



White Paper on Burma

Alice Thorner

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COMMENT ON NETROKONA PEASANT CONFERENCE

EDITORIAL NOTE: *In view of the lack of news and information on recent events in India, the following description of the Kisan Sabha may be of interest to Americans concerned over developments in that country. This material is taken from a letter written by Dr. W. Allen Longshore, Jr., to his parents. Dr. Longshore, who is with the Friends Ambulance Unit in India as a representative of the American Friends Service Committee, attended the Conference to inspect medical facilities. He says:*

The medical arrangements [for the Conference] were being taken care of by three organizations, namely, Bengal Medical Relief Coordination Committee, the Peoples Relief Committee, and the Marwari Relief Society, all of whom are old friends of ours. Doctors of these organizations had moved into the area of the conference a month previous and had selected a site and made provisions for adequate sanitary facilities for one lakh (100,000) of people. They had also carried on inoculations and vaccinations of the villagers surrounding the area in order to prevent an outbreak of an epidemic when so many people from all over India were gathered together. The conference ran from the second to the ninth [of May] and I arrived the evening of the sixth and departed the evening of the eighth. The train in the evening to Netrokona (the site of the gathering) . . . was packed to the hilt and I sat on the bedroll in one corner.

They had set up [at Netrokona] a small hospital of twelve beds with isolation wards for smallpox and cholera, plus an outpatient building and pharmacy combined. The buildings were all of basha construction (bamboo supports covered with bamboo woven mats for sides and roof) and they were set in the middle of an open field. Tube wells had been sunk in strategic places all over the area so that a fairly good water supply was available. The main pandel (this is the term applied to the main conference grounds which were enclosed in a sort of fence and the main platform or pavilion from which the main speeches were made was also in this pandel) was across the canal from the hospital and we spent a great deal of time walking around the area. It was certainly an impressive sight (very much like our county fairs) with flags and loud speakers, people in all types of costume (from all over India) and the view from the platform looking out over the thousands sitting there listening to the speeches. There was a grand parade with bugle and drum corps in which all the contingents from the various parts of the country marched through town with their many banners and flags flying in the breeze. A great number of the attenders had walked some sixty miles to get to the meetings and there were great shouts of greeting when a new "rally" arrived at the final destination. Preceding the parade there was the flag raising by an old Sikh about 73 who had been in prison some 37 years. . . . It is the rule rather than the exception to find the active social workers here now have all served prison terms and this is rather a mark of distinction than of shame.

They had several first aid posts scattered around the area so that medical attention was available at a moment's notice.

It was really well organized. The kitchen was regularly inspected and the various camps were visited daily to see if any person required medical attention and stretcher bearers were ready to take them to the hospital. There were streamers across the roads in several places advising persons who were feeling sick to go to the Marwari Hospital for treatment and the little hospital had twelve patients when I left. The medical setup was to go on two weeks beyond the end of the conference so as to get all the patients well before their discharge. It was interesting that the official language of the conference was English because it was understandable to more persons than any of the other Indian tongues. There was a marvelous statue made of mud which stood just at the main entrance to the pandel. It represented a Garo peasant who had broken the bonds of slavery and was free to be master of his own destiny. It was well done and impressive. It was completed in two days. The only inaccuracy was that he was much better nourished than most Indian peasants but it may have indicated that through Kisan Samity such freedom and health were possible. The main purpose of the conference was to stimulate the peasant organizations to greater activity so that they might become an economic force and so that they would have some say in the matters which most concerned them. It would be roughly the equivalent of the Farmers Union in the U.S.A.

DR. W. ALLEN LONGSHORE, JR.

WHITE PAPER ON BURMA

THE OFFICIAL British plan for postwar Burma, which was released in London on May 17, is strikingly similar to the "Blue Print" of the Conservative Party.⁽⁴⁾ The Government plan provides for a reconstruction period with rule by a British Governor assisted by a Council of Burmese, for a subsequent popular election, and for eventual self-government within the Empire subject to certain limitations.

The terms of the White Paper offer Burma "full self-government within the British Commonwealth" to be attained in three stages. For the first of these, lasting approximately three years, Burma is to be governed according to the emergency administration proclaimed in 1942, liberalized by the addition of an executive council which may include non-official Burmese, and possibly also by a legislative council. By or before December 9, 1948, it is hoped that a general election can be held and constitutional government under the Act of 1935 restored. During this second period the Burmese are to draw up a constitution and discuss with the British Government matters in which the British would retain control after independence, such as the administration of the Shan States and other tribal areas. The third stage, for which no date seems to have been given, is complete Burmese self-government within the Commonwealth limited by the safeguards mentioned above.

ALICE THORNER

⁽⁴⁾ See "Blue Print for Burma", by Alice Thorner, *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. XIV, No. 10, p. 126.