

THE ECONOMIC REVOLUTION OF INDIA AND THE PUBLIC WORKS POLICY

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The Economic Revolution of India and the Public Works Policy by A. K. Connell

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ECONOMIC REVOLUTION OF INDIA

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THE PUBLIC WORKS POLICY

BY
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AUTHOR OF "DISCONTENT AND DANGER IN INDIA"

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1883

232. g. 459.



"Oh, when degree is shaken,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
Then enterprise is sick."

SHAKESPEARE.

"I have known merchants with the sentiments and abilities of great statesmen ;
and I have seen persons in the rank of statesmen, with the conceptions and
characters of pedlars."—BURKE'S speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill.

"It is not certain that the despotism of twenty millions is necessarily better
than that of a few, or of one."—J. S. MILL.

"The best state for human nature is that in which, while no one is poor, no one
desires to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back, by the efforts
of others to push themselves forward."—J. S. MILL.

"After clearly seeing that the structures and actions throughout a society are
determined by the properties of its units, and that (external disturbances apart)
the society cannot be substantially and permanently changed without its units
being substantially and permanently changed, it becomes easy to see that great
alterations cannot suddenly be made to any purpose."—HERBERT SPENCER.

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PREFACE.

IN a small book called "Discontent and Danger in India," published three years ago, after a year's continuous investigation in India of the principles of British administration, I attempted to give an account of the working of our land-revenue, legal, and financial systems. I called attention to the ceaseless activity which pervaded all the State departments in their desire to convert the country to the English gospel of material progress. I now see that this activity is, for the most part, the inevitable outcome of far-reaching economic changes, and that these changes are themselves closely connected with the Productive Public Works policy of the Indian Government.

Since I wrote in 1880, our sources of information

on Indian affairs have been largely increased. The Famine Commission has published its Blue-books, and General Richard and Sir John Strachey have published their *apologia pro vitâ suâ* in a volume entitled the "Finances and Public Works of India, 1869-1881." I have examined the complacent optimism of the latter work by the light of the painful revelations of the former, and if I, an insignificant outsider, have inveighed in somewhat warm language against two distinguished Anglo-Indian statesmen, my excuse must be found in the fact that these two statesmen have so identified themselves with the policy which I hold to be radically vicious, that it is impossible to attack it without attacking them.

The object of this present book is to show the consequences of the Productive Public Works policy, not only for the finances of the Indian Government—an aspect of the question which the Stracheys have chiefly considered in their book—but also for the people of India as a whole. The flourishing state of the Indian exchequer for the time being does not necessarily imply the prosperity of the

people in the long run, because the Indian financial system is so differently conditioned to that of any other Government, that it is impossible to argue directly from the state of the public to that of the private purse.

India is now, in consequence of the outlay on Productive Public Works, subject to the play of economic forces which, when once launched on any land, are like the tides of the sea, remorseless and irresistible in their strength. The dams and the landmarks of the country are being gradually submerged beneath the flood that is ever rolling in from the West. England has in the past let loose the same forces on Ireland, though in a somewhat different way, and is slowly trying to stay their fury now that they have proved dangerous to herself. Are we willing to run the risk of having another Ireland on our hands, an Ireland of two hundred and fifty millions ?

Sir John Strachey will, no doubt, if he does me the honour of reading this book, apply to me the language which he has already used in reply to those people who exhibit "the unfortunate English

fashion of decrying the great achievements of their countrymen." He will have "neither the time nor the inclination to reply to statements of this sort," but he will be content to class me among "those birds of evil presage which have at all times grated our ears with their melancholy song, and by some strange fatality or other have poured forth their loudest and deepest lamentations at the periods of our most abundant prosperity." This is, of course, merely a rhetorical reply, and a rhetorical reply of the most inconclusive nature. For who is the Daniel called to judgment by Sir J. Strachey? It is Burke—Burke the upholder of justice to America, the champion of Ireland against the commercial selfishness of Bristol and Liverpool, the denouncer of the rapacity of the East India Company's servants, the author of the famous *dictum* that "the temper of the people amongst whom he presides ought to be the first study of a statesman." When it is the policy of the Indian Government, not the conduct of individual officials, that is to be denounced, can it be supposed that Burke would not have been found among the "birds of evil presage"?

However, as to the truth of the vaticinations of birds, the future alone can conclusively decide ;
χωρὶ τέλος ὁρᾶν.

In conclusion, I may say, that I do not much believe in any financial reforms being advocated either by the Indian Government or the India Office. I agree with Mr. A. J. Wilson, to whose writings I would here express my great indebtedness, in thinking that "nothing short of a catastrophe will ever make that Government seriously think of retrenchment. There are too many traditions, too many departments, too much self-seeking and jobbery, against any such idea." The crash will come, as the Mutiny came, like a bolt from a clear sky, and, unless the British nation is warned in time, there will be a general wailing and gnashing of teeth.

LONDON, *July*, 1883.