

## **THE PRESENT NATIONAL CRISIS AND WHAT IS TO BE DONE\***

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We are meeting at this much needed Conference at a critical time in our country's history. When one has many long borders and bad, treacherous neighbours, it is logical to expect that some time or the other we shall have trouble with them. At the present time we are having trouble from a neighbour who we least expected would betray our solemn trust in its peaceful intentions. Our trust has been betrayed and we are engaged in a conflict with it, much against our will.

For under-developed countries like ours and the rest of Asia, including China itself, the economic consequences of a prolonged conflict are very serious. The stability of our economic organisation and the success of our efforts to develop it through our five-year plans, depend on peace and economic aid. India has had no experience of direct war and destruction, as Europe and certain other parts of Asia have had which became the actual theatres of war. Even the limited horrors we experienced during the partition, waves of displaced and uprooted people streaming in and others migrating, taxed and are still taxing our resources to breaking point. Bengal and Punjab have some experience of that. But all these pale into insignificance when war-affected areas begin to force their sessile population to flee inland to safety; it upsets not only their own economy but also the economy of the places they flee to. This is inevitable, and only well organised countries with previous experience of such conditions know how to prepare for them and how to meet the sudden impact of violently changed conditions which come with great rapidity.

The present condition on our borders may get resolved unexpectedly early, if world opinion and the pressure of China's

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Communist allies can force China to see sense and desist from involving the world in a terrible global war; or, if the conflict is restricted to only India and China, it may drag on for a long time and harper the fulfilment of all our well-laid economic plans to raise the standard of life in our country and may compel us to revise our economic programmes. While we may hope for the best it would be stupid on our part to ignore the possibility that our people and country may have to face severe destruction and upsetting of our economic life. We are not ignorant Canutes to explain: "Thus far and no further." That is all very good for platform oratory and pep talks. As planners with a sense of realism, we make plans that take into account all possible eventualities that may arise if we should fail to stop the enemy at our borders. We know from recent history that the enemy may overrun a country and yet be defeated in the long run, as happened in Europe in both the First and Second World Wars. Militarily we always take that into account. Good military planners always make alternate plans in the event of defeat. Only the German mentality which had never waged a defensive war with success, flung all efforts into winning and not losing. But one single crack in their armour and all well-laid plans they made crumbled rapidly. This in short has been the history of German militarism. This may happen with the Chinese too.

But what about ourselves? China launched a massive invasion and, for a time, things looked black, as our border defences were overwhelmed in certain sectors. It was feared that we would face further disasters in a military sense as France and Russia did in the Second World War. The superiorly equipped Chinese army might even make considerable inroad into our land as the Germans did when they overran Europe with their mighty military machine and everything seemed lost. We might have been compelled to "trade space for time" as happened in Russia and France, and whether we liked it or not, to see our brethren uprooted en masse and abandon their hearths and homes, their fields and cattle, to leave behind them scorched earth to delay the invading enemy.

If such a situation had come about, it would have been

imperative for us, as civilian population of the hinterland, to devise ways and means in the simplest and most flexible form to keep things going so as to relieve our fighting forces of unnecessary burdens in addition to their own, as well as become active aiders of the fighting forces by organising the hinterland to support the fighting fronts. This has been done elsewhere and we have now to learn from others how to do it and we shall have use only for the simplest and most flexible methods.

As realistic economists we have always maintained that with the economic stringency and meagre finances that practically all Asia, with the exception of Japan, has to face, we should learn to adopt the simplest procedures which cost little and bring the people into active co-operation; and, during the crisis we are now facing, we must have that inventive enterprise to create out of dust an organisation to tide us over till better and more prosperous days come back to us. There is the example of the Russian Red Army after the First World War which was the product of the gigantic genius of Leon Trotsky who was no military man. Then, there is the example of the famous Chinese 8th Route Army which evolved a highly successful medical aid system when nothing was available. It was Tom Wintringham who first evolved the Home Guard organisation which helped Britain to hold out against the terrific Hitlerian bombardment of the towns and countryside, while the top British Brass Hats of the regular defences made a mess of everything in the first phases of the war. Symaschko of Russia worked out of practically non-existent material his famous socialised medical services which no Western system could ever match and Hitler entrusted the entire war-production organisation to a young architect who had nothing to do with the army. Perhaps the greatest military geniuses India ever produced were Baji Rao Peshwa and Tantia Tope. Neither of them was a regular army man. One was a statesman and prime minister, the other was only a clerk. Yet it is exactly men away from narrow specialism that have found simple and correct solutions in a crisis. The plans for the siege of Petrograd were made by a Professor of Mathematics whose chief passion was to play chess, and the

Communist Chinese army that fought Japan successfully for seven years when Chiang Kai Shek with his American equipped army was practically annihilated by the Japanese, was conceived, directed and trained by another non-soldier, a Professor of History at the Peking University. The origin of the present huge Chinese Red Army goes back to that now forgotten Professor of History and 6,000 hard-bitten expert miners who developed the present technique of guerilla warfare that beat the Japanese in China, and, copied by the Russian partisans, broke the back of the Nazi army when they had practically overrun Russia in the Second World War.

Indeed, if one were to judge by the histories of these wars, it would seem as if the great generals who planned and conducted wars, turned out to be the greatest bunglers. Historian Clarke writing on the British Generals in the First World War thoroughly exposed the out-of-dateness of General Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig, Ludendorff, the great German General, who trapped the Russians at Tannenberg in the First World War, exclaimed: "The English fight like lions." "Yes," scoffed an under-officer, "but they are led by donkeys." It now turns out from the histories of the two World Wars and the Korean War that the great military experts had all bungled. ("Ludendorff—die Tragodie eines Fachmanns", Collin Clarke, *The Donkeys*, Morrow, N.Y., Feb. 1962; Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, Macmillan, 1962; Thompson, *Cry Korea, The Secret History of the Korean War*, etc.).

While the expert has his legitimate place as to the "know-how", it has been amply proved that often he is wrong as to the "know-what", which is the chief characteristic of a capable statesman (Harold Laski, "The Limitations of the Expert"). In a national crisis, it is often the non-expert who sees clearly the simple and direct path.

The fact should now be clear that our ambitious plans have become strained. It will be difficult to implement them in full in this emergency period because other priorities have to be considered.

It has always turned out that the social and nation-building schemes become the very first casualties, the first to be

sacrificed, because a war has to be won and every effort towards that end has to be kept in the forefront. The upsetting of well-laid plans is all the greater in an under-developed and precariously balanced country like India.

We may do well to keep the following points in mind:

- (1) The WHO states that 60% of the world population are under-nourished. That means that only a few countries of Western Europe and North America have surplus food.
- (2) Dr. Lokanathan stated recently that 300-400 million people in Asia are actually starving. This concerns particularly India and China with half the total population of the world within their boundaries.
- (3) 60% of the world population are desperately poor.

It is exactly these two countries, India and China, which are now in a state of war with each other. What the set-back to both these countries will be in the event of a prolonged conflict with its far-reaching consequences, both political and economic, can well be imagined. As it is, the economic situation in India, with its tremendous efforts to put through elaborate plans for economic stability and development with borrowed money, borrowed food, and unfortunately, borrowed out-dated ideas, had begun to strain at the joints and look somewhat uncertain. There had been a miscalculation somewhere and we are beginning to realise that the profits and higher incomes from the plans went to benefit a handful of mostly the wrong sort of people.

Today it should be clear that, whether we like it or not and however much we may regret it, the plans, as originally contemplated, will have to be drastically modified in the light of a realistic awakening which some of us had time and again been demanding. This awakening has come after a terrific shock administered by the Chinese invasion of India, which Prime Minister Nehru admitted only recently. We have consistently pointed out during the past two decades that the social organisation in India which includes economic planning and medical and educational organisation, should be moulded on the economic realities of the situation. For years we protested against

the out-dated elaborate schemes which the health and medical bureaucracy has been thrusting on the Government. If the war on our borders spreads, our very rudimentary medical organisation which barely touches the fringe of our population, despite the enormous expenditure it has entailed, is likely to crack up of the very first impact.

It is only now that a world authority of the calibre of a Rene Dubos of the Rockefeller Medical Research Centre in America, has supported what we have repeatedly stressed all these years, viz: "Clearly, health and disease cannot be defined merely in terms of anatomical, physiological or mental attributes. Their real measure is the ability of the individual to function in a manner acceptable to himself and the group of which he is a part. If the medical services of the armed forces seem more successful than their civilian counterparts in formulating useful criteria of health, this is due not to their greater wisdom but rather to the fact that their criteria and more clearly defined. On the whole, effective military performance required attributes less varied and less complex than the multifarious activities of civilian life. But criteria of adequacy change even in the military world. The soldier of past wars who marched or rode his way to victory through mental or physical stamina might not be the most effective warrior in the push-button operations of future conflicts." (Rene Dubos, *The Mirage of Health*, p. 219).

The correct approach to medical organisation in India has been hampered from the very beginning because of the historical fact that organisation and, to a great extent, even civilian administration have been in the hands of the military men from the days of the British conquest of India. This has continued even today since all medical organisation at the Centre and even in the States is influenced by military medical men whose knowledge of civilian needs is severely restricted by their narrow movements in charmed circles. The result has been that while little Israel has 1 medical man to every 400 people, Soviet Union 1 to 490, Britain 1 to 970, India has only 1 to 5,000. Obviously, in the present crisis, major attention will have to be given to active war zones and most of the

recruitment, medical aid, stores, etc., will be concentrated in affected areas. The civilian needs will get proportionately less attention and, if social life gets disorganised as happened in Russia and a major part of Europe, mass migrations of civilian populations will not only hamper the military operations and movements, but also bring with them huge problems of evacuation and rehabilitation; and, what is more, well-known epidemics like cholera, intestinal diseases, tuberculosis, malnutrition, dysenteries, typhus, and all latent unfavourable health conditions will break out in a virulent manner.

It is crystal clear that our present official medical organisation will not only get into a jam and become hopelessly disorganised and incapable of meeting the situation, but their inefficiency, which is manifest even now in peace time, will make them crack up inevitably. We just have not got the financial resources to cope with the new problems, because the little money we have and shall get from outside, will be mopped up by the ever-growing need to buy arms, and to spend on army movements and war measures. This should be clear to any one with even a rudimentary knowledge of economics. Unfortunately we Indians are incorrigible day-dreamers and wishful thinkers, and we never wake up until the horse has bolted or catastrophe has occurred. This is a major national weakness against which some of us have repeatedly warned. But the time had to come for something to rudely shock us out of our convenient habit of shelving all problems as long as the going is smooth.

*What can we Homœopaths do?* I have repeatedly stressed and even claimed that some day when India is in a crisis, we homœopaths with our simpler and more reliable methods will find ourselves better suited to the exigencies of the situation than the elaborate allopaths. In war-torn areas and on shell-scarred roads the ungainly Jeeps still continue to hop along, defying craters, bogs and pits when the beautiful expensive Rolls-Royces get bogged down. We claim that our simple homœopathy is as reliable and as rugged, as indispensable and as appropriate as the unpretentious little Jeep with no air of luxury and no eye-appeal, no claim to enter the palaces of the

rich and the mighty. Our real place will be with the uprooted and the disinherited, fleeing from the roar of the guns and the devastation of their once peaceful fields, now charred and burnt out.

The experiences of the Western homœopaths during the First and Second World Wars have been crystallised into indispensable knowledge for us as to what is to be done, how to go about it, how simple, direct, clear-cut is our task and how effective. While it may not be our privilege and honour to be able to serve our brave armed forces fighting desperately at the war fronts to keep freedom alive in our country, I claim that it shall be our aim and privilege to cater to the civilian population who shall, of necessity, have to go without adequate medical aid, if the situation worsens. We may hope for the best, but it would be the greatest stupidity, if not criminal carelessness, not to be prepared for the worst.

I particularly refer to the great success during the Second World War of the British homœopaths in treating shell-shocked civilians, mass effect of fright, hysteria, sadness, grief, shock at loss of hearth and home, shattered morale, injuries, burns, almost everything not needing major surgical intervention, and especially, the war-time epidemics that come with them and disorganise social and economic life.

This therefore is our task, whether or not we get official recognition and aid from the Government. Every unknown village homœopath can become the unknown hero. He should become the health centre of his village, and, if there is a Government agency near him, he shall co-operate with it, for the days of distinction are rapidly disappearing. When a jungle catches fire, all animals, deadly and harmless, cluster together in mutual sympathy and help each other. With very little resources and equipment the homœopath can render services out of all proportion to his economic status. This I had foreseen for years and, now near the end of my life's tenure, I hope to see this great dream of mine become a reality which will convince the country and its people that to think in terms of simplification of ways and means to reach and be useful to the masses is not necessarily atavistic, retrograde or unscientific. India is a poor



country, despite all its borrowed feathers. That is the stark, undeniable reality and as long as that exists, I believe that we should always strive, as we have been doing doggedly till now, to seek after simpler and more effective ways to serve the masses, and this is the time to prove it.

I have never had much use or respect for platform orators and hot-air merchants declaiming their undying patriotism. I have been forty-five years in public life and have seen and heard many an eloquent orator. I never had use for them, much less now. Emotions are a fine thing, but only to rouse one to action. Something more is needed. Mere faith is not enough, but faith in something clear cut, worthwhile, fundamental, based on reality—that is what is needed. Only those social organisations survive that can show flexibility and quick adaptability to rapidly changing circumstances. Our bureaucracy has not been trained to that quality and outlook. On the contrary, as Isiah Bowmann in his *New Geography* has said, the bureaucracy under the British in India has been concentrated and developed to a great degree of inefficiency. It is therefore all the more necessary that in the present crisis we undertake, as a people, to do our own thinking as to how best we may serve the people in the small and simple way we may be capable of. If the powers that be accept our humble schemes and voluntary service we are offering them, so much the better. Our work actually begins at the point where their own work breaks down or stops or is unable to reach the masses. Is there anything wrong in that? Surely the reasonable and the realistic thinkers in our bureaucracy and the Government will begin to see our point. If they do, we whole-heartedly offer our humble services to be co-ordinated with their own endeavours. The call has come for all of us to do the utmost we can to justify our right to be citizens of India. Under the roar of enemy guns devastating our soil and threatening our right to live as a free nation, should there be differences, stupid, silly, untenable differences amongst us? No!

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