

Press review of the situation in India (28 February 1947)

Caption: On 28 February 1947, the British Foreign Office collates a series of press articles showing reactions in the United States to the announcement made by British Prime Minister Clement Attlee on 20 February to leave India by June 1948 at the latest.

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During the war, when Ceylon was the only large Far Eastern producer of rubber from which supplies were regularly available to the United Nations, the steady contribution from Liberia was invaluable.

U.S. PRESS LAUDS DECISION ON INDIA.

WASHINGTON--The British decision to withdraw completely from India by June, 1948, has been lauded generally in the U.S. press. The pronouncement placing the responsibility for the solution of India's internal problems unequivocally in the hands of the Indian leaders.

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Widespread comment emphasized the necessity for agreement between the two major factions in India and expressed hope that the British decision would prod the Indian leaders to an agreement among themselves.

The NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE said:

"Attlee's announcement that the British were determined to withdraw from India whether or not a new constitution could be agreed upon by the Indians, is a truly momentous event. It marks a breach with the older world that is more striking than anything that has occurred since World War One revolutionized Europe. A new nation, whose potentialities can only be guessed at, is rising in Asia--in a plastic Asia that may yet, in sure hands, be shaped into a mould for the future of the world.

"The British might easily have lingered on in India, playing off Hindu against Moslem, prince against peasant, presiding over a tense and costly stalemate in the interests of imperial prestige. By refusing this role--despite the temptations which it must have offered to a government under great pressure from within and without the country-- Attlee and his colleagues have been statesmanlike. And the British people discarding the trappings of imperialism--which would have seemed shabby in the cold, cruel light of this post-war dawn--have taken on a new dignity and a new moral strength, which multiplies the respect they have won by courage in the war and patience under the privations of peace."

The CINCINNATI ENQUIRER said:

"The Attlee commitment does not promise a united India, as originally contemplated. It clearly leaves the way open to three Indian states--a predominately Hindu India, a separate state embracing the heavily Moslem areas, and a scattered agglomeration of native states ruled by princes. And that is what a self-governing India will be, in June of next year, unless meantime the several factions can reach agreement on the constitution of a single Indian confederation with a central government in common...

"Attlee and his colleagues can very properly take the position that a union of division in India is not their affair. They have tried hard to get the Indian factions to join in drafting a single constitution. Agreement has proved impossible. It is logically the responsibility of the Indians to find the basis for unity within their own number."

THE NEW YORK TIMES said:

"Every passing day should now crowd the opposing Indian leaders closer to some compromise. It may be that the Moslems themselves can modify (Moslem leader) Jinnah's recalcitrant attitude. There are signs that some of them are trying to do so. A position which is still politically expedient now may become untenable a year from now. Nehru may be shrewd enough to increase his inducements for Moslem collaboration. It is certain India cannot build her independence on a deadlock. Independence with no ability to control it and no power to maintain it promises only catastrophe."

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The PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE said:

"Whatever India's leaders decide to do, the fate of 400,000,000 is in their hands. People everywhere who believe in right of self-determination will hope that within the next 15 months these leaders will demonstrate a capacity for the independence so long sought."

The WASHINGTON POST said:

"Britain has been struggling with tremendous difficulties to make possible a freedom that, for all their protestations, Indian leaders in the last analysis have been unprepared to accept. This has been an unhappy role, one that the Labour Government will be glad to relinquish..."

"Necessity does strange things to people. If the Indian leaders are convinced of Britain's sincerity, as they certainly should be by this time, there may well evolve the greatness and breadth of vision necessary to compose their differences. That is the best hope. It is in the possibility of failure that will come the real test of Britain's determination. Will she, as a humane nation, feel compelled to stick by her promise if the only clear prospect for India is a vacuum of prolonged fratricidal war?"

The BALTIMORE EVENING SUN said:

"Indian leaders know now that end for which they have so long striven is fully assured, so far as Britain goes; that disavowment, intransigence and threats of civil war no longer menace Britain but only India itself; and their's is now the task and the inescapable obligation to determine whether in 1948 they will realize a dream or be launched into a nightmare."

The CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER said:

"There is some belief that the Labour Government took this step to force a Hindu-Moslem reconciliation. The London Cabinet believes that, faced with full responsibility, Hindus will co-operate with the Moslems and the Moslems will abandon their old demand for an independent state in order to avoid a terrible civil war."

"This is a long gamble. If it doesn't succeed, Britain will be compelled to remain in India to preserve order or abandon it as a happy hunting ground for whatever power has the desire and military strength to take it over."

"To many the British move looks like a shunning of responsibility. India has come a long way since the days of Warren Hastings and Robert Clive, but it is doubtful whatever the causes in the last two centuries, that it has come far enough to govern itself as an independent state and give freedom to its 400,000,000 people."

The LOUISVILLE COURIER-JOURNAL said:

"The world impact of the British decision on India is too great for ready reckoning. Not often is an epoch realized, embodied and crowned with a suitable symbol while it still lives. Mostly men have left these difficult rites to historians. But in this decree to surrender all power and deliver India to its own people by June, 1948, we see a dramatic and definitive gesture. It is like stamping a great coin to commemorate independence for half the world (for all Asia's freedom is arising out of India's). It is the end of the era of empires, realignment of world cultures and commerce, made manifest in a single sudden revelation."
