

AGAINST COLONIAL OPPRESSION

The Riots in Bombay.

By T. H. L. Rezmie.

The English bourgeois press is endeavouring for obvious reasons to represent the struggle of the Bombay proletariat not as a class demonstration of big sections of workers against imperialism and the native bourgeoisie, but as religious strife of backward, superstitious workers. By viewing this question from this angle, the British authorities who shot down from armoured cars about 1,000 proletarians, are bound to appear as the protectors of the Moslem section of the population (the Pathans) from the violence of a handful of religious fanatics. The facts which have hitherto been published, give the lie to this mendacious version, a version repeatedly resorted to by the Secret Intelligence Service of many countries.

As an actual document which gives the quietus to the imperialist legend of the "religious" movement in Bombay, we are publishing the article which appeared in the **New York "Nation"** of February 27. This article shows clearly the class origin of the Bombay incidents and their connection with the general anti-imperialist movement.

Editor.

The awakening of India's masses is now an established fact, and events in that country are taking a serious turn. The recent carnival of blood and fire in the city of Bombay, lurid accounts of which were dutifully cabled by British news agencies in the United States, was the most sanguinary and significant occurrence in many years. With 116 killed and 700 wounded the Bombay riots take a place in Indian history with the massacre of Amritsar. Though propagandists have sought to describe these riots as motivated by religious and communal animosities, even a cursory survey of the events of the preceding year will be enough to furnish the true explanation of the unfortunate mob violence which has taken place.

It will be recalled that the appointment by the present Tory Government of an **All-British Royal Commission** to investigate the workings of the reforms granted in 1919 was universally and vehemently resented by Indians. The arrival of the commission in Bombay a year ago was greeted by a nation-wide **hartal** (complete cessation of activity as a sign of mourning). A unanimous appeal by leaders of all shades of public opinion was responded to with the greatest enthusiasm and masses were

organised for boycott demonstrations everywhere. As the commission, headed by Sir John Simon, entered on its itinerary, citizens of Poona, Madras, Delhi, Lahore, Lucknow, Cawnpore, Allahabad, Calcutta, in short all the principal cities visited, in their turn successfully emulated the example set by Bombay. In each city scores of thousands of men, women and boys gathered near railway stations displaying black banners and shouting "Simon, go back!" as the commissioners alighted from trains. Unsympathetic Indian police under the command of hostile English officers attacked these unarmed crowds in several places and with clubs and lances foot and mounted police corps inflicted injuries on these admittedly peaceful protestants. At Lahore charging police officers fatally injured the well-known Nationalist leader and member of the Indian Legislative Assembly, Lala Lajpat Rai, and at Lucknow seriously wounded, among others, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, secretary of the Indian National Congress. But the boycott of the commission has gone on apace and is becoming increasingly stricter, with none but the government-controlled men, toadies, and a few scared religious leaders paying any attention to its proceedings. The native press has even resolved to banish its reports from its columns. This is a triumph of mass action.

Behind the recent riots, in addition to this general anti-British movement, lies the epoch-making struggle of the peasants of Bardoli District, in Bombay Presidency. When the revision of land-revenue schedules by a single revenue officer, acting in camera, increased the taxes to a confiscatory degree, the peasants of Bardoli declared a campaign of non-payment of taxes. Illiterate and ignorant though they were, they placed themselves under the leadership of a lieutenant of Mahatma Gandhi and took oaths of non-violence, pledging themselves to undergo all sufferings, without lifting a finger but without yielding an inch. For eight long months they kept up the fight, neither sowing nor reaping in their fields, which in most cases had been confiscated and auctioned off. Their properties were seized and despoiled by revenue men. Their leaders were arrested and imprisoned after farcical trials. Their stocks of seed and sheep were taken away from them. And their cows — to them more sacred than to any other sect of Hindus — beaten to death before their very eyes. But they refused to retaliate. The majority of the law-officers in these cases were Moslem Pathans from Bombay. The brutality of the Pathans added bitterness to the natural anger against the losses suffered by the peasants. The entire country became aroused and offered to help make good this unique challenge of a handful of unarmed men and women to the mightiest of the empires. At last the government of Bombay yielded and accepted the popular demand for an open, impartial, and judicial inquiry into the land revision question before increased taxes should be paid. The battle of the masses had been won and a landmark had been established in Indio-British relations.

Almost simultaneously with the Bardoli struggle, mill-workers of Bombay had to wage a long and bitter fight against foreign and native capitalists who own the jute and cotton mills in and around the city. The causes of the dispute here were, as is so often the case, an increase in the number of working hours, a reduction of personnel, and reduction of salaries. The labouring population of Bombay is drawn from all parts of the Presidency. A great many had come from the District of Bardoli too. The fact and the spirit of self-defence made them fighters. Within a few days of the breaking down of negotiations 150,000 workers were on the streets. Unarmed, as all Indian crowds always of necessity are, they roamed about and attended their demonstrations and meetings. The police, helping their natural allies, the employers, used force to maintain "order" by the most disorderly method. The auxiliary branch of the police had a good many Pathans in it and the workers knew well how cruel they were. But though the strike lasted for several months and at times privations made the strikers desperate, they did not indulge in violence of any kind. When the situation became very acute, leaders of the community prevailed upon the government of Bombay to stress the need of a settlement upon employers, and, after long pourparlers and compromises, more or less satisfactory adjustments were reached. The event was a monument to the organisation and stamina of the mass movement in Bombay.

This, briefly, was the situation and the mental condition of the labourers in Bombay mills when a strike took place in the plant of the British Burmah Shell Oil Company. The concern immediately recruited "new" hands in the city to replace the

strikers, and many of the strike-breakers were Pathans. A clash between the striking Hindu mill-workers and the strike-breaking Pathans of Bardoli and Bombay ill-fame was inevitable.

A few days later some interested parties circulated the rumour that the Pathans were kidnapping children to use for sacrificial purposes. That the Pathans are Moslems — rugged and fighting stalwarts from the North-western frontier of India — and therefore forbidden human sacrifice in any shape or form, must have been clear to the authors of the rumour, but the Hindu labourers could be counted upon either not to know it or to be too inflamed at the news to ponder over the matter. The news spread like wild-fire, and according to the news dispatches from that city and the propaganda mills in London the workers became a mob of frenzied men roaming the streets hunting Pathans, and killing them wherever found. Panic ensued and the population became frightened and desperate. Street brawls grew into cases of homicide and murder. Places of worship were desecrated and feelings ran high on both sides. In the million and a half population of Bombay there are only about a thousand Pathans, and the Moslem population held aloof. Yet the dispatches continuously insisted on the theory that the riots were motivated by religious hatred and that the British military and police had to fire to prevent the two communities from tearing each other to pieces. The number of casualties could not possibly have resulted from the sporadic and weaponless fights of such an unequal combat. The main portion of them can probably be traced to the machine-guns and bayonets, the sandbags, the barbed-wire entanglements, the armoured cars, and military pickets, in describing which the war correspondent of a London daily exultantly says the scenes match any he saw in France. But whatever the aftermath of the outbreak it is clear that the reasons for it were not chiefly religious, and that purely economic discontent mixed with hatred for a group of indiscriminating bullies aiding the oppressor of their country led to the riots. And the seven hundred arrests of riot promoters promise that the court proceedings will give us the opportunity of learning the whole truth.

Increased Repressive Policy of the Mahmud Dictatorship in Egypt.

By J. B., Jerusalem.

In the summer of this year, when the parliamentary elections in Great Britain have cleared the political atmosphere of that country, Mahomed Mahmud, dictator of Egypt by the grace of the British High Commissioner, will resume the negotiations with the British Foreign Office. By that time the internal political situation of Egypt has to be so far knocked into shape that even in the case of a victory for the Labour Party he, as representative of the Egyptian people, can play the part of the only force capable of guaranteeing the maintenance of law and order in case of emergency.

This is the reason why Mahomed Mahmud is putting the screw on the party of his opponents, the Waft, and taking measures which will rapidly lead to its complete destruction. As Mahmud announced in the speech he made in February, he intends to proceed in the most ruthless manner against agitators and enemies of the State. In view of the ineffectiveness of the reforms proclaimed by Mahmud at the commencement of his government, of the growing dissatisfaction of the population, and especially of the working masses in the towns, with the British-Mahmudistic dictatorship, these threats mean nothing less than that the organisatory overthrow of the Waft is now to form a prominent part of the Government's activities.

What response is the Waft making to the sharper tactics of the Mahmud dictatorship? There can be no further doubt that the bourgeois and semi-feudal strata, who still have the leadership of the Waft, the pashas and beys, who determine its directives (and whom Mahmud himself, through the clumsily staged Seif-ed-Din trial, which ended in favour of the Waft leaders, unwittingly offered the possibility of complete rehabilitation), are afraid to take any really revolutionary step against the dictatorship, just as they were in the beginning. Their course is not directed towards the revolutionary overthrow of the Mahmud dictatorship, which would of necessity lead to the undermining, if not the fall, of the monarchy in Egypt; for King