

**David Lockwood, *The Indian Bourgeoisie: a political history of the Indian capitalist class in the early Twentieth Century*, London & New York, I.B Taurus, 2012, 315 pp. Reviewed by Lance Brennan**

For an Indian historian the central event of the twentieth century is the success of the nationalist movement led by Gandhi and Nehru against the British – one of the greatest imperial powers of all time. The source of this success has been searched for in the activities of a range of Indian groups: from the ‘elites’ of the Cambridge School to Ranajit Guha’s ‘Subalterns’. Neither of these groups had the financial resources to mount the civil disobedience and electoral campaigns that comprised the critical contests of the movement. Most of these resources came from the business classes – despite their concerns about mass action.

The ‘big’ question addressed by this book is whether the capitalists’ increasingly positive relations with the Indian National Congress meant that the latter became the puppets of the bourgeoisie? To answer this question, the author first addresses the problem of how the industrialists related to the British-controlled Indian state. With careful analysis of the connections between the industrialists and the Government of India, he establishes that the British, to meet the challenge to imperial security during the First World War, at first encouraged the ambitions of the industrialists for an industrialised India. This attitude changed after the War – first in London and then in New Delhi. With state support for tariffs and other aids for industrial development denied them, the bourgeoisie turned to the ‘counter-

state’: the Congress. They did so at a time in the early 1930s when, under the influence of Jawaharlal Nehru, many in the Congress were turning to the Left, calling for the nationalisation of industry, state controlled planning, and even ‘confiscation’ of property. The industrialists’ concerns about the Left prompted them to support the Gandhians (i.e. the Right of the Congress), but their experiences of British policy during the Second World War secured their broad support for the nationalist movement.

During the Second World War the British were less interested in developing Indian industry for strategic purposes, arguing for the specialisation of armaments production, limiting the growth of ordnance factories, imposing an Excess Profits Tax and, in the face of Japanese invasion, advocating a ‘Scorched Earth’ policy that would have seen Indian industry destroyed to deny it to the enemy. The British also abandoned the movement towards an Indian Federation, further disappointing the industrialists’ hopes for an autonomous India. Because the British were not prepared to grant either political or economic development to India during the War, the bourgeoisie lined up with the Congress on major political and industrial questions. The industrialists not only believed that India needed self-directed industrialisation, but they agreed with the Congress that this required planning. Taking the initiative the leading industrialists produced ‘the Bombay Plan’ in early 1944: The Bombay Plan not only called for independence, the reduction of inequality – including land reform – and the development of heavy industry, but it also called for state control of the economy. As Lockwood comments, their approach was to accommodate rather than to confront the Socialists.

Pointing, perhaps, to a successor volume, the author concludes by suggesting that the industrialists quickly became disenchanted by

the planning and control regime they had initially welcomed. Nehru's government certainly did not feel beholden to those who had provided the finances for many of their campaigns. It took nearly half a century before the exigencies of living in a rapidly globalising world economy forced the Government of India to abandon what had become known as 'Licence-Permit Raj' and to allow the bourgeoisie to chart their own course.

The significance of the book is that it fills a major gap in our knowledge about the relationship of the industrialists and the Congress. There are studies that deal with short periods, but this is the first book that takes a look at the relationship over the long term, and importantly, traces the changes in the views of the major industrial families, especially the Tatas and Birlas. The author underpins the book with his understanding of the theory of historical materialism: indeed he challenges the Marxist idea that the state is part of the superstructure, asserting instead that the state is part of the economic base, that is, part of the framework of power in which production occurs. In this book he is also able to consider ideas he examines in his theoretical articles: that military threats and war have a special importance for the development and nature of the state, and of its relationships with the capitalists who control the productive forces. Though this theoretical framework is a great strength of the book the reviewer would like to have learned more about the personalities and motivations of the Indian industrialists, and how far their relations with Congress leaders were significant in the choices they made over the crucial years of the nationalist movement. This is not to say that the book is a dry theoretical treatise: it is not – the narrative flows easily and the analysis emerges naturally through discussion of the events.

This detailed analysis of how British intransigence towards the development of Indian industry moved the Indian industrialists to support the Congress makes a considerable contribution to our understanding of the success of the nationalist movement, and of British imperialism in the twentieth century. It also helps us understand the motivations of the industrialists who produced the Bombay Plan, and then acceded to the planned economy of independent India. A considerable achievement.