographical area or national groupings. Hence, after nearly two years of

<sup>1</sup> Cleveland Trust Company Business Bulletin, December 15, 1941.

armed conflict, Germany, in pursuit of her imperialistic objective and to replenish her larder and stocks of wheat from the Ukraine and oil from the Caucasus before attempting a direct challenge to Britain and America, drew the Soviet Union into the general maelstrom.

Although forced against its will into the primarily imperialist conflict, the Soviet Union, unlike the Axis and their 'democratic' adversaries, has no imperialist aims, its sole objective being to defend and secure its frontiers and the collective achievements of the workers, peasants and intellectuals. Having abandoned the capitalist system of private ownership of the means of production and distribution, there are no monopoly capitalist pressure groups using the State to promote and defend the selfish interests of 'free enterprise.' Consequently, the Soviet Union seeks no markets, sources of raw materials or spheres for the investment of finance-capital abroad. It therefore cannot have imperialist aims. Bureaucracy or no bureaucracy, the Soviet Union is defending a higher socio-economic form of society than predatory capitalism, and therefore is waging a socially progressive war, even though its leaders are waging it in alliance with Imperialist Powers.

Similarly, China, even headed by the anti-Socialist, anti-Communist Kuomintang,<sup>1</sup> is fighting a progressive war of national liberation, even though it fights on the same side with Britain, the enslaver of China's neighbours—India and Burma. Weak peoples fighting for self-preservation cannot afford to pick and choose their allies. The Chinese people are defending themselves against Japanese Imperialism, which seeks to deprive them of their national sovereignty, reduce them to the Colonial status of Africans and Indians, and exploit their labour and natural resources in the interests of Japanese capitalism. This distinguishes China's struggle, for instance, from that of the Dutch, who, having been liberated by Anglo-American arms from the Germans, are fighting not for the emancipation of the 60 million coloured people of the Netherlands Indies, but rather to continue to hold them in subjection. China's struggle is an inspiration

<sup>1</sup> See *China Struggles for Unity*, by J. M. D. Pringle (Penguin) for a good factual account of the Generalissimo's counter-revolutionary record prior to the Sino-Japanese war.

to all oppressed peoples in Asia and Africa. Should China succeed in throwing off the Japanese yoke, it will blaze a path to the liberation of the East from all forms of Imperialism—'democratic' or totalitarian. The Chinese struggle, therefore, is historically progressive.

The fact that the Soviet Union and China happen to be linked up in the same military alignment with the Western 'democracies' in no way invalidates or alters our analysis of the multi-character of the present war. Nor does it change one whit the original Imperialist nature of the conflict between the Axis and Anglo-American capitalism. That the Soviet Union and China are allied with Britain and the U.S.A. is simply a matter of military expediency; it does not imply that the character of Anglo-American monopoly capitalism has experienced a fundamental change and that the interests of the four Great Powers have suddenly become inextricably intertwined.

Events at the San Francisco Conference have only served to underline the political differences which exist, even between the Anglo-Americans. After five years of comradeship in arms, their diplomatists squabbled over the methods of sharing out the colonies to be annexed from the defeated Powers on the one hand, while they united to oppose the Soviet and Chinese demand for colonial independence, on the other.

It was just over a decade ago, at the time of the attack on Manchuria, that Sir John Simon pleaded Japan's case at Geneva even better than the Japanese representatives, while "the report of the Lytton Commission (August 1932) said many severe things about China, and stated Japan's case with sympathy and consideration."<sup>1</sup> No action was taken by the Western democracies to check Japan's wanton attack upon China, which Mr. Leopold Amery, Secretary for India, justified on the grounds that Japan was carrying out her civilising mission in the Far East. "Japan has got a very powerful case based upon fundamental realities," he said in 1933. "... When you look at the fact that Japan needs markets and that it is imperative for her in the world in which she lives that there should be some sort of peace and

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Pratt: *Japan and the Modern World*, p. 15 (Oxford Pamphlet).

order, then who is there amongst us to cast the first stone and to say that Japan ought not to have acted with the object of creating peace and order in Manchuria and defending herself against the continual aggression of Chinese nationalism? Our whole policy in India, our whole policy in Egypt, stands condemned if we condemn Japan."

China was not embraced as Britain's ally during all the time (4½ years) that Japan was bombing her defenceless millions. Almost up to the very entry of Japan upon the scene of the present war against the 'democracies,' British policy had sustained Japanese action in China, and it was only just prior to Nippon's bombardment of Pearl Harbour that this policy gyrated somewhat, as though not quite sure whether appeasement were really succeeding or not. The British Government oscillated between closing the Burma Road or keeping it open, and finally closed it, thus cutting off China's life line. Only with the threat to the Far Eastern colonies was China accepted as Britain's ally, and then really because the Chinese Army offered the sole means of operating on the Asiatic mainland. There is no fundamental community of interest between China and Britain; there is only a temporary mutual military necessity. It would be folly to maintain that there is a community of interest in view of the fact that Britain, stripped of Hong Kong, has refused to surrender her claims to its recovery.

Japan only became an 'Imperialist aggressor' when she directly challenged Anglo-American interests in the Far East, where her military achievements, great though they have been, are due more to the ineptitude of her opponents' politics than to anything else. She is able to exploit the 'Asia for the Asiatics' propaganda, because she knows that the only way to counter this form of demagoguery is for Britain to concede the right of Self-Determination to India, Burma and the British Colonies occupied by Japan. The present situation in Burma and India demonstrates most palpably that military warfare is governed by politics. This is because war is a continuation of policy by other means. "There are wars and wars," wrote Lenin. "We must examine the historical conditions which give rise to each particular war, the class which conducts it, and for what objects."