

On the Situation in India.

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I.

Compromising Policy of the Indian Leaders.

Those Indian newspapers that have not yet suspended publication, because the ruinous conditions of the Press Gagging Ordinance have not yet been applied to them, publish hardly any accounts of the actual position on the North Western Frontier of India.

The gruesome details of the massacre of Peshawar of April 23rd are now beginning to come to light through the enquiries instituted by the Congress Commission specially appointed to investigate the facts, though the Commission was not allowed by the Government to proceed to Peshawar and had in consequence to hold its enquiries in Rawalpindi.

The real position in the whole North West Frontier Province since that massacre has been carefully concealed by the Government. But even from the careful cables sent to the "Times" by its special correspondent in Peshawar, two facts seem to be very clear. Firstly, the MacDonald Government is carrying on a war of extermination against the frontier tribes, a very large number of whom are up in arms against British imperialism. And secondly, these tribes are not committing raids on Indian villages, as they had done in previous years, but have joined the Indian movement of national liberation.

The latest battles on the Frontier have been fought by the Afridis, ten thousand of whom advanced on Peshawar, and who in spite of the destructive bombing by some 180 aeroplanes are still keeping up the fight from their numerous hiding places. A remarkable feature of this Afridi advance is that it was decided upon at a *jirga* (council) at which the young men carried the day against the older men.

The youth movement is gaining ground throughout the North West Province, and there seems now to be intimate co-operation between the Afghan Youth League, the youths of the frontier tribes, whose most conspicuous organisation is the "Red Shirts", and the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (Revolutionary Youth League) of the Punjab. The organisational successes attained by the "Red Shirts" have been considerable. Since the arrest of their leaders, especially Abdul Ghaffer Khan, the organisation has increased its membership from 750 to 25,000. The importance attached by the Government to the destruction of this organisation is shown by the printed appeal distributed on May 12th by the Chief Commissioner of the North West Frontier Province among the Khans and chiefs of the frontier districts by air and through Government revenue officials. After requesting these chiefs in their own interests not to have anything to do with the civil disobedience campaign, the appeal concludes:

"You must prevent volunteers wearing red jackets from entering your villages. They wear the apparel of Bolsheviks and they are no less than Bolsheviks. They will create the atmosphere of which you have heard in the Bolshevik Dominion. You can prevent meetings from being held in your areas, and you can help your local officials. The Government as usual will consider your demands and remedy your grievances."

As regards the development of the movement in the rest of India, special interest attaches to the tactics of the Congress leaders to bring about a situation favourable for negotiations with the Government. The real leaders of the Congress today are Motilal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviyya. Motilal Nehru was to have come to Great Britain to conduct a legal case, but has abandoned this plan. Instead the Acting President of the Congress, far from boycotting the British law courts, is going to Agra to fight a highly lucrative case on behalf of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, one of the greatest landlords in India. Patel, after having made himself popular by his resignation from the position of Speaker in the Indian Legislative Assembly, has systematically been working to destroy the mass character of the movement. He and Malaviyya declare that the most important item in the programme is the boycott of foreign cloth.

Gandhi made it clear in his 13 points that this boycott "helps the Indian mills by removing foreign cloth which competes with them and stifles them". In fact, the whole emphasis on the boycott of foreign cloth is for the benefit of the capitalists, and it is therefore not surprising that, according to a decision taken by the Congress leaders in the first week of May, the boycott is to be conducted in accordance with a scheme worked out by G. D. Birla, one of India's biggest capitalists and manufacturers, who is President of the Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce. Patel approves of the plan, and indeed, at a gathering held in Bombay on May 7th he expressed the opinion that "the Indian merchants alone can win Swaraj (independence) for India". (!!)

And the merchants and industrialists are anxious for a speedy settlement with the Government, for since the arrest of their best support, Gandhi, they fear that the movement for the non-payment of taxes and other revolutionary aims become too dangerous and "uncontrollable". The Indian Merchants' Chamber of Bombay, the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, the Punjab Merchants' Association, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and dozens of other Commercial bodies have warned the Government and have demanded that Gandhi should be released and invited to negotiate for "Dominion Status". But they make it clear that they will accept "all the necessary safeguards" that British Imperialism may demand. Their language is the same as that used by Patel, who speaks of the limitations placed upon "Dominion Status" during the transition period, and by Malaviyya who states that

"Indian Nationalists will of their own accord remain in the Empire if Great Britain will agree without unnecessary delay that the Dominion form of Government modified to suit Indian conditions will be established at the next revision of the Statute this year or next year".

There is no talk of independence now, but only about the terms on which they will take part in the Round Table Conference. All political leaders — including the "Liberals" Sapru, Bepin Chandra Pal, Suhrawardy etc. — are in full agreement with the merchants and industrialists in demanding that Gandhi shall take part in the Conference, for there can, according to them, be no real representation of India without Gandhi.

That Gandhi will be liberated in July is predicted not only by an Indian astrologer (who has used his "science" lucratively in the service of the Government and Ramsay MacDonald) but by Wilson, the editor of the "Indian Daily Mail", who stands very close to Government circles. Wilson writes in his paper that "the Government's principal opponent might after all be the principal negotiator", and expresses the opinion that by arresting Gandhi "the Government have increased his prestige and fortified his position".

The attitude of the Congress leaders towards the peasant question is also interesting. The peasants of Gujarat have begun a no-rent campaign which is spreading fast and established their own panchayats (arbitration courts). They have also organised a social boycott of Government servants, which has become so serious that the Government has been obliged to open its own shops for its campaign in the Gujarat districts, for there the land rent is paid direct to the Government. The Indian Zamindars (landowners) have sympathised with this movement so long as it was confined to non-payment to the Government.

But the no-rent campaign has spread to the United Provinces, Behar, Orissa and Bengal. In an editorial article on this movement in the "Indian Daily Mail" of May 15th, it is pointed out that "owing to the zamindari system of land tenure the fight in these areas will, unlike in Gujarat, immediately develop into a bitter one between the Indian landlords and peasants" and with reference to Rae Barelli, the district where the peasants had already once expropriated their landlords in 1921, the journal says that "there is a definite communistic element in this part of the world and a devotion to the principle of the Workers' and Peasants' Republic".

The Background of the Revolt in Rangoon

Burma, which had been an independent country until 45 years ago, was finally annexed by British imperialism in 1885 after the "successful" conclusion of the Third Burmese War, one of the most disgraceful acts of aggression even in the criminal history of the British Empire. The first two wars (1852-1856) had deprived Burma of important provinces bordering on **India**, but the great Indian revolt of 1858 prevented further invasions, and the British robbers had to wait until India had been "pacified" and disarmed. Since its annexation Burma has been a province of India. It is governed from **Delhi** and **Simla**, it pays an annually large contribution to the **Indian Treasury**, it is subjected to laws enacted by the so-called **Indian Legislative Assembly** in Delhi, for the benefit of the British imperialists and of their agents, the Indian landlords and bourgeoisie.

Of this province of Burma, which is exploited solely by British capitalists, the capital is **Rangoon**. Until a few years ago it was only a commercial port of considerable importance to British merchants and the British shipping companies for the export trade in rice, timber, silver, tin, petroleum, etc., in which the country has enormous resources. But it is now becoming also a strategic centre of first-rate importance. It is being developed into a naval base which is to be subsidiary to the **Singapore** base. It is, along with **Halla**, **Baghdad** and **Karachi**, one of the important bases on the air-routes of the Empire. It is to be provided shortly with a meteorological forecast centre and observatory for the needs of military and civil aviation, the other centres being **Quetta**, **Peshawar**, **Karachi** and **Delhi**, all cities of military and political importance.

British imperialist policy in the exploitation of Burma has been the same as in **East Africa**. For forty years it has been robbed of its minerals and foodstuffs by British capitalists with the help of cheap labour imported chiefly from **South India**. Some 350,000 Indian workers are employed annually in the rice-fields, mines, docks and industries. In addition, the educated Indian is pushing the Burman out of the banks, commercial companies, schools, colleges and Government service. Indian lawyers, medical men, journalists and engineers occupy important positions in Burma. There has therefore arisen a strong anti-Indian feeling among all classes, the Indian being regarded as a foreigner and a parasite, who has come to exploit the Burmese people in the wake of British imperialism. Among the landowners, the commercial bourgeoisie and the upper strata of the intelligentsia there has therefore arisen a demand for separation from India—a demand that coincides today with British interests in Burma.

British imperialism finds it necessary now to separate Burma administratively and politically, in order to isolate it from the revolutionary movement in India, and to use the finances of Burma, (seven-tenths of which has hitherto gone into the Indian Treasury) for "developing" Burma, that is, for constructing new railways, docks, public works, etc., which mean a new source of enormous profits for British heavy industry. The demand for "separation" is therefore endorsed by the British Governor of Burma, the arch-reactionary **Sir Charles Innes**, supported by the commercial and shipping interests in Rangoon. And the Government has been encouraging the formation of various political organisations—the "People's Party", the "Separation League", "Burma for the Burmans League"—which demand immediate separation from India, but a "free" place for Burma within the Empire, while the party of the peasants, small farmers and petty bourgeoisie, the **Baho G. C. B. A. (General Council of All Burmese Associations)** demands complete independence for Burma, but only after India and Burma have jointly overthrown British imperialism.

The main centre of this struggle between the broad masses on the one hand and British imperialism aided by the Burmese landowners and bourgeoisie on the other, is naturally Rangoon. It is the visible centre of imperialist exploitation. But it is also one of the largest immigration ports in the world, 90% of the imported labour being from India. Owing to the rapid increase in the rate of immigration, which in the eyes of Burnese nationalists has "assumed alarming proportions", Rangoon has already become practically an Indian town. The "**New Burma**" of Rangoon, the organ of the anti-Indian separationists, raises

the alarm in its issue of April 6th, in which it says that "a similar fate awaits some of the other town and villages in Burma" and regards the "ever growing number of Indian immigrants as a terrible menace to the nations".

We have therefore two forces at work in Rangoon and Burma generally—a strong anti-imperialist movement among the working masses the peasantry and the radicalised intellectuals, and an anti-Indian movement arising out of Indian immigration supported by the British Government. The position is in some respects comparable to the **Arab** feeling against the **Zionists**.

It is with this background that the recent events in Rangoon must be judged. On February 15th and 20th, the **Major of Calcutta, J. M. Sen Gupta**, a follower of **Gandhi**'s doctrine of non-violence, delivered three lectures in Rangoon in which he denounced the annexation of Burma as sheer robbery, and called upon the Burmese to join the campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience. He was arrested by the Burmese Government and after a short trial which took place on March 20th, he was sentenced for sedition to—ten day's imprisonment. During the trial thousands surrounded the court and demonstrated, but the police provoked the demonstrators by throwing bricks and stones at them from behind the shelter of buildings. This led to retaliation, and in the violent conflict that ensued, several were killed and a large number wounded. On March 25th a mass meeting of 3,000 Burmans and Indians was held, to protest against this imperialist terror. Several anti-imperialist demonstrations took place during the next few weeks, marked by the same conflicts with the police.

The anti-imperialist temper of the masses in Rangoon was further enhanced by the events in India during the month of April. Nationalist leaders created an atmosphere of unrest by pointing out that the currency notes of the Government of India would become useless if Burma was separated from India (as the Government intended), and advised to cash the notes as quickly as possible in Rangoon into gold or silver. The rapid and steady fall of rice prices has led to acute suffering among the peasants and to unemployment among the commercial employees. The agitation for the abolition of the highly oppressive capitation taxes, resulted in meetings and demonstrations with the usual exhibition of police hooliganism. The earthquake on May 5th which destroyed the town of Pegu, sixty miles from Rangoon, and which caused serious losses in Rangoon itself, resulting in the partial or total destruction of hundreds of houses, created further unrest and bitterness against the Government. It was declared by the nationalists that the Government showed bureaucratic delay in calling out troops to help the victims of the earthquake, while no time was lost by the Government in dispatching police and military to shoot down the masses engaged in demonstrating for their freedom.

In this atmosphere of anti-imperialist excitement, the Indian dock workers known as **Corlorghis**, mostly recruited from **South India**, struck work on May 25th, and dozens of ships lay idle in the Rangoon harbour. The agitation of the Burmese separationists had worked up the Burmese workers against the Indians, and attempts to break the strike resulted in bloody conflicts in which the police fired upon the workers, killing hundreds and wounding over a thousand. The infuriated masses stormed the police prison and set fire to it after having liberated the prisoners. Rangoon is under martial law and the city is occupied by the military. 4,000 Indian dockers have returned to India, and of the 1,600 who were imported to break this strike, 1,200 refused to do so and proposed to return to India.

That these riots were engineered by interested agencies and do not represent the actual sentiment of the workers, is proved by the solidarity actually shown by the Burmese working class families. Six hundred Indian workers were kept by the latter in the **Kemmerdine** suburb for three days, while Indian women and children were removed by the Burmese themselves to places of safety.

The strike at the docks is still unbroken in spite of imperialist intrigues to bring about racial conflicts, and the port is at a complete standstill. But the imperialist shipping companies are suffering heavy losses and the Government has therefore appointed a "conciliation board". There is also strike among the Indian conservancy workers employed under the **Rangoon Corporation**, who refuse to return to work in spite of the Government's promises and assurances.