

# Labor Imperialism and India

By C. P. DUTT

THE British Labor Government has made its first contribution towards policy in India since its accession to office. The pronouncement, made through the mouth of the Viceroy in India, follows a line fairly accurately forecast beforehand. This is not surprising, for the foreign policy of the Labor Government, as already exemplified in the case of Egypt, the Middle East and China, is bound within very narrow limits. The first factor in the situation is the increasing development of mass discontent and revolutionary ferment inside India. The second factor is that the Labor Government is pledged to maintain and continue the imperialist policy agreed upon jointly by all the British Parliamentary parties and typified in the joint participation in the Simon Commission.

The Simon Commission, the report of which will not be ready until 1930, was rejected and boycotted even by the bulk of bourgeois nationalists. The Indian Congress pledged itself last year to take drastic action if the British Government does not offer dominion status to India by the end of 1929. Under the pressure of radical forces, growing stronger along with the intensification of repression, the Congress has selected the "left" nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru as president of the coming session in Lahore, Ghandi having declined the responsibility.

Under these circumstances, if the Labor Government made no more concessions, the Congress would be bound to commit itself by some form of action. Yet most of the bourgeois leaders would be glad to find an excuse for retreating. Thus, the British Labor Government has its chance of appearing to do something new which would be eagerly seized by those harboring expectations from a Labor Government, while at the same time

it would in no way alter the policy fixed by imperialism.

The Viceroy's statement does two things. Firstly, it makes a new vague promise of dominion status which goes no further than anything previously said:

*"I am authorized on behalf of his Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgment it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status."*

Secondly, following a suggestion already made by Simon, it proposes a round table conference of "all parties and interests" after the Simon Commission has made its report and for the purpose of discussing the findings of the Simon Commission.

There is nothing here which meets the Indian bourgeois nationalist demand for a round table conference empowered to decide the future Constitution of India. The British Conservative press emphasizes that the Viceroy's statement contains "no promises and no change of policy," that the Simon Commission is still the sole channel for proposals on India and that the British Parliament remains the final arbiter.

Nevertheless, as in the case of the Egyptian Treaty, all sections of the Labor Party are busily extolling the new declaration as the basis for a happy solution of the Indian problem, as the I. L. P. *New Leader* calls it. The *Daily Herald* says there is now "complete unity of purpose" in Britain and India and the path to co-operation is now open.

The Executive of the I. L. P. in a resolution "congratulates the Government in its

re-affirmation of the justice of India's claim for self-government" and urges an amnesty for political prisoners to create a favorable atmosphere of discussion.

Acceptance of this even by the bourgeois wing of the nationalists is not such a foregone conclusion. If the Simon Commission was boycotted why should its report be discussed? Nevertheless, even Jawaharlal Nehru talks of a Conference being acceptable if the present "war-like" policy of the government is discontinued and the fundamental basis of the Conference is satisfactory. The basis will probably not prove satisfactory but the immediate object of the British Labor Government will be served if the attention of the Indian Congress is diverted to these conditions for co-operation.

The Labor Government is turning from the Simon Commission because it knows that this body is too compounded in India. The Government, however, is carrying out pre-

cisely that which the Simon Commission will propose.

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THE hope of British imperialism that the trial of the leaders of the Indian militant working class movement now proceeding at Meerut would spread confusion and terror among the rebellious Indian workers shows no sign of being realized.

The Preliminary Enquiry, now in its eighth month, still drags on interminably while the prosecution brings forward its innumerable police spies with reports of public meetings and intercepted letters. Among the two thousand documents are two hundred speeches said to have been delivered during the strike of the Girni Kamgar (Red Flag) textile union in Bombay. There is no pretense of proving acts of violence or conspiracy to plan insurrection. Leadership in the strike movement, speeches advocating class struggle are considered sufficient.



*One of the thousands of textile workers shot down indiscriminately during the textile strike in Bombay.*

The Public Prosecutor, Mr. Langford James, relies on the crudest methods to prove his case. The Workers' and Peasants' Party proclaims that it is out to destroy imperialism. But is not the head of the imperialistic British Government his Majesty the King-Emperor? Before the Soviet regime was established in Russia did they not get rid of their king? These are the actual questions put to witnesses by Mr. Langford James.

Meanwhile, it is hoped to break the spirit of the prisoners by cruel treatment and petty tyrannies. Not only do they have to undergo the usual gross hardships of under-trial prisoners in the fever-infested Meerut jail, but those who have fallen ill get inadequate medical assistance. One of the prisoners, Muzaffar Ahmad, is dying of consumption, but the authorities refuse to release him on bail or even allow him to be examined by a Calcutta doctor.

A glaring example of the interference with the defense that goes on was the recent arrest of one of the assistants of the defense counsel, who is to be charged with criminal trespass because he entered the court premises after the session was ended but while the prisoners and their counsel were still being detained there. This arbitrary action was taken by the complainant in the case who happens also to be the lessee of the Court premises, and a petition of the prisoners to have the case removed to another Court on this ground was rejected by the magistrate.

The only result achieved by the prosecution so far is to make known throughout India the cause for which the prisoners are fighting and to popularize the slogans of militant class struggle. Their cries of "Down with British imperialism" and "Long live the Indian revolution" have been taken up by demonstrators in all parts of India and have replaced everywhere the old cries of "Mahatma Gandhi Kijai," etc.

The cynical defense of its action put forward by the Labor Government through the mouth of the Under Secretary of State for India, Dr. Drummond Shiels, at the British Labor Party Conference, has been received

in India with derisive scorn. Mr. Shiels acknowledged the responsibility of the Labor Government for the conduct of the Meerut case, but he claimed that they were not being tried merely because they were trade union leaders. He said the Government would support "genuine" trade unionism in India, and he boasted that the policy of the India Office was in the interests of "the uninformed, humble people of India." The Calcutta Congress paper *Liberty* comments that this speech "could not have been improved upon even by Lord Birkenhead."

In spite of the ferocious tide of persecution, the Indian working class movement refuses to be subdued. In Meerut itself, the mass demonstrations outside the Court in support of the prisoners have led the authorities to prohibit the assembly of more than five persons together.

The most ferocious attacks have been launched against the Girni Kamgar Union in Bombay. The recently issued reports of the Riots Enquiry Committee (appointed to enquire into the communal riots in Bombay last February) and of the Strike Enquiry Committee (appointed under the Trades Disputes Act to enquire into the causes of the general strike in the textile industry this year) both reveal themselves as representing nothing more than a method of attacking the Girni Kamgar Union. The Riots Enquiry Report even suggests that steps should be taken to prevent "Communists" from occupying leading positions in Indian trade unions. These reports foreshadow an attempt to declare the Girni Kamgar an illegal organization.

Under the combined attack of the textile capitalists and the British rulers, with the use of unlimited, strike-breaking tactics, prohibition of picketing and organized violence, the Girni Kamgar Union has been compelled to call off the textile strike unconditionally, which accordingly came to an end in October. Nevertheless, the Union is still firmly established, based as it is on the mill committees organized by the workers in the mills themselves. The textile workers have been

starved into surrender for the moment, but their class spirit is unbroken.

New strikes are breaking out in other parts of the country. The tin plate workers of the Taka Company at Jamshedpur are still on strike as solidly as ever, and the strike of the oil and petrol workers in Calcutta has now lasted over two months. These workers demand recognition of their union and a substantial increase in wages. The company has offered an insignificant wage increase which has been rejected by the men. In Karachi, recently, the dock workers came out on strike and boldly resisted the attempt to use strike breakers against them. As usual, the authorities quickly had recourse to armed police and savagely attacked the strikers. Many smaller strikes are taking place in various centers, and it is clear that the ferment of industrial unrest is by no means subsiding.

The movement to boycott the Whitley Royal Commission on Indian Labor, which arrived in India on October 11, has been growing in strength. While the active leaders of the working class movement are in jail at Meerut, and workers on strike are being crushed by repressive legislation and police terrorism, it is impossible even for the reformist elements to regard the Commission as having come to assist Indian Labor. The Meerut trial is the predominating issue which is causing important sections of the trade union movement to decide to boycott the Commission. The Provincial Trade Union Federation of the United Provinces, at a conference last September at which 6,000 people were present, passed a resolution deciding to boycott the Commission:

*"in view of the fact that the Whitley Commission was appointed at a time when the Meerut case was going on against a number of labor leaders and has not been withdrawn by the Government in spite of the repeated requests of the workers."*

A number of other labor organizations, such as the Workers' and Peasants' Party, the Girni Kamgar Union, the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Union, the Barabazar Labor Union, the Bombay Port Trust Employees Union, the Bombay Tramwaymen's Union, etc., have decided to have nothing to do with the Commission.

The British *Manchester Guardian* in a leading article last August frankly exposed the real purpose of the Whitley Commission. It declared:

*"Experience of the past two years has shown that the industrial workers in the biggest centers are peculiarly malleable material in the hands of unscrupulous Communist organizers, and this is one of the circumstances which gives such importance to the recently appointed Commission on Indian Labor."*

British imperialism, acting through the agency of the British Labor Government, is straining and striving to exorcise the Communist spectre. But do what it will, its measures fail of their intended effect. The Indian working class is advancing under heavy fire; but precisely the fact of its advance under those conditions makes it impossible to be stopped. The Indian revolution is gathering strength.