

(written at Amritsar, November 5, 1946)

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The reason I have delayed a week in reporting on my visit to the Frontier with Phil Talbot is that I have been trying to sort out all the various factors which contributed to the complexity of the situation at the time of Nehru's visit. Apparently within the last two months the tribal belt has become a new arena in India's political struggle, so that now the tensions of all-India politics almost dominate the local scene. Nehru's stated purpose in making the visit was to investigate this extra-Indian problem with a view to establishing new policy. Instead, the trip unfortunately took on the nature of a political tour, partly because he had not made his purpose clear to the tribespeople themselves, partly because of opposition encouraged by the Muslim League. In short, if the mission could have been postponed until a more settled atmosphere prevailed at the center, at which time Muslim League might have supported or participated in the trip, its results would have been more satisfactory. But that statement is merely a nice platitude, as the Congress and Muslim League have still failed to reach the agreement on principle that will be fundamental to true cooperation.

I'm sure I don't feel capable of detecting and evaluating the conflicting political activities of the two parties on the Frontier, so I shall try instead to describe the underlying problem of the tribal area, as it would have to be faced even by a united central government of India. That problem in itself is a serious one even if the political struggle is abandoned.

Rising sharply and bleakly along the entire northwest edge of the plain of the Indus River are rocky, dry mountain ranges, cut by five great river passes, the Swat, Kabul (Khyber), Kurrum, Tochi, and Gomal, which flow from the Kindu Kush and the Afghan plateau down through the plains into the Indus. Before the advent of the mass air attack, these mountains were the barriers, the passes, the strategic threats to India. Today their military significance is much less. Economically, the 24,000 square miles in this area are not inviting. Cultivation of grains is only successful along the rivers and their branches where level land can be irrigated, and this is endangered by the irregularity of the rainfall which sometimes provides torrential 'spates' that wash away dams, bridges, crops and topsoil, and at other times leaves the reservoirs and canals empty for months. Experts have found no mineral resources as yet. A large export product is lumber from the highest slopes, now being timbered off at a quota rate established by the British so that the forests will not be completely stripped. Potatoes, mazri (the dwarf Palm), and wool from the migratory sheep herds are the remaining sources of income, but as a whole the area is far from able to support its 2,500,000 inhabitants.

These tribespeoples call themselves the 'Pathan' race. Racially they are the same people as their neighboring Pathans in Afghanistan, from whom they have been legally separated by the artificial Afghanistan boundary established in 1894. Like these Afghans, their ancestors were early converts to Islam, and they speak the Pushto language. Except in the north of the tribal belt, where three strong tribal monarchies preserve a stable and relatively peaceful order, the Pathans have earned the reputation of being dominated by the blood feud and by inter-tribal conflict, which make life a precarious affair and necessitate the armed vigil which we saw on the part of everybody as we drove into their mountains. They are a sturdy and proud folk, meeting the outsider with a firm eye and handshake, owing to domination by no one. By nature, they are hospitable - as proved by the enormous meal provided

for us by one headman - but they are of necessity suspicious of strangers and jealous of their 'sovereignty'. Within the tribes themselves the only outsiders are the isolated Hindu shopkeepers in each village, who for generations have been considered almost as the slaves of the tribe, and who in tribal law are valued with the women at half the monetary worth of the Pathan menfolk. Little wonder that the Pathans are contemptuously opposed to the slightest threat of a Hindu 'Raj'.

During the last forty years, the British have established relations with these Pathans through alternate periods of war, involving bloody campaigns to subdue the rebels, and of peace, instituted by treaties with the tribes. Such treaties legally preserved the independence of the tribes. They recognized the 'maliks', or headmen, as the leaders and spokesmen. They permitted the tribesmen to control their own internal affairs, and they called for no interference with existing tribal 'law' and 'justice', which seem rather crude to me but are apparently effective. Therefore the tribes consider themselves as parties to an international treaty, and told us "We are as free and independent as you Americans are supposed to be".

But the treaties also allowed the British to extend their salients further into the mountains, to erect military installations and build costly roads which demanded great engineering skill and hard labor. The understanding attained was made more pleasant to the tribesmen by money paid them in return for their agreements to keep peace, for road labor or for tribesmen recruited as road guards, and for such items as mail and food contracts awarded to the 'maliks'. The result is the present state of equilibrium. The British military salients effectively dominate the entire region, the flow of money to the tribes is large, and a tightly-knit administrative staff of British Political Agents and their native subordinates maintain relations with the tribespeople through their 'maliks'.

It must be admitted that in many cases these British officials have earned the respect and even the affection of some of the 'maliks' and tribespeople. Occasionally they call on the British to settle a tribal dispute on which they cannot agree, and we saw that some of them regard the British as sort of guardians and supporters of the tribe. Many of them, by their heavy road labor or their loyal service as road guards and escorts, have fully earned the money paid them, and in some cases the full confidence of the British. But even among such people, little has been accomplished in educating them to civilized living, and one suspects that the stronger 'maliks' have been greater gainers than the tribespeople themselves.

Furthermore, the tribes who can really be depended upon as friends are in a minority. Actually, despite the assertions of tribesmen that they are independent, they are all ultimately controlled by the dual policy which is well expressed in the Pathan proverb: "Carry a big stick in one hand and a lump of gur (sweets) in the other". During our drives through Waziristan we certainly saw the 'big stick' in operation. I have never seen so much armed might during peacetime. We drove behind Nehru's car during the 'Road-Open Day' established for his eighty mile trip from Razmak to Miran Shah. Tanks, sniper cars, and lorries full of armed men escorted our convoy. Riflemen and mortar crews were fixed in trenches along the road, small mud blockhouses manned by watchful pickets dominated the scene from every hilltop, and dirt brown forts rose from the dusty valley floors. And this was no special protection laid on merely for Nehru; twice a week these 5000 troops are called out to safeguard long convoys to pass up the winding roads to forward units. To me the establishment seemed totally out of proportion to the number of

raids and kidnappings reported to us by the Political Agents, but my prejudice against military means probably makes my judgment suspect. In any case, troops and air bases must be maintained for the punitive raids which are occasionally necessary to keep the tribes in their place.

It is also easy to understand the use of the 'lump of gur'. After seeing the barren hillsides, it is easy to accept the estimate of one British official that one-third of the economic support of the tribes comes from the British subsidies, which have served as a basis for tribal population increases that cannot be sustained unless fundamental economic development replaces the present unproductive flow of money from the revenues of British India into this deficit region. But the resulting human situation is even more serious. One would hardly expect that a policy based on the two alternatives, force or money, could serve as a stimulus to improved morality on the part of these rather primitive but extremely clever peoples. On the contrary, many of them have been encouraged by this policy to adopt subtle tactics of extorting what they consider to be 'tribute' from the British, by threats of raids and hostility which will only be withheld on receipt of funds. A degeneration of ethics is the result, rather than the increase of civilized methods and standards that should be the goal. The 'independence' of these more recalcitrant tribes is merely the anarchical right to be lawless and untamed.

Upon the departure of the British from India, the Indian Government will thus be faced by some tribes who are openly hostile and unruly, and by others who are relatively peaceful but who are: (a) fearfully jealous of what they consider to be their political independence; and (b) absolutely dependent on continued economic support from outside, though they may not have consciously realized the fact. What is to be the policy? Were it not for the hostiles, it would be possible to withdraw the huge military force and, through the use of exceptional tact and patience, to persuade the friendly tribes to accept education and development of economic resources. (Even this program would be limited by the paucity of present resources and would necessitate large immediate expenditures, but might produce long-run results if a program of reforestation and dam construction were started. The economic feasibility of such a scheme has apparently not been explored as yet.) But the hostiles still form a barrier to peaceful progress.

Actually, the problem of hostiles in the tribal areas is no more serious than the same problem among the same Pathan 'race' in the 'settled' Frontier Province of British India which adjoins the tribal territory. There the blood-feud, the abduction or seduction of women, and the raids on property continue. The murder rate, among a population equal to that of Chicago, is three per day. 6,500 regular police and 9,700 additional wartime police patrol the country roads and city streets. In the fields and on the roads we saw individuals armed for self-protection from their fellow-Pathans. The cities and the spacious British cantonments are surrounded by a barbed wire barrier, and at night no one leaves its protection to venture forth on the dangerous roads. Law, in other words, has not been successful; order has not been established.

Perhaps the statistics and the guns make the situation seem blacker than it really is. But it seems to me that a basic campaign against crime is essential in the Frontier, as elsewhere in India. Such a movement, which captures the imagination, was actually started some twenty years ago by Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the 'Frontier Gandhi', who formed his Khudai Khidmatgars, or 'Red Shirts', as emissaries of love and goodwill, who were to form a non-religious missionary

crusade propagandizing for harmonious and civilized living among the people. Abdul Ghaffar still preaches his method of love, but, as he himself told us, he long ago became a politician as well as a teacher. This has weakened, if not crippled, the force of his crusade, as happens to most crusades when they become dominated by political tactics and individual rivalries between the former crusaders and their new political opponents.

Nevertheless, the Khudai Khidmatgars still form an impressive society. I attended their rally for Nehru near Peshawar. Neatly attired in their red uniforms, posted every fifty yards along the sixteen miles to their new headquarters, they formed a colorful escort line for the Nehru party. Unarmed, but as sturdy and manly as the armed Pathans and patrols who mingled among them along the road, they seemed to me a hopeful symbol for humanity, for they themselves were once Pathan feuders and have been converted, in theory at least, to non-violence. It is such moral resuscitation that India - and the world - so badly need at the moment. I don't know that we can be hopeful about its arrival, unless the leaders forget their conflicts and start concentrating on fundamental principles.

Well, I'll stop sermonizing and get on with investigation.

Yours sincerely,

*Richard Morse*