

The Time to Fight— Now or Never

By M. R. Masani

THE hot and cold treatment is an old established and well-known form of torture practised by the dreaded Soviet Secret Service, the N.K.V.D., in breaking down the resistance of its victims in order to extort confessions. The same technique is adopted by Communist Powers when dealing with the victims of their actual or intended aggression. The cease-fire unilaterally declared by the Chinese Communist regime is only the latest example of the use of this technique. As the Pan-Mun-Jon negotiations with the UN forces in Korea had shown, negotiations are for the Communists a carrying on of war by other means.

What are the likely objectives of the present Chinese move? Politically, the intention is clearly to counter the splendid solidarity shown by the Indian people by confusing and dividing the country through an appeal to the weaker and less determined elements among our Government and people, as also to prevent massive Western aid and friendly forces from supplementing our own defence effort. Militarily, the motivation is to extricate the Chinese forces, which are dangerously extended, from their present untenable and vulnerable positions.

Impudent Missile

Indian public opinion has, with striking unanimity, seen through the Chinese move and rejected it. The nature of the arrogant and impudent missile, which has properly been described as an 'ultimatum' has been correctly understood by the Indian people and the Press. The fact has also been understood that it is at least as objectionable as, if not worse than, the October 24 proposals of the Chinese Communists, which were turned down out of hand by our Government, a rejection that was repeated in the Prime Minister's letter to Chou En-lai of November 14, which characterized them as 'preposterous demands,' and again on November 20, only a few hours before the Chinese ultimatum, when the Prime Minister told both Houses of Parliament that "India will not accept any compromise on Chinese terms and will fight on to victory." The treacherous nature of the trap set by the Chinese Communists to lure us from this high resolve has been seen through.

The Chinese ultimatum has made it clear that they are not interested in our verbal acceptance or rejection of their dictates. They will judge us by whether or not we comply with the demands they have made as to what we may and may not do. The Chinese Communists, the world and our own people will judge whether we have accepted or rejected the ultimat-

um by whether or not in action we submit to those dictates. Let us not deceive ourselves. If we do not contravene any of the demands sought to be imposed on us, then, whatever we may say or whatever diplomatic evasions we may indulge in, we shall have accepted military defeat in the eyes of the enemy and the world.

The implications of such a possibility are fearful. Our armed forces, who are keen to have an opportunity of retrieving their honour by giving the enemy, in service terminology, a blood nose, would be cheated of that opportunity and left cruelly demoralised. Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan will draw their own conclusions and act accordingly. The Chinese aggressors will be left to choose the time and mode of their next onslaught on this country from the points of vantage in which we shall have permitted them to be lodged.

How then should the national will that the Chinese ultimatum will be rejected be carried into effect? The enemy, who has advanced along a front extending from Ladakh to NEFA over difficult mountainous terrain, maintaining around 100,000 men in the process, must inevitably have extended himself dangerously. He has spread himself very thin. His logistic problems rule out any immediate further advance. He may find it difficult even to maintain himself against a determined attack.

The question that arises is whether we on our side are in a position to launch a massive counter-attack. Here any non-official is at a disadvantage in that the full facts are not available but, on the best information available, the answer appears to be a positive one. Man for man, the Indian soldier, with a long tradition of warfare, is unquestionably superior to the Chinese, who has never been particularly known for martial qualities.

Political Interference

The recent setbacks may fairly be ascribed to special reasons such as political interference impairing esprit de corps and dictating a false order of strategic priorities by which Pakistan was made into enemy number one. Surely, the Indian army is not going to be judged on the basis of these temporary reverses.

There is no reason why, given certain essentials, the Indian army should not be capable, now that the fighting takes place on our own terrain, of pushing back the Chinese vanguard. The first of these essentials is numerical superiority, which can be established if around a lakh of troops reported to be in and around Kashmir and on the frontiers of

West Pakistan are moved to the NEFA front.

Even if, by way of abundant caution, it is felt that the Kashmir front cannot be disturbed, there is no reason whatsoever why troops in neighbouring areas cannot be so redeployed. The second essential is parity of fire-power which, with the appropriate equipment which is available and can now be brought in, can also be established. The third is air support and the capacity to bomb enemy bases and lines of supply.

The British and U.S. Governments have indicated that there is no limitation to aid in men and material being made available if only we ask for it. Whether this situation can be achieved before November 30 or soon after is not of crucial importance. What is important is to reserve our freedom of action to strike back through our Government announcing officially before November 30 our outright rejection of the Chinese ultimatum in their present positions or to harry and maul them should they seek to withdraw. If the Chinese terms are not categorically rejected by November 30 we shall in fact have submitted to the Chinese ultimatum.

No Second Round

There are some who think it would be clever to observe the cease-fire and November 30, allow the Chinese to withdraw to the line they have indicated and then to ignore their other demands and reoccupy the points held by us on September 8 in defiance of their ultimatum. On examination, this will be found to be a line of action not at all to our advantage, since it would allow the Chinese to get away from their present exposed position while the going is good and allow them to place themselves in a well-entrenched position as on September 8, with the additional handicap to our forces that they would be attacked before they even have the opportunity to consolidate their position. It will prove to be a deceptive mirage covering up an abject surrender.

As has been well put, "there will be no second round if the Chinese ultimatum is accepted. For the result will be complete demoralization in the people as well as the armed forces and natural misgivings among our friends in committing more support to us."

Wars are not won by craven calculations. Can we imagine Winston Churchill agreeing to a cease-fire immediately after Dunkirk? The honour and manhood of India are at stake. Shall we not assert them? The time to fight is now or never.

ultimatum, leaving our military commanders the freedom to attack the Chinese