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The World Will Will Hear of Gandhi

By Basanta Koomar Roy



These two things about Mahatma Gandhi lay hold on the imagination—that he has more influence over the millions of India than any political leader has ever had over the people of any country, and that at the same time he preaches not the power of force and violence, but the power of the ascetic and saintly life

IT is both futile and foolish to deny or to ignore the existence of a widespread and deep-seated unrest of 315,000,000 people in India today. And the most significant factor to be reckoned with is the dramatic entrance of the masses of this ancient land into the arena of political and economic revolt against the British Raj. *The Pioneer Mail* of Allahabad, India, is a semi-official British paper. On pages 20 and 21 in its issue of February 4 there are twenty headlines, and sixteen out of these deal with strike and boycott. These headlines read: "Bombay Strikers Riot," "Madras Sweepers Strike," "Lahore Students Strike," "Madras Strike Ends," "Bangalore Mill Strike Ended," "Madras Municipal Strike," "Men Resume Work," "Kohinoor Mill Strikes," "Madhupur Cooks (in British homes only) Strike," "Calcutta Tram Strike," "Men Desirous to Negotiate," "No Signs of Settlement," "Both Sides Remain Firm," "Tram Cars Held Up in Calcutta," "Agra Students Strike," "Calcutta Students Strike."



A young Gandhi circa 1880

A study of the map of India would show that the places mentioned in these headlines cover the entire country—north, south, east and west. Day after day, week after week, and month after month similar items of news are crowding the pages of the Indian papers. They simply indicate the direction of the dominant currents of thought in India. And the paramount factor in this crisis is the non-coöperation movement. In plain language it means nothing short of absolute boycott of everything connected with the British in India. It advocates the surrender of all titles of honor and honorary offices; suspension of practice by lawyers in British courts; and settlement of disputes by private arbitration; non-participation in Government loans; boycott of Government schools, colleges and universities; boycott of the reformed councils; refusal to accept any civil or military post in Mesopotamia and to offer as units for the army especially in Turkish territories now being administered in violation of pledges; vigorous prosecution of the boycott of British goods, and the adoption of means for the production of necessities of life; resignation of all salaried Government employees; resignation of all police and soldiers from their respective positions; and absolute refusal to pay taxes to the British Government in any shape or form.

The aim of this movement is to paralyze the British Government in India and to establish Swaraj (national government). As Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal in 1905 gave rise to the *Swadeshi*, which later ripened

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into the present revolutionary movement, similarly the origin of the non-coöperation movement may be traced to the Rowlatt Act, which practically placed India under martial law, and that after taking the tremendous toll of India's men and money in the world war. The same Rowlatt Act may also be held responsible for General Dyer's notorious Amritsar massacre, when 500 Indian men, women and children were killed in fifteen minutes, and 1500 more were left wounded weltering in their own blood.

The leader of this great non-coöperation movement is Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. He has more following than any other political leader ever had in any country. This makes him the most powerful man on earth today, tho he weighs but one hundred pounds. Gandhi-ism has fired the imagination of the teeming millions of India, and has stirred the country to its foundation, and is threatening the very existence of the British rule in India and British supremacy in the East. Gandhi is a pacifist. He discourages physical force, and preaches what is known as non-violent non-coöperation. Any act of violence, according to this modern Mahatma, would desecrate the sacred movement, jeopardize the cause of *Swaraj*, and defer the day of India's independence. "Victory must be won by soul-force," says he. But he holds that if blood must be shed, let it be the blood of the Indians themselves. If it is necessary to stop a train, let none use violence, but let a few lie down on the track and get killed in the name of truth. Then the train is sure to stop, and India thus wins a moral victory. Man is a moral and intellectual being, so his weapons of warfare should be moral and intellectual. Brute force should be relegated to brutes alone. He also believes, tho he was educated in London, that Western civilization is based on force, so he condemns it in unmistakable terms, and agrees that blind commercialism, arrogant imperialism and all-devouring militarism have ruined Europe beyond redemption.

As the leader of the Indians Gandhi fought a similar battle in South Africa and won it after years of hard fighting. The weapon used was passive resistance. For civil disobedience Gandhi and his followers went to prison most cheerfully, and defiantly bore the inhuman tortures they were subjected to. Many a time he barely escaped death from the hands of infuriated South African mobs. But always and invariably he kept the Indians away from active insurgency. Gradually the South African issue was introduced into India. And this furnished a common platform for men and women of all creeds and walks of life. Mass meetings were held all over India and funds were raised.

The man who endangered the empire from South Africa is now endangering it from India.

For a while Gandhi mainly preached the gospel of pure and healthy life thru pure thought and carefully selected food. Food does influence the body, and the body the mind. So for the health of both body and mind simple food is necessary. He preached celibacy to the unmarried, birth control by continence to the married, and fasting for all. He holds that as fire purifies gold, even so fasting purifies the body and clarifies the soul as well. Gradually he began to take part in politics, and during the Rowlatt bill agitation, he came to the forefront. There was a chance for him to put in practice the principles that won him success in South Africa.

Gandhi's influence over the people of India is so profound that it is easy to predict the success of his undertaking.

Wherever he goes he draws immense crowds. Thousands upon thousands of people listen to his dynamic appeals with rapt attention and unalloyed reverence, for he is not only a political leader but also a saint. And saints still have a chance in India. After his speeches thousands rush to touch the hem of his garment. The secret of his success lies in the simplicity of his life, honesty of his intention and spotlessness of his character. His fellow countrymen call him Mahatma (Saint). Even his political opponent, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, an Englishman, thus speaks of him in the *London Nation*: "One does not feel it blasphemous to compare Gandhi with Christ."

Tho he is fighting for political independence and economic emancipation, Gandhi lives the life of an ascetic. He lives on fruit, vegetables and rice. He eats no sweets and no spices. He dresses like a poor working man in coarse clothes. He never uses shoes. He always travels by the third class in railway trains, certainly not an easy undertaking. By natural inclination Gandhi associates more with the poor than with the rich. Twice he refused the presidency of the Indian National Congress, but last December he most cheerfully presided over the pariah conference

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at Nagpur, and valiantly advocated the social and economic emancipation of the depressed classes of India that constitute one-sixth of the total population of the country.

Quite unlike the idealists of all lands Gandhi is a practical man. He is a constructive statesman, not a "destructive fanatic" as he is called by some of his enemies. He does not believe in destroying anything that he cannot readily replace by something better.

In spite of desperate opposition from the Government and the reactionaries of India the non-coöperation movement is meeting with tremendous success. Many titleholders have given up their titles. Rabindranath Tagore gave up his knighthood soon after the Amritsar massacre. Women like Sarojini Naidu and Sarala Devi have given back their medals of honor for war services; and lawyers like C. R. Das of Calcutta have given up their practices carrying fabulous incomes. Hundreds of thousands of students of all ages and of all provinces of India are out of British schools, colleges and universities. National educational institutions are being opened in quick succession, where Hindustani, the future common language of India, has been made compulsory, and students are daily receiving lessons in spinning and weaving. This is to help the production of indigenous cotton goods in order to make the boycott of such British goods most effective.

The success of the boycott of British goods in India is actually threatening the British commercial supremacy in the world. This affords a splendid opportunity for further development of American trade in India. Indian merchants, influenced by Gandhi, are flatly refusing to buy British goods. British merchants cannot sell their goods to India. The export of British goods to India has fallen beyond comprehension. Mills and factories are being closed and millions of workers are out of employment in Great Britain.

Not only the students, lawyers and the consumers of British goods are on strike, but even the prisoners of India have begun to show signs of non-coöperation with British prisons. Thus reads a London dispatch of March 26, last: "Six hundred prisoners, says an official statement, have escaped from Rajshahi jail in Bengal, India. As they fled, they seized the rifles belonging to the guards." Policemen in many cities have approached Gandhi to be allowed to strike work and do their bit for the success of this great movement. Gandhi is advising them to have patience and devote their energies to organizing among themselves, and to inducing the female members of their families to take to spinning and weaving. The policemen of Nagpur, impatient of waiting, have already gone on strike. The British courts are closed, as there are no police to escort there the men under arrest. The police guards of the British treasury walked out in a body, and the building is being guarded by Gurkha soldiers. The Gurkhas correspond to the Cossacks under the Czars.

The Indian soldiers serving in the British army, too, have approached Gandhi for his permission to strike. They have recently become so restless that the British Government has postponed the demobilization of several divisions that was ordered for the month of March. The Government is afraid that the discharged soldiers may be fierce enemies of the Government in case of an armed uprising. In other words, these men are now being interned in the British forts. Gandhi has informed the soldiers of India that when their turn comes, they will be duly notified of their duty to the Motherland. In the meantime both the soldiers and the police should refuse to obey any orders that go against their conscience.

Perhaps the most stupendous feat of constructive work Gandhi so far has been able to accomplish is to bring the Hindus and the Mahomedans together in British India in a spirit of wholehearted coöperation and mutual helpfulness in these days of India's renaissance. Hindus are entering Mahomedan mosques to take the oath of fraternity, and Mahomedans are entering Hindu temples to take the vow of fighting to the bitter end India's fight for independence. During the troubled days of 1919 the Government even issued an order that no Hindus should be allowed to enter the famous Badshahi mosque of Lahore. Armed British forces were stationed to enforce the ordinance. The two principal lieutenants of Gandhi are Mahomedans—Mahomed Ali and Shaukat Ali. A strangely significant alliance indeed, for Shaukat Ali especially is a fiery revolutionist who believes in immediately plunging the country into an armed revolution.

Lord Reading has been sent to India as the new Viceroy to use, it is claimed, his diplomatic acumen to pacify India. He reached the shores of India on April 1—the April fool's day. It is easy to predict that Reading's mission will be just as unsuccessful as the Duke of Connaught's has been. "To extend any welcome," says Gandhi,

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"to any representative of the sovereign would be a mistake, would be a crime, would be inconsistent with our self respect," for to him the British Government is an "irresponsible, insolent and godless bureaucracy." And he is not very anxious to keep India within the British Empire either. Thus spoke Gandhi at the last session of the Indian National Congress at Nagpur. "It is derogatory to the National Assembly to think of the permanence of the British connection at any cost. . . . If British connection is inconsistent with India's national self-respect, then it is our bounden duty to destroy it." And the virulence of his opposition to the British rule in India may easily be judged from his free and frank statement to a representative of the London *Daily Telegraph* that he preferred Bolshevism to British rule.

It is not necessary to agree with all the principles and practices of Mahatma Gandhi to realize the importance of this movement that is implacably moving one-fifth of the total population of the world to a destiny that cannot yet be definitely defined, but which is sure to change the color of the map of the world.

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