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The I.P.R. Conference at Lucknow

MRM, who was a member of the Indian Delegation to the recent Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations and Chairman of its Political Round Table, provides readers of the Bulletin with a glimpse of the Conference and its proceedings:-

The Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations which met in Lucknow last month has aroused a lot of interest and many enquiries are made both about the nature of the Institute and the purpose and objective of such a Conference. It might therefore be worth while to give readers of the Bulletin a brief glimpse of the Conference and its work.

The Institute of Pacific Relations or the I.P.R., as it is more popularly known - is "an international non-governmental, non-partisan association of private national societies concerned with the scientific study of international affairs in the Pacific and the Far East." Founded in 1925 by a group of University teachers, businessmen and Y.M.C.A. leaders from several countries abutting the Pacific, the Institute endeavoured ~~thoroughly~~ study the conditions of the Pacific peoples with a view to the improvement of their mutual relations. In more recent years, the scope of the sphere of interest of the I.P.R. has widened till it now includes the whole of South, South-East and East Asia as well as Australia and New Zealand. The means by which the I.P.R. seeks to advance understanding of the problems of the region include the publication of an authoritative quarterly journal named 'Pacific Affairs' and of a large number of books and pamphlets embodying the results of research sponsored by the organisation. The I.P.R. also holds International Conferences every two or three years, and the recent conference at Lucknow was its eleventh.

With "Nationalism in Asia and its international consequences" as its theme, the Conference met at a time when the eyes of the world were focussed on the region and its deliberations were consequently felt to be highly topical and excited more than usual interest. The Conference was fortunate in having as its venue the charming city of Lucknow and the delegates were gratified to make the acquaintance of the wit and hospitality of Sir Homi Mody, Governor of the State, and the gracious old-world charm of Acharya Narendra Dev, Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University. The arrangements made by the ~~I.P.R.~~ I.P.R. Secretariat, the Indian Council of World Affairs and Lucknow University were most efficient and satisfactory.

"Round Tables"

Perhaps something should be said about the procedure followed at the Conference. The main purpose of these Conferences is not to reach firm decisions but, by drawing together men and women from many lands and with various kinds of expert knowledge and background, to stimulate ideas and foster understanding. The

Conference is thus primarily an educative gathering. From this objective flows the procedure which is to divide the delegates into "Round Tables" of thirty and forty members each, which discuss certain specific aspects of the subject to be covered. Thus at Lucknow we had two series of "Round Tables" in the two successive weeks of the Conference, divided up into three "Round Tables", one on South Asia, another on South-East Asia and the third on East Asia, (or, as we would call it, the Far East.) During the next week, the same delegates were reshuffled into three new Round Tables, one for political problems, a second for economic and social problems and the third for economic and financial problems. The reports of these Round Tables come up before the full Conference, but there is no question of rejecting or accepting the views expressed.

Among the countries represented by delegates - selected by affiliated national organisations, like the Indian Council of World Affairs in our case - were Canada, France, India, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Phillipines, the United Kingdom and the United States, while guest members were present from Australia, Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, Malaya, the Netherlands and Viet Nam. Among these delegates were some men and women of real eminence and I for one felt I had benefited richly from the acquisition of knowledge and the stimulating exchange of ideas. Perhaps quite as valuable were the contacts made and the friendships formed with people from various countries which one looks forward to renewing at some later Conference or reunion.

Results.

Was the Conference a success, and what are the results it yielded? From a personal point of view, many delegates I talked to felt that attending the Conference had been worth their while in the way of what they got out of it in knowledge and understanding of the point of view of those from other countries. The Conference yielded no concrete results beyond the reports of the discussion which would be found enlightening by only a discerning few, but then, as explained earlier, these Conferences are not meant to yield concrete results. If there were no definite agreements arrived at, there certainly resulted from the Conference a much greater awareness of the trends of thought in various countries. This enlightenment was by no means always a pleasant experience to its recipients. Thus, an article in the New York Times of 12th October entitled, "Plain Words to Indians" gave expression to the sense of shock undoubtedly experienced by several American and other foreign delegates to the Conference at the charges of "Imperialism" levelled against the U.S.A. by certain Indian and Pakistan delegates. The Manchester Guardian revealed in an article on the I.P.R. Conference on October 19th that this reaction was not confined to America when it wrote: "The countries of South Asia face an almost

desperate situation economically . . . yet this is the time chosen by Asian countries for proclaiming their suspicion of loans or of capital." Perhaps the strongest criticism came from an Indian organ, the Times of India of October 30th, "supposedly knowledgeable and objective students of Asian affairs descended to the level of the cliché and revelled in ascribing the most diabolical imperialistic plots to the United States." America, it was charged, desires to exploit the Asian people; she was pictured as trying to bully Asia into cringing submission; and she was painted as a cunning devil who is seeking to secure bases in Asia through the insinuating influence of the 'almighty dollar'. Of factual justification of these charges there was astonishingly little at a Conference sponsored by an Institution noted for its academic integrity.

Isolationism ?

Now, to one who was present, these reactions appear to give a somewhat lopsided view of the proceedings. Much quiet good sense was also talked by delegates from all countries and certainly most of the sessions were very remote from anything savouring of a slanging match. That there should be a gulf between the thinking of the larger number of Indian delegates on the one hand and those from Canada, the U.S.A., Britain and France on the other is, though a pity, perhaps natural. What to me appeared some what more disquieting is the difference revealed between the processes of thought of the larger part of Indian opinion on the one hand and of the representatives of countries further East, such as Japan, the Phillipines and Viet-Nam, on the other. Perhaps this difference is brought about best in the following gently remonstrance containing in an article in the Bharat Jyoti of 5th November written by a delegate from one of these countries: "Those who came from Europe and America to the Conference seemed to have made up their minds that Communist expansionism was the main danger in Asia and wanted to help the countries concerned to stop it. & My own country is menaced by Communist designs, and so I understand these delegate colleagues from other countries in South East and East Asia thought the same way. Our friends from India and Pakistan ^{felt} ~~felt~~ differently . . . Yours is a very big and great country, many of us come from small countries. We are frightened by what happened to the Republic of Korea. We cannot hope to defend ourselves. We need economic and military assistance to keep our countries free. We cannot remain isolated. We would be happy if your great country joins us in a Pacific pact. Then we would feel safer. But the majority of your delegates do not want such a Pact. Then we must look to the United Nations and

to the West, the same as Korea . . . The countries of Asia are in a desperate position. They have too many people, too little production. They need machinery and technical 'know how'. We want India to lead us so that there can be a happy balance between the East and West. But we do not believe in isolationism, for we do not want to be destroyed one by one. When we are in danger, we cannot pick and choose. We must take all the help we get."

Are we in India getting isolated in our thinking on international affairs, not only from the peoples of the West, but also from our neighbours in the ~~East~~ East? The discussions at Lucknow should prove to be of great value to us if we draw the right conclusions from the opportunity provided to us by the Conference to get an idea of how others feel about what we say and do.
