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167. 'AN APPEAL TO THE NATION'

Under the above heading Mr. Srish Chandra Chatterji and eighteen other signatories have issued a document which I copy below:

We are passing through a series of national crises the gravity of which can hardly be exaggerated. There are moments in the history of nations when a decisive move in the right direction often leads a nation to a triumphant goal and, when that supreme moment is lost in vague magination or false and

¹ Prafulla Chandra Ray (1861-1944); professor of chemistry at Presidency College, Calcutta; author of *History of Hindu Chemistry*; educationist and patriot

indecisive steps, it takes long centuries to retrieve the loss. India is passing through some such crisis and we are extremely fortunate that the crisis is not yet over. The whole world is shivering from the pains of labour, the indications of a new life are manifest everywhere, and a regenerated India must find a place among the new-born nations of the world. This rejuvenated India cannot accept any overlord, she must be a free and independent nation.

At a time when all the nations of the world are fighting for independence and liberty, at a time when our Indian heroes are championing the cause of India's independence abroad, it is simply ridiculous and shameful that we Indians should hesitate to accept independence as our only legitimate and logical goal; we therefore appeal to our nation to declare in the open Congress in unmistakable terms that independence and complete independence is our destined goal; let there be no ambiguous phrases to qualify it, let it be preached in all its nakedness. It is the moral force of this ideal that creates nations.

We must educate the country from this very moment in a way so that the people may realize the significance of a republic and a federation. We may postpone it for the future only at the risk of a great national calamity. We therefore appeal to the Congress delegates to define swaraj as a Federated Republic of the United States of India.

We also appeal to the delegates of this Congress to delete the words 'by peaceful and legitimate means' from the Congress creed, so that men holding every shade of opinion may have no difficulty in joining the only national organization in the country, though for the present it may be retained as a part of the actual programme of Congress work. Our time is short and we cannot dilate upon this point at any length, but we only say that means are after all means and our object and means should not be confounded with each other.

We are further of opinion that mere changing of the creed and passing of resolutions would not bring us independence. We therefore request the representative of our nation to engage the whole strength and the whole resources of the Congress in organizing a band of national workers who will devote all their time and all their energy in the service of their motherland and who must be ready to suffer and even be ready to sacrifice their lives for the national cause. When the Congress is backed by an organization of this kind then and then alone will the Congress have any strength and only then can we expect the voice of the Congress to be respected.

The other items in our programme should be:

- (1) Boycott of British goods

- (2) Establishment or helping in the establishment of factories and cottage industries on a strictly co-operative basis.
- (3) Helping the labourers and peasants of our land in obtaining their grievances redressed and organizing them for their own economic good and moral prosperity.
- (4) And finally to organize a federation of all the Asiatic races in the immediate future.

I know that this 'appeal to the nation' has been before the public for some time. It contains nothing new. Nevertheless it represents the views not merely of the signatories but of a large number of educated Indians. It will not, therefore, be a waste of energy to examine the contents.

Whereas the Congress leaves swaraj undefined, the signatories would have complete independence and, therefore, define swaraj as a Federated Republic of the United States of India. There is nothing in the Congress creed to prevent India aspiring' after independence. In fact, swaraj that does not enable India to declare her independence if necessary is no swaraj. What, however, the independence of the signatories means is severance at any cost and in every case with England. I hold that such severance is not indispensable for India's growth and freedom. The burden of severance should lie with the English people. It is more dignified for us to declare our readiness to be partners on equal terms and at will with the English in a Federation of Free States. Acceptance of such a position on the part of Englishmen may be impossible, but we have no right to assume the impossibility of a thing which, in its nature, is not impossible. Isolated independence is not the goal of the world States. It is voluntary interdependence. England is by no means so independent as to absorb any European State she chooses. Her independence depends partly upon the goodwill of her neighbours and partly upon her armament. In so far as she relies upon her armament, she is a menace to the world, as in fact she became during the late War. She stood, as we now learn, not for righteousness but for plunder. Her statesmen, equally with France and other States, were guilty of secret treaties, diplomatic fraud and barbarities hardly inferior to Germany's. It must be clear to everyone that it cannot be such armed independence that the signatories want and, if they do, I am certain that they represent only themselves. Independence is a word hallowed by centuries of usage and, therefore, it is possible to raise round it a large body of opinion, but no one would hazard a definition of it that would suit the whole of that body. I

suggest, therefore, that there is no substitute for swaraj, and the only universal definition to give it is 'that status of India which her people desire at a given moment.'

If I were asked what India desires at the present moment, I should say I do not know. I could only say I would have her to desire truthful relations between Hindus and Mussalmans, bread for the masses and removal of untouchability. That is how I would define swaraj at the present moment. I give that definition because I claim to be a practical man. I know that we want political independence of England. It will not be attained without the three things mentioned by me, not even if we had arms and we knew how to use them.

The second thing the signatories desire is the removal of the clause restricting the means to what is 'peaceful and legitimate'. I share the signatories' opinion, not for the reasons they give, but for the very reverse of them. They say 'means are after all means'. I would say 'means are after all everything'. As the means so the end. Violent means will give violent swaraj. That would be a menace to the world and to India herself. France obtained her freedom by violent means. She is still paying dearly for her violence. She will presently be at the mercy of her savage African army. I am a staunch believer in absolute equality between man and man, but my belief does not take me to the length that the French have gone. Their training of levies of Africans is not proof of her acceptance of the doctrine of equality but of her greed for absolute power. There is no wall of separation between means and end. Indeed, the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception. Holding such a belief, I have been endeavouring to keep the country to means that are purely 'peaceful and legitimate'.

But experience has taught me that the purpose has not perhaps been served by the restriction of the means. For I see that those who do not believe in the necessity of non-violence and truth for the attainment of swaraj have also joined the Congress, for they regard it to be quite the proper thing to sign the Congress creed, although they do not themselves believe in it. Perhaps, they do not interpret 'peaceful' and 'legitimate' as respectively to mean 'non-violent' and 'truthful'. I would myself, therefore, probably propose the deletion of the clause 'by peaceful and legitimate means'. It would be a faithful

representation of the present state of things. We would then not be open to the charge of camouflage. Everyone will be free to follow the policy he likes best.

The last paragraph of the ‘appeal’ reads extremely well, but it shows the utter inexperience of the signatories about practical work. It does not appear to have occurred to them that, if we have not yet got a “band of national workers who will devote all their time and energy’, it is not because the Congress has not tried, but because the Congress has failed to get a large number of such workers. Surely it is open to the signatories themselves to raise such a band if it exists. They will find funds enough for the proper stamp of workers. If the signatories will examine the different institutions of India, they will find that not one languishes for want of funds. Is it not clear that a nation always pays for organizations it needs? Only last week I drew attention to the fact that the Khadi Board cannot get the workers it wants.

The other items of the programme suggested by the signatories do not call for any lengthy notice.

I hope I have shown in a previous article¹ that boycott of British goods is a totally impracticable proposition.

The proposal for the establishment of factories has a strong Western flavour about it and ignores Indian conditions.

The one cottage industry that is possible finds no mention in the programme.

The proposal to help the labourers and peasants is a counsel of perfection.

And the final proposal to organize a federation of all the Asiatic races in the immediate future demonstrates the present impossibility of the programme.

I, therefore, respectfully suggest to the nineteen signatories to divide all the items suggested by them among themselves, each batch to specialize in connection with the item taken up by it and, when success is shown in any one of the departments, to come to the Congress for national adoption. But if they have made the proposals without any idea of carrying them out themselves, I ask them to accept the opinion I have tendered and apply themselves to the working of

¹ *Vide* “Empire Goods Boycott”, 15-5-1924.

khaddar*—a programme that can harness the energy of all who will work.

Young India, 17-7-1924

*Weaving homespun cloth [PL]