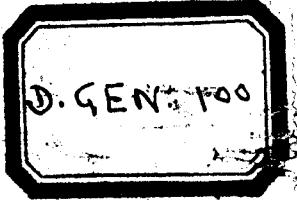


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ARMY

**WHY INDIA IS NOT
MOBILISED**



By S. A. DANGE

President, All-India T.U.C.

PRICE THREEPENCE

The Author

Mr. S. A. DANGE, President of the All-India Trade Union Congress, 1943-1945

Born in 1899, Mr. Dange is one of the pioneers of socialist thought in India and one of the founders of the All-India Trade Union Congress. As a leader of the youth movement in 1920, he heralded socialist thought in India by writing a book entitled "GANDHI VERSUS LENIN." Following a strike of textile workers in Bombay, he was arrested and sentenced to four years' hard labour for his political and trade union activities. His book, "HELL FOUND," exposing conditions in Indian jails, led to a stormy debate in the legislature of the country. Out again, in 1928 he was in the forefront of the greatest strike in the history of the Trade Union Movement in India and was again arrested, and in the well-known Meerut Conspiracy trial was sentenced to twelve years' transportation. Released in 1936, he returned to trade union and political work. For leading a strike of women textile workers in 1939 he was sentenced to four months' hard labour, along with his wife, Mrs. Usha Dange and four other colleagues. On the outbreak of war, there was unrest in the working class and following a strike of 200,000 workers in Bombay, he was arrested and sent to a Detention Camp, from which he was released in 1943.

The 19th Session of the All-India Trade Union Congress, which met that year, unanimously elected him as their President.

Out of 25 years' work in the Liberation Movement of his country and of the working class, he has had to spend 13 years in jail.

Mr. Dange is a well-known literary critic in his own country and was a member of the Presidium of the Indian Progressive Writers' Association and was founder-editor of the first working-class paper in the Marathi language, the "KRANTI," which was suppressed by the Government for its expression of radical views.

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A WORD

IT was reported in the papers that 200,000 British troops in India suffered from epidemic diseases, like malaria and dysentery. 14th Army lads, holding the Burma front and fighting back the Japs, have been complaining of bad transport, bad food and bad handling of everything, whether pertaining to ordinary life in the country or the life at the Front.

They were called a "Forgotten Army." If the Government can allow a whole British army to be forgotten, it is no wonder they do not want to be "reminded" of an Indian people!

The Government sent Lord Munster to enquire into the situation, but the sufferings of that army cannot be understood, unless the roots that gave birth to them are grasped. I am attempting it here.

The following represents the substance of a talk I gave to the Trade Union Group of Members of the House of Commons, on December 5, 1944, with Mr. W. Dobbie, M.P., in the Chair. In the short time at my disposal, I could not deal with the subject at length, and a number of points, such as the growth of industries during the present war, the question of sterling balances, the problems raised by the Bombay Plan, the relations between the National Congress and the Muslim League, the State of Trade Union organisation, etc., were raised by the Hon. Members in the subsequent discussion. As these are questions requiring separate treatment, I have not included them in this small brochure. They will be dealt with in other publications.

The facts and arguments contained herein, and the conclusions to which they lead have been stated by me to hundreds of delegates of the Trades Councils whom I have addressed since my arrival in this country for the World Trade Union Conference. I have had the opportunity of stating them to the International Committee of the British Trades Union Congress, the General Council of the Scottish T.U.C., the Executives of the South Wales Miners' Federation, of the National Union of Scottish Miners, of the Durham and Northumberland Miners, the Railway Clerks' Association, the Electrical Trades Union, the Building Workers' Conference, the Association of Scientific Workers, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, etc. Not only ordinary rank and file workers, but a number of the leading

men have frankly told me that these facts have solved many of their doubts and given them a truer and clearer picture of India.

I was, therefore, glad to see that the enlightened voice of the British working-class so unfalteringly asserted itself in the India resolution finally adopted by the Labour Party Conference on December 15th.

The next step is translation into practice.

S. A. DANGE,

President, A-I.T.U.C.

London,

December 17th, 1944.

CHAOS IN INDIA

THE attention of the people of this country today is primarily centred on finishing the war quickly, both in the East and in the West, and on the maintenance and improvement of their standards of life. When inquiring about countries like India, they naturally take the same approach, and ask mainly two questions: How far the resources of India have been mobilised for the war effort, and how the vast millions of her people are being maintained and treated. You, too, would like me to look at India from this angle.

Legacy of the Past.

India is not an industrialised country. This fact was brought home to the people of Britain when it was found that Hitlerite Germany and fascist Japan intended making a drive towards India; not one of the most essential armaments and means of transport required for a modern army could be produced in the industrial plants of India!

Five years of war have not altered this basic character of India's economic life, though in fulfilment of the pressing demands of the conflict, some new industrial units have sprung up there. Even now a broad gauge locomotive for railways, a complete motor car, or even a steamship of an appropriate size, cannot be produced in the country.

The disastrous policy of thwarting India's industrialisation has kept the people of the country in the grip of poverty, and her defences at the mercy of the aggressors.

It is, therefore, the inevitable corollary of this policy that those vested interests, who prevented India from being a modern industrialised country and who have drawn millions of pounds of profit from the poverty of the country, should be asked to bear the costs of the war.

Bureaucratic Incompetence.

Let the past alone, some will say. Well, let us see what use was being made of the existing industrial and agricultural resources of the country. In 1942, when an S.O.S. was sent to America to come and advise in the mobilisation of industry, the Grady Commission of experts found, in the third year of war, the following state of affairs:—

“ There was no single Government official or group of officials

with the responsibility of directing or co-ordinating the entire industrial war-effort . . . the Mission found horse-shoes, steel tips of army boots and rail-road switch-gear being produced in a ship-repair plant in Bombay, while more than a hundred ships waited in the harbour for major and minor repairs."

Thus the effects of the disastrous policy of thwarting industrialisation were aggravated by imposing on the country an incompetent bureaucratic rule, divorced from the voice of the people; a rule which was incapable of intelligent planning and direction of the affairs of the country, in the face of serious danger.

Though you are given the most glorifying picture of a supremely efficient governmental system in India, the situation given above has not changed in essence.

Transport.

This is one of the vital keys of the war, as well as of modern social existence. The transport capacity of the 41,000 miles of railways in India was not controlled or rationed, even up to the year 1943. Railways are managed by the Central Government, which has appointed a Calcutta Jute Magnate to be in charge of them. Movements of millions of bales of cotton and textile goods were not planned and controlled till the middle of 1943, thus permitting waste of wagons and engines. Even as late as June, 1944, regarding transport in Assam, which is in the front line of the war-zone, the Chairman of the Indian Tea Association (Sylhet Branch—a European body) condemned the railways as a disgrace to the Province. Army circles also condemned the management of the railways so severely that the District Traffic Superintendent, a European Major, complained that "I have heard it said that the Army has given us a worse nick-name, 'Tojo's Secret Weapon,' which I consider very hard and undeserved."

Let us see the story of another strategic material—coal—which feeds the railways and the industries.

Coal Muddle.

The failure of coal production and distribution in India, leading to a breakdown of industrial production and constituting a threat to war and civilian transport, have been the subject of questions in the House of Commons, which unfortunately prompted misleading replies from official quarters.

Production, which was 27 million tons in 1942, had collapsed

to 18 millions in 1943. Nearly twenty-five per cent of the coal miners had left the mines. The reason was not so much that they got very high wages elsewhere, as that in the coal areas, in addition to receiving the lowest wages (3s. 9d. per week), employers and Government had completely failed to bring in and ration supplies of food and clothing at reasonable prices. The miners began to leave only when they were threatened with famine and starvation. The Government awoke only when the disaster had taken place, and a certain amount of supplies of food at cheap prices and an inadequate system of rationing were then rushed in. While the cost of living had risen 233 per cent in January, 1944, wages had gone up only 33 per cent —to 5s. per week from 3s. 9d. A full working week, with cheap rations and allowances, does not bring the miner even today more than 9s. per week, while the earnings of those employed on war-work in nearby-regions go up to 12s. per week.

The Government's reply to the protest of the miners has been to send 10,000 to 15,000 women to work in underground pits, and it is unfortunate that this violation of the International Convention is still allowed to continue in this connection.

Even the protection of the Maternity Benefit Act, passed only eighteen months ago, is not available to these women. The Secretary of the Giridih Miners' Union, affiliated to the A-I.T.U.C., has complained to the Government of India that in the railway collieries owned by the Government, not one payment has been made so far for maternity, and that many women making claims have been dismissed from work.

The result is that coal production has not yet recovered, and will not, so long as this policy is persisted in.

And I ask you to note that all the best and biggest mines, contributing the largest share of production, are owned and controlled by Government railways and European mine-owners.

The same is true of the planning of production and distribution of all other vital goods like cloth, iron and steel, jute, mica, etc.

That is the sad story of industrial mobilisation. It not only affected the war fronts, but also affected the ordinary day to day living of the people.

Let us see the management of the food of the nation.

Food Famine.

The severest indictment of the way in which the country's economy and life is being managed by the bureaucracy is the

famine of last year, which in one Province alone killed more than three and a half million people.

That famine was not a natural calamity, because there was nowhere any severe failure of crops. In fact, it occurred in a year of bumper crops.

That famine was not due to the loss of Burma rice, because that rice constituted only three per cent of the country's rice supply. A failure of 3 per cent only cannot cause a severe famine.

That famine was not due to backward agriculture or large population. These are chronic factors, but there is no chronic famine killing millions every year in India.

Requirements and Production.

The nutrition experts of the Government say that a man in India must have a minimum of one pound of grain per day to live on, besides other food. If the whole population was severely rationed on this basis, 400 million people (excluding 10 per cent children, who do not require rations of grain, and 10 per cent who require only half an adult's quantity) would require 55.4 million tons of food grains in a year.

The average annual production of all food grains (including the lowest quality grains) in the year 1934 to 1939 has been shown to be 54,752,000 tons, and the balance of imports over exports gave an addition annual average of 1,280,000 tons, making a total of about 56 million tons for consumption.

The war cut out the imports and imposed an extra burden of supplies to the army of about three-quarters of a million tons. That left an average of only 54 million tons of supplies against a demand of 55.4 million tons. Even then a shortage of only one and a half million tons should not have caused famine.

In fact in the years 1942 and 1943, there were bumper crops of wheat and rice, giving 3 million tons over the average production of previous years. There should have been no famine at all, if it were to be due to **absolute shortage** of supplies.

Why then the Famine?

Because:—

Government itself speculated in food prices, made profits, and disrupted the market, with the criminal notion of keeping down consumption by raising prices and freezing wages and incomes.

Government refused to control prices until the famine was almost on.

Government refused to purchase stocks of food for the urban population and to introduce all-round rationing, until 1943.

And when workers' strikes and popular discontent forced it, Government relied on the hoarders and profiteers, who backed its policy of repression and inefficiency, to purchase stocks and run rationing.

The demand of the patriotic national organisations of the people to be allowed to manage the affairs of the country was met with repression, causing still further discontent, panic and loss of confidence.

Thus it was the political and economic policy of the bureaucratic Government of India that was the basic cause of the famine.

Corner not turned.

And continuation of the same policy is preventing the eradication of famine and epidemic.

Even now, though it is said that several towns and cities are out of rationing, both price control and rationing are a failure. For its purchase of stocks and administration of rationing, the Government relies mainly on its incompetent officers and on monopoly traders, who back those officers for their own interest. Government refuses to guarantee minimum prices to the poor cultivators, while allowing the maximum to the monopoly traders and the landlords. The result is that from every province comes the story that there are no stocks with Government, and control and rationing are in a precarious condition.

Several millions of people are still in the grip of famine, which is now aggravated by epidemics. More than thirty million people in Bengal are suffering from malaria. More than a hundred million in the country are disabled by disease. For instance, in one village alone, 850 out of 1,000 villagers died of smallpox. The supplies of medicine were so inadequate that the Civil Surgeon of Mymensingh said that while his district required 3,500 lb. of quinine every month, the Government supplied only 200 lb. (September, 1944).

Conclusion.

Thus it will be seen that the present system of governing the country and running its economy and life has failed to protect the people, and has also failed to mobilise the full resources of the country for war—which is said to be the justification for keeping the system as it is.

Failure to rely on Peoples' Organisations.

Both in industrial production and food, the Government's main failure has been to rely upon the profiteers and hoarders, who are its own creation, and to discourage and suppress people's organisations. Instead of making people's food committees, drawn from all classes, the main purchasing and distributing agencies, the bureaucracy relies on the profiteers, who support reactionary policies and deny food to the people. Instead of relying on Trade Unions for production co-operation, the Government imprisons these very Trade Unionists who organise the workers, possess their confidence, and help to protect the people's interests. Trade Unions fighting corruption and inefficiency in the ranks of governments or managements, or fighting for the just demands of the workers, are not recognised, but are directly or indirectly suppressed. The Tri-partite machinery, set up for consultation between workers, employers and Government, becomes mere window-dressing, and even its unanimous recommendations are not implemented. The strongest national political organisation, like the National Congress, is suppressed, and its members imprisoned for demanding democratic freedom.

Root Cause: Absence of Political Democracy.

This disaster in the economic field, with its direct and indirect effects on the military arena, has its **root cause in the fundamental hostility of the bureaucracy to the people, in the refusal to yield the effective power of political democracy to the people, as organised in their great national organisations.** An alien bureaucracy, irremovable by and impervious to the pressure of public opinion, relying only on force and isolated from the intelligence and will of a whole nation, can cause nothing but agony to everyone.

Most of the leading and popular organisations of the people, the main national political parties are genuinely desirous of joining in the defence of the country and fighting the anti-Japanese war; but they are denied, under one pretext or another, any effective power in the management of the affairs of the country, so disastrously mismanaged. On the contrary, they are falsely charged and thrown into prisons, rendering still more serious the question of the mobilisation of the country's resources for the people's needs and for war. Instead of unifying and strengthening the people's morale through their most respected

and avowed anti-fascist leaders, the bureaucrats disrupt it by imprisonments and shootings in India, while the most rabid fascists in Britain are released in celebration of anti-fascist victories. The inevitable result in India is famine, chaos, and prolongation of the agony of war and its cost in terms of men and material.

Not only are the greatest political organisations of the people attacked and disrupted; even the Trade Unions and the Peasants' Leagues are subjected to disruptive attacks by the bureaucracy in their day to day work.

Let us see the condition of the industrial workers, the great soldiers of production.

Industrial Workers.

Owing to the small size of industry, our working class is not very big in relation to the whole population. Before the war, the number of industrial workers was about five millions. During the last five years about a million more have been added by the establishment of war and accessory industries, making a total of six million.

There is a vast mass of agricultural landless labourers, whose numbers cannot be measured, since during the last two years of famine and scarcity millions of small land-owning peasants have lost their lands and have been turned into landless labourers.

This section of workers might easily be **more than 50 millions.**

Beginning of Trade Union Organisation.

The Indian worker has become conscious of his appalling conditions, his rights and his future since the world war of 1914-1918, during and after which he learned to use the weapon of strike and organisation to better his conditions. An organised trade union movement was born; the oldest and largest central trade union organisation in the country was founded in 1920—the All-India Trade Union Congress. It was founded in the crisis of the last war with only 10,000 members; today it has become the most united and the strongest central Trade Union organisation in the country, and has succeeded in bringing 12 per cent of the workers into the Trade Unions.

Gains of the Organisation—Wages and Hours.

Before 1920, the hours of work per week were anything between 72 and 105 hours. By 1920 they were reduced to 60 hours per week, and by 1934 to 54 hours. Today the workers

are employed for 60 hours per week in some war industries, and for 54 hours in non-essential industries.

During the last twenty-five years, not only have the hours of labour been reduced, but wages also have been increased to some extent. Of course, they stand no comparison with the standard of wages and living conditions of British or American workers. And even this had to be achieved through determined strike struggles, in which scores of workers have been shot dead and hundreds sent to prison, including women and children.

The pre-war average wages in some of the principal industries were as follows:—

1939		
Cotton Textiles	13/-	per week (Bombay)
Jute Textiles	7/6	„ (Calcutta)
Engineering & Railways ..	15/-	„ (Bombay)
Coal-mining	3/9	„ (Bengal & Bihar)
Tea-gardens	4/-	„ (Assam) 1942
Tobacco	9/-	„ (Bombay)

It should be noted that the purchasing power of the shilling here in England and in India is approximately the same. The Government controlled price of rice in Bombay is 5d. per pound. Milk is selling at 6d. per pint; tea at 3/- per lb. A single room, 12 ft. by 10 ft. without furniture or service, costs 2s. to 3s. per week. In the worst paid areas there is no housing at all, and thousands sleep on the pavements and under the trees. Thus it can be seen that the coal-miner in India has one-twentieth the standard of living of the miner in Britain. It is a picture of intense exploitation and starvation of the working class.

Social Security.

The worker in India has no social security of any kind. There is no sickness insurance and benefit, not enough hospitals even for treatment; no unemployment insurance; no old-age pensions, except for certain salaried sections in the Government services, and no minimum living wage. While employed, the Indian worker has no guarantees of a decent living; while out of a job, he has nothing to fall back on.

Since the War: Rise in Cost of Living. Depreciation of Wages.

The above low scale of wages has depreciated considerably since the beginning of the present war. Though Government failed to control prices and to introduce rationing of necessities,

it was quick enough to oppose any rise in wages. The result was that while the cost of living rose enormously, wages lagged behind; and whatsoever advance of wages the workers could secure had to be fought for by strikes, with consequent loss of production.

Government, so far, has no machinery to assess the cost of living in every industrial town; in some of them, however, the cost of living was found to have risen as follows, according to the Labour Gazette of the Government of India:—

	Aug., 1939	Dec., 1942	Dec., 1943	June 1944
Bombay	100	179	235	225
Ahmedabad	100	204	318	281
Cawnpore	100	226	314	315
Lahore	100	262	262	286
Madras	100	161	193	208

These figures clearly reflect the anarchy in our economy and the bankruptcy of the Government to manage it, when we compare that in **Great Britain** the cost of living has risen only to 130.

The rise in the price of food-stuffs, which, before the war, absorbed 52 per-cent of the earnings of the workers, is shown as follows:—

	1914	Sept., 1939	Sept., 1943
Cereals	100	80	530
Pulses	100	99	449

(cf. Index of Cereals and Meat in Great Britain: 1927=100; 1939, Aug.=66.9; 1943, Nov.=107.6; 1944, Nov.=106.8).

Demand for rise in Wages and Add-on Allowances.

As against this rise in cost of living, the workers could not secure adequate compensation by means of advances in wages; the worst sinner in this respect being the Government itself, the largest single employer in India. Three-quarters of a million workers on the Railways run by the Government got their first meagre increase in wages only in July, 1942, when they threatened a serious transport strike. Private employers, both European and Indian, backed by the governmental machine, copied their masters and refused a bonus or a rise in wages, while profits were going up by leaps and bounds. On an average, in the whole country, the workers got only a 50 point rise in wages, against a 100 point rise in the cost of living. The result was that while production should have gone up for defence

and for the people's needs, the industrial soldiers of production were left with no incentives and were thrown in the grip of famine and starvation. Production began to suffer, due to sickness, epidemics, absenteeism, and a fall in efficiency.

Uniform Wages Policy Report (Gregory Committee).

The Government of India ultimately appointed a Committee to inquire into the wages policy. The Committee strongly recommended a uniform policy for all employers and an adequate increase in wages to compensate the rise in the cost of living, there being almost a unanimity of opinion that adequacy should mean at least 75 per cent compensation. The Report was discussed by the Tri-partite Conference of Employers, Trade Unions and Government. But the vital recommendations are still not yet implemented. Such is the treatment given to the workers in India by the British Government and the employers, both European and Indian.

Our Anti-Fascist Working Class.

Like all people, the working class in India has long and sustained anti-fascist traditions. Our trade unions and our T.U.C. are not subservient to or an appendage of any political party, and are certainly opposed to the disastrous economic and political policy of the bureaucracy backed by vested interests in Britain. In the absence of any civil liberties, of recognition of trade unions and of any political rights, and in the face of severe repression and of the hostility of both Government and employers to the formation of Joint Production Committees, our T.U.C. could not shoulder the responsibility of mobilising for production. While a number of Unions were handicapped by these circumstances, many of them did try to break through the wall of official incompetence and capitalist provocation, and held on to production, the most outstanding example being the patience and endurance shown by our Railway workers and Textile workers, along with a number of others—all under the banner of Unions embraced by the All-India Trade Union Congress. While thus doing their service to the people, not a single worker in India supports the present repressive anti-democratic policy of the bureaucracy.

Attempt at Disrupting Trade Unions

The most united and organised voice of the working class, through its A-I.T.U.C. and Trade Unions, having indicted the

bureaucracy and called for democratic co-operation with the people, the Government, finding itself thoroughly isolated, set up, two years ago, a rival trade union organisation to disrupt us, namely, the Indian Federation of Labour, the trade union counterpart of the Radical Democratic Party. While the President of this bogus organisation vehemently denied that it was financed by the Government and claimed that it was a bona fide and genuine trade union organisation, the Government itself, in reply to a question in the Indian Legislative Assembly, on April 4th, 1944, stated that this body was being paid £1,000 a month from the Treasury, ostensibly "to raise the morale of the workers." When asked for an account as to how this money was being spent, the Government refused. The accounts of this body have never disclosed the receipt of this secret grant in reports to members during the last two years. And yet this is paraded as a bona fide Trade Union body, and is sent to the I.L.O. to represent Indian Labour.

The bureaucracy of the Government and most reactionary landlords and financiers (who blessed the birth of this organisation by their presence or by messages) have set up this bogus organisation to mislead world opinion and give the semblance of "Labour support" to their policy of reaction. This is seen from the fact that the I.F.L. supports the Government's policy of keeping the national leaders like Nehru and Gandhi in jail, of refusing to yield a National Government, and, echoing its master's voice, denounces the National Congress and the Muslim League as not being the representative national organisations of the people of the country. In the Legislative Assembly last year, when all the 48 elected members of all the main parties (both Hindu and Muslim) voted against the Government's Budget as a protest against its policy of deadlock, the President of the Indian Federation of Labour was one of the four who supported the Government. He has since been rewarded further with the post of a High Commissioner under the Government of India. Thus while mouthing pseudo-socialist phrases, the I.F.L. works as the instrument of anti-working-class reaction and of anti-national vested interests.

But where repression of our Trade Union leadership failed to break us, disruption of this cheap kind will not succeed.*

* News has now appeared in the Press that the I.F.L. has split on the question of secret subsidies from Government, landlords, etc., and several "Unions" have left it. (S.A.D.)

Attempt at Disrupting the Peasantry.

As against the united voice of thousands of peasants organised in the All-India Kisan Sabha, Government tries to set up Leagues of reactionary landlords as "champions" of the peasantry.

Attempt at Disrupting the People's Unity.

And as against the national voice of the major political parties (whether National Congress or Muslim League), the Viceroy, supreme head of the bureaucracy and representative of the vested reactionary interests here, collects a bunch of landlords, speculators and disgruntled intellectuals, ready to lend their services to anyone for profit, and sets them up as "representatives" of the nation on his Executive Council, to mislead world opinion, and to justify the repression of popular organisations and bureaucratic incompetence that only cause famine and prolong the agony of war.

The Way Out.

Such are the facts. And these facts lead to the inevitable conclusion that the policy of refusing to establish a National Government, justified by whatever excuse, is a wrong policy which must be changed.

It is the duty of all progressive people to raise their voice and demand that in order to finish the war quickly and to save people from death, the co-operation of the Indian people be at once sought by releasing the National leaders, and ending the political deadlock; by recognition throughout the country of the Trade Unions, and of the right of collective bargaining; by the establishment of a minimum living wage; by recognition of the Peasant Unions and the People's Food Committees, and by evolving a democratic control of the production and distribution of the essential needs of the country.

This must be done immediately. All democratic opinion must press for and achieve this—if, India, today discontented and poverty-stricken, is not to be a thorn that will tear across all schemes of post-war security and prosperity, but is to be a mighty weapon in building prosperity and world democracy.

We, in India, are doing our part. I hope the workers in Britain do theirs.

London.

December 5th, 1944.