

REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN THE COLONIES

A Revolutionary "Republican" Movement in India.

By Luhani.

Among local committees of the Indian National Congress, the Committee at Nagpur (in the Central Provinces) is one of the most active and most advanced centers of the political activities of the petty-bourgeois and intellectual rank and file of the Congress. During the revolutionary movement of 1921 and also, later on, in 1923, the Nagpur Congressmen were very prominent in organising "civil disobedience", that is, mass direct action against the British authorities.

Since the beginning of this year the Nagpur Committee has been showing great disaffection with the official leadership of the Congress. On April 25th of this year, this committee adopted a resolution censuring the Congress leaders for their recent policy of co-operation with the British Government in the Legislative Assembly and for their general orientation towards the Right. The resolution also laid emphasis on the importance of work "outside the legislative bodies" and the organisation of peasants and workers.

Passing from censure to action, the Nagpur committee passed another resolution by the casting vote of its President **Manchershah Avari**. According to this resolution, "civil disobedience" was to be started then and there. The immediate aims of this direct action were to be the annulment of the Arms act (prohibiting the use of arms by the Indians) and the explosive Substances Act (making the possession of explosives a punishable offense) and the release of the national revolutionary leaders imprisoned under the latest repressive laws of the government.

Avari followed up the resolution by organising the next day a big demonstration at Nagpur in which six thousand people participated and in which volunteers (including women) marched with naked swords past the official quarters of the British authorities. The carrying of swords was meant to signify the defiance of the Congressmen to the Arms Act.

Within a few days the movement took on a very popular character, though always confined to Nagpur. The action of the Nagpur Committee was, however, supported by another local committee of the Congress in the Province of **Madras** where, as in the central Provinces, there is a pronounced Left orientation among the congress rank and file.

An increasing number of volunteers — always including women, a new and significant feature — began to take part in the demonstrations under the auspices of the Nagpur committee. The tactics of the volunteers have been to deliberately violate the Arms Act by carrying swords and to offer themselves to be imprisoned. Some of the volunteers were eventually arrested.

Meanwhile, passing from its immediate objects, the movement took on the character of a revolt against the British Government. **Avari**, the leader of the movement defined "the freedom of India" as the objective of the volunteers whom he organised under the name of "The Republican Army". **Avari** went to the extent of issuing notices convoking meetings, etc. signed by himself as "The General of the Republican Army". In one of his speeches he said "Who has won Swaraj without fighting? It is our right to rebel and throw out the government. When Englishmen kill our men, why should we not kill them?"

Before taking decisive action against the Nagpur volunteers who came to be known as the **Nagpur Republicans**, the British Government wanted to see what repercussion there would be throughout the country. The openness of the revolt and its Republican slogans were certainly producing a considerable effect and beginning to attract mass support. It was developing as a rallying point for all the Left elements within and without the Congress and forcing on the official leaders of the Congress the choice between reformism and revolution, in other words, co-operation with the British Government or a revolt against it.

As a matter of fact, the **All-India Committee of the National Congress** during its sessions at **Bombay** in May 15-17 of this year was formally asked to define its attitude with regard to the Nagpur revolutionary movement. A Left wing resolution, moved at the Bombay session with a view to commit the whole congress to support the action of the Nagpur Committee, was thus worded:

“The All-India Congress Committee congratulates the organisers of **Satyagraha (Civil disobedience)** at Nagpur and recommends the Working Committee to take the necessary steps including the collection of funds with a view to carry on the campaign to a successful end.”

It was very significantly pointed out during the discussion on the resolution that the Nagpur movement was to be supported if not for its immediate revolutionary value, at least as a means “for educating Indians in the use of arms”. At the instance of the president of the Congress, the left wing resolution was replaced by another resolution which said:

“The All-India Congress Committee requests the Working Committee to send some accredited representatives to Nagpur to inquire into the Satyagraha movement there and to make a report as to the facts of the situation and the steps, if any, that may be taken by the Working Committee in furtherance of the object of the movement.”

After this, the British Government found their way clear to take steps to suppress the movement at Nagpur. The most prominent of the volunteers were sentenced each eighteen months imprisonment and Avari himself to four years imprisonment. Other volunteers however, have appeared on the scene and are carrying on the movement.

The significance of the Nagpur revolt lies in the fact that since 1921 it is the first symptom that the social classes whose interests have been betrayed by the reformist policy of the Right leadership of the Congress, are ready for decisive revolutionary action against British Imperialism.