The Indian Dilemma

The deadlock between Britain and India imperils one important sector, both political and military, of the battle line of the United Nations. It is from this point of view—which places victory over the Axis above all other considerations—that the issue must be judged and a solution pressed. And from this point of view the attitudes and actions of both the British government and the Congress Party seem unreasonable and unrealistic.

The Churchill government looks upon India as part of the Empire and as a vital link in its military defenses against the Axis. Though it has said that, after the war, India will have the "fullest opportunity for attainment . . . of complete self-government," it maintains that India's demand for independence cannot be granted now, because a shift in government would involve at least temporary chaos and, far more important, because the Indians are not themselves united and the country might be plunged into a civil war between Hindu and Moslem. This may make sense from the cautious military point of view. What the Churchill government refuses to realize; as far as India is concerned, is that this is not only a military but a political war and that to meet the Indian demand for freedom and Gandhi's civil disobedience campaign with arrests and other forms of repression was a major strategic blunder.

As for the attitude of the Congress party, there could scarcely be a more vivid and convincing statement of it than is contained in the article by Louis Fischer on Page 145. We sympathize with the Indian nationalists; we can even understand why, to them, the British repression they know at first hand is far more real than the Japanese oppression they have not yet experienced. But our sympathy does not blind us, as their bitterness blinds them, to the cold fact that an Axis victory would not only end India's chances for independence but destroy the freedom of the rest of the world.

These two attitudes are, unfortunately, the fruit of more than 150 years of British-Indian relationship and therefore not subject to easy or speedy change from within either camp. For that reason it is all the more essential that the allies of Britain bring pressure on both sides for a settlement which shall take account of the enormous military and political stakes involved.

Chiang Kai-shek and President Roosevelt are in excellent position to point out to the British that India's demand for independence has become a test of the good faith of the United Nations; and to convince the Indian nationalists that something less than absolute and immediate independence is infinitely preferable to Japanese rule.

Mr. Fischer is convinced that Gandhi, in spite of the arrests and riots, is still willing, as he was before he began his campaign, to accept the form of independence with a reliable promise of the content. Gandhi has rivals to the claim to speak for all of nationalist India, but it seems likely that if he and the British government could arrive at an agreement, he could command sufficient support to bring about a minimum unity, particularly between the Mohammedans and Hindus, which is essential to Indian self-government.

To the disinterested person there seems no reason why the British government should not at this moment formally offer India its independence not "after the war" but on a fixed date. Given a specific promise, morally guaranteed by the United Nations, Indian nationalists would, we feel sure, be willing to participate in a provisional government until a constitutional convention could be called.

Such a settlement would insure the whole-hearted participation of Indians in the war; it would be a tremendous stimulant to anti-Nazi feeling and action throughout the world. Indeed we can think of no single event which would be worse news to the Axis—and to those covert anti-British isolationists who are currently showing such ill-concealed glee over the "tragedy" of India.

The Trendless Primaries

BY FRED A KIRCHWEY

The general tenor of editorial comment on last week's primaries was philosophical. The results, we were asked to believe, were inconclusive and proved nothing. Both isolationists and interventionists were elected; incumbents were generally returned. In many instances issues other than the war governed the decision. The control of the local machine, the record of the candidate as a party man, the resentment of voters against interference from outside the district—all these factors had to be considered in judging the significance of the results. After all, if Hamilton Fish and William B. Barry were nominated in New York, Martin L. Sweeney was defeated in Ohio. So what conclusion could one draw?

The New York Times on Sunday carried a feature story headed Primaries Showed No Trend, in the course of which the writer summarized his conclusions in the following words:

Local issues, and especially the effectiveness and efficiency of a Congress member in handling the problems and complaints of his constituents, appear to be of more concern to voters than the question of his pre-war stand on foreign policy and his attitude on the conduct of the war.

This sort of comment was typical, not exceptional. And