

THE PROGRESS OF THE TEXTILE WORKERS' GENERAL STRIKE IN INDIA

(Information Material.)

AT the end of April a tremendous strike of textile workers started in Bombay, which quickly embraced other textile centres of India

The Indian press to hand, which covers the first days of the strike, establishes the fact that "in spite of expectations the call for the general strike was exceptionally well responded to by the workers," and that "even the workers' leaders did not expect such results."

On the basis of the material appearing in the Indian press, the development of the strike is pictured as follows:—

On April 23rd, when the strike was declared, work stopped in eleven factories in Bombay, involving 30,000 workers. Every day the number of strikers increased, and by the fifth day forty-nine factories (out of 51) involving 85,000 workers, were already on strike. Thus, the overwhelming majority of the Bombay textile workers are participating in the strike. The strike continues on this level at the present moment. Only three factories are working with their full personnel, employing from three to four thousand workers. These factories have not joined the strike mainly because the employers do not let the workers leave the factory grounds even at night time, and provide food and bedding in the factory, etc.

The Bombay strike served as a signal for the calling of strikes in other centres. On April 26th 7,000 textile workers came out on strike in Delhi in solidarity with the Bombay strikers, and from the first days of May the strike spread to Nagpur (14,000), Cawnpore (several thousand), Kurla (3,000), and to several factories in Ahmedabad.* The textile workers of Sholapur (over 10,000) who declared a strike two months before the general strike, also joined the general strike. Strikes are also expected to be declared in the near future in Akola and Pulgaon (central provinces). The Indian press does not give any information about the development of the strikes in Dhulia and Chalisgaon, where the textile workers struck work even before the general strike. We can therefore assert that the general strike has at the present time spread to the most important textile centres of Bombay, the Central and United provinces (with the exception of the majority of the factories in Ahmedabad, and involves about

130,000 textile workers. But all the possibilities have not as yet been exhausted, and we can expect that new detachments of workers will join the strike in the very near future. The Congress leaders of the Ahmedabad trade unions are trying in all possible ways to prevent the strike spreading to the majority of the factories in Ahmedabad, and the agents of the imperialists are also doing this in the Madras province.†

At the same time we have to emphasise that united front bodies (strike committees and factory committees) have not been organised in the factories.

The supporters of the revolutionary wing in the Central United Council of Action and in the Central Bombay strike committee do not limit its work to Bombay. Due to the efforts of the supporters of the revolutionary trade unions a strike was declared in Kurla and in Nagpur. Preparations are being made to declare strikes in Pulgaon and Akola, and work is being carried on to mobilise the textile workers in Ahmedabad for the fight (meetings, leaflets).

While the strikes in Bombay and Cawnpore are being carried out on the basis of the united front, in Nagpur the united front has been smashed by the "left" reformist leader Ruikar, and the struggle between the revolutionary trade movement and the "lefts" has become very sharp. This is a result of the exposure of the treacherous policy of Ruikar, who from the beginning tried not to allow the general strike to be declared in Nagpur, and who later appealed to the government for arbitration. In Nagpur parallel meetings of the workers in connection with the general strike are being carried on by Ruikar and by the revolutionary unions.

The Indian bourgeois press, which gives information of a number of actions in connection with the strike (meetings, appeals, etc.), by the supporters of the renegade Roy (in the shape of the Bombay provincial party of the working class and the National-Reformist Congress of Trade Unions) and by a group of "socialist-congressists," does not give any information of the independent activities of the revolutionary organisations. However, a number of facts, information of which has even penetrated the bourgeois press, bear witness that the revolutionary trade unions are showing their face. An example of this, for instance, is the fact that a number of strikers have spoken at a public solidarity meet-

* The declaration of a strike in Ahmedabad is being broken up by the textile workers' union led by Ghandist elements; and in Madras by the union headed by the agent of imperialism, Shiv Rao.

† The railway line Bombay-Baroda-Central India.

ing called by the "left" Congressists in connection with the strike. As the "Bombay Chronicle" dated May 5th, 1934, writes, one of the workers who spoke at this meeting declared in reference to members of the National Congress that the campaign of assistance developed by them reminded him of the activity of the labour department set up by the National Congress in 1930, and which did all possible to split the ranks of the workers. He further warned the Congress leaders against organising such "assistance" for the workers as only had the aim of imposing their views upon the workers. "The workers"—stated this worker further—"are ready to accept assistance from the National Congress, but they will never agree to accept this assistance at the expense of their demands."

The success of the textile workers' strike and the sharp character of the struggle has alarmed all the open and hidden enemies of the working class. Different groups of "well wishers" are trying to interfere in the strike with a view to breaking it up. The group of "socialist-congressists" who are trying to participate in the strike under the pretext that they are developing a campaign to mobilise public opinion, and organising material assistance for the strikers are displaying great activity. This group has already organised several public meetings in Bombay. A "Committee for Assistance to the Strikers" has also been organised on its initiative and it is participating in it.

The "city fathers" of the Bombay municipality are trying to act as intermediaries between the employers and the striking workers. And, finally, the agents of the imperialists, the well-known reformist leaders, N. M. Joshi, Vakhil and others have also appeared on the scene recently. They have already been received by the governor of Bombay and have had a long secret meeting with him on the question of steps to be taken to stop the strike. So far, however, all these attempts to interfere with the strike and break it up have met with no success.

At all meetings the workers enthusiastically declare their determination to continue the fight until all their demands have been fully satisfied, because, as a group of strikers stated to a correspondent of the "Bombay Chronicle," "the workers have nothing to lose but their chains." The strike leaders declare that the workers will fight for not less than three months. A number of reports testify to the fact that the Communists are actively participating in the strike. The "Times" states that during the strike the Communist Party of India issued an illegal leaflet in which, besides general questions, a line is given on how to carry on the fight for partial demands.

We can assert now already that the general strike of textile workers is awakening the activity of the working masses in various branches of industry. The solidarity movement is spreading all over the country and embraces not only the working masses but also the petty-bourgeois strata of the city. Both working class and general city solidarity meetings have already taken place in many cities — Bombay, Calcutta, Thana, Madras, Karachi, etc. The peasants' union (Kisan Sabha) in Karadjan (Central provinces) adopted a resolution at a meeting called by them addressed to the Nagpur textile workers (even before they had declared the strike), calling on the Nagpur workers to immediately join the strike declared in Bombay. The "Kisan Sabha" is at the present time developing a campaign for the collection of bread for the strikers.

Under the tremendous pressure of the masses the reformist federation of trade unions in Karachi, which unites a number of unions, was even compelled to carry out a May 1st half-day solidarity strike in Karachi, which passed off amid great enthusiasm.

In England the Communist Party and the revolutionary trade union movement are also developing a campaign in several cities organising solidarity meetings with the striking Indian textile workers, and the collection of funds. In particular a solidarity meeting has been carried out in Lancashire. The first contributions to the strike fund have already been forwarded to India. We must, however, note that the movement of solidarity and for assistance to the striking Indian textile workers has as yet been only weakly developed in England, and so far is more of a campaign (true, a rather wide one) in the revolutionary English press ("Daily Worker").

All the newspaper materials which we have at our disposal are witness to the fact that the workers' strike leaders are carrying out a correct policy. The workers have shown an example of heroism and at the same time have been able to correctly answer the blows of the police and the cunning tricks of the Congress leaders. The strike leaders must be able to show up the real character of the Gandhist policy. A statement was printed in the "Bombay Chronicle" from the chairman of the Ahmedabad Manufacturers' Association in which he showed that the Ahmedabad factory owners have factories in Bombay, and shares in a number of factories.

This statement should be given wide circulation. It must be shown that the Gandhist leaders of the Ahmedabad Labour Association are helping the factory owners to smash the Bombay workers. The Gandhists in Ahmedabad are telling the workers not to strike, are causing confusion with

their promises of showing profits (which in reality will only lead to wage-cuts and serve as the occasion to increase the exploitation of the workers), and thereby are helping the factory owners to attack the workers one by one. The leaders of the Ahmedabad Labour Association are playing the rôle of strike breakers, and it is not in vain that there are relatives of the factory owners and of the bourgeoisie intellectuals in the leadership of the association.

The Bombay workers must know that Gandhi and the Congress leaders break up the struggles of the workers and help the factory owners. If it becomes necessary to temporarily retreat in an organised manner, we must explain to the workers as widely as possible that the Congress leaders are to blame, and that they helped the factory owners and the police to smash the textile workers' strike.

The strike is developing with great enthusiasm and is distinguished by the sharpness of the struggle. The unheard-of terror on the part of the government (the ban on meetings, demonstrations, pickets, the mass arrests of the leadership, shooting of the demonstrators) only inflames the hatred and militant activity of the masses, and sharpens the struggles. The clashes of the strikers with the police (Bombay and Delhi) are almost a daily occurrence, often assuming the form of street fights, accompanied by the stoppage of all traffic over big territories. This is how one of such clashes is described by the bourgeois national newspaper, "Bombay Chronicle" of April 28th, 1934:—

"For a distance of half a mile the square was turned into the scene of bitter clashes. Even the railroad traffic in the districts near the B.B. and C.I. station were stopped for a time. The strikers hid in alleys and behind the houses, and carried on regular guerilla warfare. When the fight stopped, the entire district from the "Textile" factory till the Elphinstone Bridge was covered

with stones and all kinds of debris which the workers used as weapons in their fight."

The strike is going on in an organised manner. Every day, in spite of the Government ban, tens of meetings and demonstrations are being organised. At the present stage, mass picketing has not been resorted to, since, as the strike leaders declare, this is not necessary as yet. Even the bourgeois press is compelled to note the fact that in spite of the presence of 70,000 unemployed textile workers in Bombay, cases of strike breaking are very rare. Strike pickets are on duty at the gates of the factories where the transport of strike breakers under the protection of the police is expected.

The strike in Bombay, Cawnpore and some other cities is being carried through on the basis of the united front. The supporters of the revolutionary trade union movement have shown a great deal of activity in Bombay. It is not without their influence that the central strike committee in Bombay, which was originally composed of officials of unions with different policies, is at the present time adding representatives from the strikers elected on the basis of the united front in all the factories.

We must also note the following new point, namely, the Chawl Committees organised on the initiative of the Central Strike Committee, in the workers' living quarters. The main task of these Committees is to prevent strike breaking and to keep up the militant spirit of the workers by carrying on work directly in the homes of the workers. The election of the "Chawl Committees" assumes all the greater significance since meetings and demonstrations are actually forbidden in the open air, and since the factory owners on their part, helped by the "jobbers,"* are trying to develop work within the workers' homes in order to disorganise the strike.

* Jobber—an agent of the employers—a contractor, an intermediary who hires the workers.

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