

# The "Present Moment" in India

By G. Safarov

**T**HE heroic six months' struggle of 150,000 Bombay textile workers, their retreat without the least sign of collapse or weakness, the attraction of new working-class fighters into the strike movement at Jamshedpur and Calcutta; the maturing of a strike movement among the railway workers; the swift political development of the working masses; Girny Kamgar, which is not to be shattered by any persecution or laws against "hooliganism"; the demonstration of 500,000 in Calcutta at the funeral of the young revolutionary Jatindranath Das, who died during a hunger strike in prison; the incessant students' strikes, which break out in place after place; the endless meetings and demonstrations under the slogans of "Hurrah for the revolution" and "Down with imperialism"—such is the picture of to-day in the India which is living for to-morrow.

In this situation there are many known features which make "incomprehensible" India akin to Russia on the eve of the 1905 revolution.

Fearfully and with warning glances in the direction of the British Government, the liberal bourgeoisie are noting that the country has not known such an agitation since 1921, in other words, since India passed through her first revolutionary stage. The liberal bourgeoisie are by no means enraptured with this growing revolutionary rise, which may interfere with their capitulatory transactions with British imperialism. They are trying in all ways to hide the fact that the chief motive power of the revolutionary rise is now the Indian proletariat, which was not the case in 1919-1922. But meantime the strike statistics prove this irrefutably.

	1926.		1927.		1928.	
No. of strikes	.....	128	.....	129	.....	203
No. of strikers	.....	186,000	.....	131,000	.....	506,851
No. of lost working days	.....	1,097,000	.....	2,019,000	.....	31,647,404
	1st quarter.		2nd quarter.			
	1929.	1928.	1929.	1928.		
No. of strikes	45	58	47	52		
No. of strikers	77,385	83,370	150,000	290,654		
No. of lost working days	820,215	1,065,083	5,000,000	13,012,506		

In the third quarter of 1929 200,000 workers participated in the jute mills strike, and the

number of working days lost reached the figure of 1,725,000.

India has now grown accustomed to revolutionary slogans and demonstrations; the influence of the working-class on the intermediate petty bourgeois strata of the towns has grown extraordinarily; to the very broadest masses the working-class has become the outpost of the revolutionary struggle against the British Government. India is now passing through a period of a revolutionary rise, and the representatives of that rise are the working-class on the one hand and the city petty bourgeois strata with the student youth at their head on the other. Meantime the Indian bourgeoisie has come closer than ever before to a treacherous transaction with the British bourgeoisie, and is exerting all its strength to accomplish this transaction as swiftly as possible in order to avert further revolutionary disturbances. On the instructions of the MacDonald Cabinet the Viceroy of India has promised India "dominion status," and Ghandi and Co. are already going into raptures.

"The proletariat struggle, the bourgeoisie steal into power." That Leninist formula could not be improved upon as a characterisation of the present situation in India. It goes without saying that the Indian bourgeoisie cannot under any circumstances count on receiving power from the hands of British imperialism. It is a question of attracting individual representatives or certain strata into the ranks of the British bureaucracy, of a certain distribution of petty official positions and profitable sinecures under the flag of a dominion constitution. The notorious Nehru constitution revealed this secret of bourgeois policy, and the statements daily appearing in the Indian press concerning the "intentions" of the British Labour Government to form a bloc with the Indian national reformist bourgeoisie against the masses of India witness to the extraordinary hurry of the Indian bourgeoisie in this connection. Only with difficulty observing the formalities of a shop-window opposition, the Indian bourgeoisie is doing everything it can to reach the longed-for

end as quickly as possible. It is with rare ardour attempting to persuade MacDonald and Co. to hasten with a conference of British and Indian politicians. "If the British Labour Government displays such directness and resolution in carrying through the policy proclaimed by the Labourites for India as it displayed in regard to Egypt, if it displays that resolution at the moment when all the political problems have acquired sufficient clarity, we think that half the difficulties which are so frequently appealed to will disappear, and it will be easy to create an atmosphere of agreement at the general conference." (*The Hindoo* for 29th July, 1929.) Thus the Indian bourgeoisie of the National Congress are alluring the MacDonald Government with the prospects of agreement with them. Through the Viceroy the MacDonald Government has already promised a conference in London, but of course it will not grant the "rights" of Egypt. In December an all-Indian National Congress is to assemble at Lahore. By then the period of the ultimatum threatening the British with a declaration of civil disobedience in the event of a refusal of dominion status to India will be nearing expiration. Their diligent fawning on MacDonald and Co. reflects the inward anxiety of the Indian bourgeoisie, which knows only too well that it is politically bankrupt, that it is not able to keep any "left wing" promises. The Indian liberal bourgeoisie is trying to hide its naked poverty under "left wing" phrases and gestures, which are hardly likely to take in anyone concerning their real intentions. The Indian National Congress is all but ready to be laid out. And yet this near corpse is trying to block the road of the revolutionary movement, and in this consists its main political significance. In order to render the revolutionary movement impotent the bourgeoisie is pretending that it will be glad with all a father's pride to adopt it as its own legal child. Only thus can the fact be explained that the leaders of the National Congress have tried to lay their paws on the body of the dead Das, who was in no sense a hero of bourgeois treachery. It was convenient for the counter-revolutionary liberals to declare Jatindranath Das as a national hero and martyr, in order the more easily to pave the way for the young Nehru who has been put forward by Mahatma Gandhi himself as president of the Lahore congress.

With the aid of the clever young men who swear their fidelity to socialism and the revolution and at the same time do not break away from their filial devotion to their fathers, the counter-revolutionary liberals are hoping to decapitate and paralyse the vast movement of the revolutionary strata of the town petty bourgeoisie, and to isolate the working-class in its ruthless struggle against imperialism. Mahatma Gandhi himself, that great lover of Herodic poses and misty phrases, has spoken on this question in the language of the fly-blown politician: "A friend of discipline, he (Dwarkanath Nehru) has always revealed his readiness for loyal submission even when he regarded it as mistaken. He is undoubtedly a man of extreme convictions by comparison with those close to him, but he is modest and sufficiently practical not to carry the matter to a rupture. He is as clear as crystal, he is true beyond all suspicion. He is a knight without fear and without reproach. The nation will be in sure hands." (*Bombay Chronicle*, 5th Oct., 1929.)

And it is this knight without fear and without reproach whom they are trying to force into the position of national leader of the masses of India, in opposition to the other, the collective leader, the new revolutionary class, the proletariat, which has come to the forefront and will not concede the position to any strangers and enemies.

With a broad gesture the younger Nehru is to-day calling for a boycott of the Whitley Commission, sent by the Labour Government to study the conditions of labour in India. This "left wing" gesture costs the Indian bourgeoisie very little, as it does not consider it necessary to study anything in this sphere and is in no way disposed to assist the attempts of British capital to thrust itself between the Indian workers and the Indian capitalists. The younger Nehru is proclaiming a boycott of the Whitley Commission because it is not with this commission that they will have to discuss their act of treachery. None the less, at a trade union conference in the United Provinces this same Nehru points to the necessity of being doubly cautious in the handling of such a sharp instrument of class struggle as strikes. That is enough from him. He knows that some of the older men will follow in his tracks and openly declare that "the class struggle is useless so long as a third power dominates over both sides." (*Hindustan Times*,

October, 1929.) The innumerable attempts of the national reformist bourgeoisie to organise their own trade union movement along Kuomintang lines is a characteristic feature of the last few months. The Indian bourgeoisie is ready to exploit the class struggle against the British capitalists to a certain extent in order to strengthen their influence over the working masses.

In addition to all this, the intrigues of the Indian bourgeoisie with the peasant movement are worthy of special attention at the present transitional stage. The weakness of the peasant movement at the present time serves to indicate that the revolutionary rise has still inadequately captured the masses outside the city boundaries. Beyond all doubt no small role is played in this regard by the circumstance that the working-class advance as the decisive revolutionary force has not yet led to a final political and organisational formulation of the Communist advance guard in India. None the less, the bourgeoisie realise quite clearly that the peasants' silence is growing more and more suspicious and that the day is not far distant when the direct ally of the working-class, the basic masses of the peasantry, will enter the arena of the political struggle.

The betrayal of the peasant movement in Bardoli tore the mask of hypocrisy from the leaders of the Congress. To please the landowners and bureaucrats the Indian National Congress was declared to be the "common ground" on which the landowners and the peasants, the exploiters and the toilers, were to unite in brotherly union. None the less, the prospect of the working-class being supported by peasant reserves is forcing British imperialism and the Indian bourgeoisie to seek their own roads to "alleviate the peasant misery," and to eliminate the growing discontent. In this connection the foundation of the Land League in Bombay is highly indicative. The first and chief principle of this league says that "property in land is based not in the rights of the State, but on the rights of the landowner." This principle completely exposes the national reformist bourgeoisie's attitude to the land question. It is trying to dam the fiscal appetites of British imperialism somewhat whilst creating bigger possibilities for the capitalist transformation of the landowners' and then the large peasant properties. None the less, whilst putting for-

ward this point of view, the bourgeoisie is simultaneously trying to catch the peasant masses with slogans of struggle for a reduction of the land tax. Mr. Patel, the super-traitor of the Bardoli movement, the leader of the Bombay Land League, is "pining in expectation of the day when it will be possible to organise all the peasantry of Bombay and Madras, raising them to a peaceable, yet resolute protest against the existing system of land taxation." (*Hindustan Times*, 2nd Sept., 1929.) Of course Patel does not forget to add that "only non-violence" can be the method of struggle, although it would be truer to say that it can be only a method of rejecting the struggle for peasant interests.

The officials of British imperialism also realise quite clearly the danger for them of the influence of the proletariat being carried into the countryside. "The Communist movement is still not very widespread outside the town proletariat, but it may prove alluring to the Indian peasant. If the British strong hand be removed the Indian Ryot will kill his landowner, just as did the Russian peasant." (Sir Basil Blackett in *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1929.) That is not only an expression of British imperialism's fear of the rising revolutionary wave, but a reminder to the Indian bourgeoisie of the unity of their interests with those of British capital in the work of defending landed property against the peasants.

The nearer the Indian bourgeoisie gets to a decisive capitulation to British imperialism the more it endeavours to extend the basis of its influence with the masses, and not only the petty bourgeois masses of the city population, but even among the workers and peasants. It is with this endeavour that we have to connect the attempts of the leaders of the Indian National Congress to transform that Congress into a strictly centralised organisation, with a widely ramified network of nuclei in the villages and with a firmly established discipline. In *Young India* Ghandi has already complained that the congress organisation embraces only two-thirds of the 250 districts of British India. The Indian bourgeoisie needs a centralisation of its political influence over the masses just in order to block the path of the revolutionary wave, and also to get its hands on the machinery of administration, which it could afterwards blend with the British bureaucracy's machinery of administration.

British imperialism is trying to help the national reformist bourgeoisie to paralyse the revolutionary rise, overwhelming the working-class and all the radical elements of the national emancipation movement with ruthless persecution. Thus it is trying to ensure a monopoly of legality, and with it a monopoly of the representation of the masses, to the Indian bourgeoisie. In the struggle with the Bombay textile workers the Indian bourgeoisie completely unmasked itself, acting not only as the direct agent of the British police system, but as the chief organiser of strike-breaking in the enterprises. From time to time the Indian bourgeoisie may play with strikes, in so far as those strikes occur at British enterprises, but as soon as the working-class strike movement acquires a genuinely national scale the Indian bourgeoisie openly declares ruthless war on it.

At the December Congress the Indian bourgeoisie will feel no compunction in hiding its treachery beneath a copious flood of "left wing" phrases and "left wing" gestures. And for that very reason the working-class must at once set itself the task of concentrating the political activity of the masses. It must pull off

the glove of the Indian bourgeoisie, by summoning the masses to a resolute struggle against any kind of negotiations with British Imperialism, and by permeating these masses with the idea of the systematic and direct preparation of a mass strike. It must oppose the bourgeois methods of national reformist treachery with its own revolutionary methods of mobilising the masses; to the bourgeois methods of extension of the political and organisational basis of compromise and deception of the masses it must oppose its own methods of extending the basis of the revolutionary movement among the masses. The working-class must formulate its political advance guard, it must find organisational formulation in left wing trade unions, discarding the treacherous leadership of Joshi and Co., and finally, the representatives of the working-class must proclaim the programme of the peasant revolution and make it the touchstone of all the further struggle.

A revolutionary class has already been born in India which will smash through the bourgeois betrayal. The question of India's freedom will be decided, not at a round table in London, but at the weaving looms of Bombay and Calcutta.