

# AGAINST COLONIAL OPPRESSION

## The Meerut Trial and the Indian Workers.

By Clemens Dutt.

The hope of British imperialism that the trial of the leaders of the Indian militant working class movement now proceeding at Meerut would spread confusion and terror among the rebellious Indian workers shows no sign of being realised.

The Preliminary Enquiry, now in its eighth month, still drags on interminably while the prosecution brings forward its innumerable police spies with reports of public meetings and intercepted letters. Among the two thousand documents are two hundred speeches said to have been delivered during the strike of the Girni Kamgar (Red Flag) textile union in Bombay. There is no pretence of proving acts of violence or conspiracy to plan insurrection. Leadership in the strike movement, speeches advocating class struggle are considered sufficient.

The Public Prosecutor, Mr. Langford James, relies on the crudest methods to prove his case. The Workers' and Peasants' Party proclaims that it is out to destroy imperialism. But is not the head of the imperialistic British Government his Majesty the King-Emperor? Before the Soviet regime was established in Russia did not they get rid of their king? These are the actual questions put to witnesses by Mr. Langford James.

Meanwhile, it is hoped to break the spirit of the prisoners by cruel treatment and petty tyrannies. Not only do they have to undergo the usual gross hardships of under-trial prisoners in the fever infested Meerut jail, but those who have fallen ill get inadequate medical assistance. One of the prisoners, Muzaffar Ahmad, is dying of consumption, but the authorities refuse to release him on bail or even allow him to be examined by a Calcutta doctor.

A glaring example of the interference with the defence that goes on was the recent arrest of one of the assistants of the defence counsel, who is to be charged with criminal trespass because he entered the court premises after the session was ended but while the prisoners and their counsel were still being detained there. This arbitrary action was taken by the Complainant in the case who happens also to be the lessee of the Court premises, and a petition of the prisoners to have the

case removed to another Court on this ground was rejected by the magistrate.

The only result achieved by the Prosecution so far is to make known throughout India the cause for which the prisoners are fighting and to popularise the slogans of militant class struggle. Their cries of "Down with British imperialism" and "Long live the Indian revolution" have been taken up by demonstrators in all parts of India and have replaced everywhere the old cries of "Mahatma Gandhi Kijai" etc.

The cynical defence of its action put forward by the Labour Government through the mouth of the Under Secretary of State for India, Dr. Drummond Shiels, at the British Labour Party Conference, has been received in India with derisive scorn. Mr. Shiels acknowledged the responsibility of the Labour Government for the conduct of the Meerut case, but he claimed that they were not being tried merely because they were trade union leaders. He said the Government would support "genuine" trade unionism in India, and he boasted that the policy of the India Office was in the interests of "the uninformed, humble people of India". The Calcutta Congress paper "Liberty" comments that this speech "could not have been improved upon even by Lord Birkenhead".

In spite of the ferocious tide of persecution, the Indian working class movement refuses to be subdued. In Meerut itself, the mass demonstrations outside the Court in support of the prisoners have led the authorities to prohibit the assembly of more than five persons together.

The most ferocious attacks have been launched against the Girni Kamgar Union in Bombay. The recently issued reports of the Riots Enquiry Committee (appointed to enquire into the communal riots in Bombay last February) and of the Strike Enquiry Committee (appointed under the Trades Disputes Act to enquire into the causes of the general strike in the textile industry this year) both reveal themselves as representing nothing more than a method of attacking the Girni Kamgar Union. The Riots Enquiry Report even suggests that steps should be taken to prevent "Communists" from occupying leading positions in Indian trade unions. These Reports foreshadow an attempt to declare the Girni Kamgar Union an illegal organisation.

Under the combined attack of the textile capitalists and the British rulers, with the use of unlimited strike-breaking tactics, prohibition of picketing and organised violence, the Girni Kamgar Union has been compelled to call off the textile strike unconditionally, which accordingly came to an end in October. Nevertheless, the Union is still firmly established, based as it is on the mill committees organised by the workers in the mills themselves. The textile workers have been starved into surrender for the moment, but their class spirit is unbroken.

New strikes are breaking out in other parts of the country. The tinplate workers of the Taka Company at Jamshedpur are still on strike as solidly as ever, and the strike of the oil and petrol workers in Calcutta has now lasted over two months. These workers demand recognition of their union and a substantial increase in wages. The company has offered an insignificant wage increase which has been rejected by the men. In Karachi, recently, the dock workers came out on strike and boldly resisted the attempt to use strike-breakers against them. As usual, the authorities quickly had recourse to armed police and savagely attacked the strikers. Many smaller strikes are taking place in various centres, and it is clear that the ferment of industrial uprest is by no means subsiding.

The movement to boycott the Whitley Royal Commission on Indian Labour, which arrived in India on October 11, has been growing in strength. While the active leaders of the working class movement are in jail at Meerut, and workers on strike are being crushed by repressive legislation and police terrorism, it is impossible even for the reformist elements to regard the Commission as having come to assist Indian Labour. The Meerut trial is the predominating issue which is causing important sections of the trade union movement to decide to boycott the Commission. The Provincial Trade Union Federation of the United Provinces, at a conference last September at which 6,000 people were present, passed a resolution deciding to boycott the Commission

"in view of the fact that the Whitley Commission was appointed at a time when the Meerut case was going on against a number of labour leaders and has not been withdrawn by the Government in spite of the repeated requests of the workers."

A number of other labour organisations, such as the Workers' and Peasants' Party, the Girni Kamgar Union, the Indian Peninsula Railway Union, the Barabazar Labour Union, the Bombay Port Trust Employees Union, the Bombay Railwaymen's Union, etc. have decided to have nothing to do with the Commission.

The British "Manchester Guardian" in a leading article last August frankly exposed the real purpose of the Whitley Commission. It declared:

"Experience of the past two years has shown that industrial workers in the biggest centres are becoming malleable material in the hands of unscrupulous Communist organisers, and this is one of the circumstances which give such importance to the recently appointed Commission on Indian Labour."

British imperialism, acting through the agency of the British Labour Government, is straining and striving to exorcise the Communist spectre. But do what it will, its measures fail of their intended effect. The Indian working class is advancing under heavy fire; but precisely the fact of its advance under those conditions makes it impossible to be stopped. The Indian revolution is gathering strength.

## MacDonald's Gallows and Knout in Palestine.

By J. B. (Jerusalem).

"... From here you will be taken back to prison and then to the place where you will be hanged by the neck until you are dead. The High Commissioner will decide where you shall be buried. And God have mercy on your soul." Such is the sentence passed in the name of the humane-socialist-pacifist-democratic progressive MacDonald Government upon three poor Arab peasants, who were accused of taking part in the disturbances of Safed. It is the first sentence of a great number, for only a small portion of the trials have so far been concluded and already assurance is given — in view of the rising tide of Arab emigration — that no protest will prevent British "justice" from mounting in Palestine as many gallows as possible.

But there is something peculiar about this "justice", namely the numerous armoured cars, aircraft squadrons and demountables, which are maintaining order in the country, the police are the people, whom the whole of public opinion in Palestine regard as solely to blame for the bloodshed. The accusers are the British officers, who during the pogrom told the Jews that they would be at hand "two minutes after they had been slaughtered". And the witnesses are people whom the Zionist Fascists have persuaded that the poor fellahin in the dock are solely responsible for the whole disaster. As a matter of fact, it is a question of brutal, imperialist vengeance: MacDonald's emissaries want to hide their own guilt and their own disgraceful acts behind a forest of gallows with poor Arab peasants hanging on them.

In view of the beginning of the bloody settlement of the slowly dawning on the Arab masses who their real enemy is. They are beginning to understand how dastardly their leaders have lied to them when they told them: "El Dola Maana" (the government is with us) and incited them against the Jews. Gradually they are beginning to see through the game that has been played on them, and in similar measure the hatred of the masses against imperialism is intensified. The leaders, who have long wanted that the movement would die down, cannot help but take a step or other under the pressure of the masses; it is true that they tried to water down with semi-religious slogans the general strike, in which a hundred thousand participated on October 10th; it is true that they took great care that the masses should not make a direct attack upon imperialism on that momentous day; it is true that in regard to the imperialistic parliamentary commission they displayed a pitiable irresolution — but it is clear that the mass movement is taking on a distinctly anti-imperialistic character. What the conservative Baldwin regime was not able to accomplish in five years has been achieved scarcely two months by MacDonald's gallows and knout.

It is no wonder that the excitement is continually growing, that in various corners of the country protest strikes and demonstrations are breaking out spontaneously. No wonder that every Arab peasant, every worker is trying to sell whatever he has in order to buy arms. No wonder that the national movement is spreading to wider and wider circles and extending to neighbouring countries.