

The Whitley Commission in India.

By A. G. E. (London).

In January 1929, the appointment of a Royal Commission "to explore all aspects of the Labour problem in India" was announced by the British Viceroy.

Repression of the worst form has been carried out against the working class in India; the shootings of strikers, ruthless dispersal of demonstrations by armed police and soldiery, intimidation laws and other repressive legislation; arrests of the chief leaders of the workers in all the chief industries, the chief example of which is "Meerut", where the most prominent leaders are now undergoing trial for organising the workers, but charged with conspiracy.

Ruthless and brutal repression is the chief form of the activity of the British Labour Government, but "Commissions to investigate" is an attempt at a more subtle form to head off the militancy of the Indian workers.

The Whitley Commission in Britain in 1917 played its role and served the purpose of capitalism by partly diverting the attention of the workers at that most critical post-war period when militancy was at a very high peak. A number of prominent British Trade Union leaders were in hearty accord with the Commission. Was not Clynes, now the full-blooded Social fascist member of the Labour Imperialist Government a signatory of the British Whitley Commission Report?

The Indian Nationalist press have criticised the membership of the Commission, or as a "costly experiment" and that "there should be more Indians on it, not imported foreigners" etc. etc. Messrs Joshi and Chaman Lal, the champions of the 2nd International, are members of the Whitley Commission. They had not the sanction of any section of the Indian Trade Union movement to sit on such a commission. While it is true the boycott of the Simon Commission was backed by the Nationalist leaders, it was the working class movement in India who recognised the took active steps to boycott it completely.

The Whitley Commission landed on October 11th. 1929. On Sept. 14th at the Trade Union Conference of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh held at Cawnpore, at which 1000 workers were present, a resolution to boycott the Commission was unanimously passed.

A Boycott of the Whitley Commission has also been decided by the following organisations:

1. The Barabazar Labour Union, Calcutta;
2. The Workers and Peasants Party;
3. The Bombay Youth League;
4. The Independence of India League;
5. The Mill Workers' Union, Bombay;
6. The Girni Kamgar Union Bombay;
7. The G. I. P. Railway Kamgar Union;
8. The Bombay Port Trust Railway Union;
9. The Bombay Port Trust Employees Union;
10. The Tramwaymen's Union;
11. The Hawkers' Union.

The above Bombay organisations also arranged Mass Meetings where resolutions to boycott were enthusiastically passed. At a mass meeting in Bombay on Sept. 25th, the speakers denounced the Commission as "an Imperialist camouflage to facilitate the exploitation of Indian workers by capitalis and imperialists".

Joshi and Chamann Lal were denounced as "agents of British Imperialism". The Hall was decorated with slogans: "Down with Imperialism"; "Withdraw the Meerut Trial"; "Remember our Meerut Comrades"; "Remember the class war prisoners".

It was also arranged to conduct a series of mass meetings to further the boycott.

At Nagpur, two mass meetings were held, one on Sept. 24th. under the auspices of the G. I. P. Railwaymen's Union and on Oct. 1st under the auspices of the Nagpur Youth League, at both of which boycott resolutions of the Commission were passed.

The Bombay G. I. P. Railwaymen's Union held a mass meeting in Bombay on Oct. 14th and a resolution of boycott

was passed. At the sitting of the General Council of the All-India Railway Federation complete boycott was advocated, but a few dissentient voices were raised and it was finally decided to relegate the matter to the Annual Congress.

While the Commission were taking evidence at Karachi, the workers of Karachi came out on strike. Some of the newspapers made out that it was a strike to call the attention of the Commission to the grievances of the dock workers, in reality the strikers were demanding a nine hour day (they work 11 hours without a break) and an increase in wages (The wages of a seaman are Rs. 22 and a fireman Rs. 27 per month).

Meanwhile the type of witnesses who appear before the Commission at Karachi is significant; e. g. the Buyers and Shippers Chamber, Karachi, handed in a memoranda, the witnesses were, the Chairman of the Port Trust, Karachi; the Chief Engineer, Lloyd Barrage and the President of the Karachi Municipality. The Government of Madras, and the Punjab Chamber of Commerce also presented memoranda, while at New Delhi, the Director of Industries, the Inspector of Factories and several of the Railway Board acted as witnesses. A furore was raised in the press due to the reports of the Railway Board being refused to the Press. The Bombay Chamber of Commerce submitted a memorandum which will weigh with the "Commission" because it is a re-hash of the arguments put before the Fawcett and the Pearson Commission, with the object of stifling militant trade unionism. One paragraph is as follows: "Communism is encouraging the Indian labourer to demand that which he could not earn and was not worth in the industrial market of the world."

Finally at the Nagpur Session of the All-India Trade Union Congress, the question of the Whitley Commission created a split. Joshi and Chaman Lal, the leaders of the Reformists, left the Congress. They refused to accept the Congress decision. Later, the Congress, after the decision, passed several far-reaching "left" proposals.

Despite terrorism, arrests and brutality, the Indian workers are marching forward; the boycott of the Whitley Commission denotes a tremendous advance in international class consciousness and a realisation of imperialist exploitation.