

# The Calcutta Strike.

By P. (Moscow).

MacDonald is carrying on in India a policy of bribery and bullying. Unimportant reforms are promised, attempts are made at corruption and the revolutionary movement is suppressed. This and nothing else is the sense of the policy of the imperialists carried out by the Labour Government. The workers are to be blessed with the reforms, the peasants with a revision of the ground tax and the industrial bourgeoisie with a revision of customs duties. The purpose of the action is to restore for British finance capital the commanding economic position in India. The promised reforms are, however, unable to suppress the revolutionary movement or even to keep it as are the terrorist laws, the organisation of pogroms, strikes, terrorist trials and shootings. MacDonald's policy is bringing one defeat after another. The working class of India must not be misled or intimidated either by reformist promises or by the Terror of the English social imperialists.

In Bombay the fight of the textile workers continues. The workers' association of the textile trade publishes every day reports of the position in the factories, just as headquarters of the world war reported the situation on the fronts. It may place any reliance on these reports on the front of the world war, the employers have already succeeded in setting one hundred thousand strikebreakers to work. But every fresh incident gives fresh impetus to the strike movement. The unskilled workers recruited in inland provinces become infected with the "like fever". A portion of the strikers have returned to the villages, so that the rural population is informed by actual partisans concerning the strike of the workers in the town. Many workers, however, still remain in the city. And they do all they can to protect their union "Girni Kamgar". It is only on account of stubborn refusal of the workers to acknowledge their representatives that the arrested leaders of the above-mentioned union have been let out of prison for a few hours, mediated by prison officials, however, to take part in the session of the arbitration commission nominated by the government.

Also in Madras and Cawnpore strikes have broken out in the textile industry. They reflect a serious crisis in the Indian textile industry, the unbridgeable chasm between imperialism in Colonial India, the contradiction between the growth of the textile industry and the shrinkage of the domestic market. In India consumed 4210 million yards of different kinds of material, against only 3656 millions in 1928-29. The purchasing power of the impoverished Indian village is sinking ever and lower. Output in India is also regressing. It amounted in 1928-29 to only 1893 million yards against 2356 million yards in the year 1927-28. Imports are falling at the same time. The Indian, English, Japanese and Italian industries are fighting for the reduced sales market. England's share in the export trade of India has fallen off, for instance, from 59 per cent. in the year 1927-28 to 52 per cent. in the year 1928-29.

The movement is, however, not confined to the textile workers. In Jamshadpore 3000 metal workers have now been on strike for three months. The leaders of the reformist federation, who desired to speak at their meeting, were howled down.

Finally, it should be remarked that the 35,000 railway workers of the so-called Great Indian Railway have driven out the national reformist leaders and elected men of the Left, and that among the seamen and dockers, too, the fermentation is increasing.

But the seriousness of the revolutionary crisis in India is evidenced most of all by the strike of the jute workers in Calcutta. Isolated collisions took place last year. They brought to light the interesting fact that the owners of the jute factories at the same time landed proprietors who lease their ground and employ some of their lessees as workers in their factories. In other words, the workers are in many cases doubly exploited as peasant lessees and as factory workers.

At the end of July of this year it came to a mass fight in the jute industry of Calcutta, when the employers lengthened the working day and at the same time reduced wages. While previously the workers put in a total of 54 hours in a working week of five days, from July 1st the working week was to

be 60 hours. The individual output quota was increased to such an extent that for the longer working week the workers would have received one rupee less in wages.

The jute industry of India, in contrast to other branches in the textile industry, works exclusively for export. It is entirely in the hands of English capitalists, although a considerable portion of the shares are distributed among the landowners of Bengal. The dividends of the jute industry are phantastic. They fluctuate between 30 per cent. and 140 per cent. of the nominal value of the shares. Colonial profiteering is here at its best. But the lust for profit knows no bounds. And it therefore happened that the employers undertook a fresh attack upon the starving workers. The workers replied to this challenge with a strike.

The national-reformist trade union, which has only a few hundred members, tried right from the start to throttle the strike. The leaders of the union implored the workers to return to the mills. As regards the left-wing trade union, which has a membership of 3000, all of the leaders were arrested immediately. Only a few members of the destroyed Workers' and Peasants' Party led the agitation for the strike. The movement comprises 200,000 workers. When the usual measures, such as arrests, maltreatment, etc. failed, the authorities resorted to provocation. The money lenders, on whom the Indian workers depend, because they receive the wages which are due to them only after the lapse of two or three weeks, gathered in front of the mills and demanded the repayment of the debts. The workers drove them away, and the authorities made use of this opportunity to fire into the masses. A state of siege was declared in Calcutta. Quotations of jute shares sank and the prices for jute goods went up.

While in Bombay the economic position was unfavourable for the workers and only a political success could be made of the strike, the situation in Calcutta is favourable for the workers from an economic point of view. The MacDonald Government still hopes that with the help of soldiers, shootings, imprisonment and with the support of the national-reformists it will succeed in throttling the strike. When it is a question of the dividends of the English capitalists and Indian landowners, it is not to be expected that the Labour Government will act with leniency. But the proletariat of Calcutta was able to stand the Terror and the state of siege. A sympathetic strike broke out on the city railway. Ten thousand workers of the Burma-Shell Oil Company went on strike. The railway workers, too, threatened to go on strike.

While during the five months of the heroic strike of the textile workers in Bombay it was impossible to extend the movement and to organise sympathetic strikes, in Calcutta practically the whole of the working class rose to protect the jute workers. The fact is all the more remarkable, as it happened without a strong revolutionary trade union and almost without a party. The movement developed with enormous rapidity. The wave rose higher and higher and the employers had to beat a retreat....

From reports received, it appears that the employers have been obliged to accord an increase of wages commensurate with the longer working hours, resumption of the old individual output quotas, maternity grants to the women workers and to take on again all the workers who had been discharged, etc. Particular mention should be made of the fact that the attempts of the employers and the authorities to victimise the leaders of the workers after the liquidation of the strike were countered by a fresh mass strike on the part of the jute workers.

Bombay and Calcutta have become the theatres of continual class struggles. At the same time, in the peasant province of Punjab, reprisals are taking place against the revolutionary peasant organisations, and mass trials and mass arrests are occurring. Even the National Congress was obliged to protest against the furious raging of the MacDonald creatures. Evidently peasants' actions are brewing in the Punjab.

Through their heroic action, the working class of India is rousing the peasants to fight. When the call from Bombay and Calcutta reaches the countless peasant masses of India, a new chapter will begin in the history of the British Empire. MacDonald can check this process neither by reformist manoeuvres nor by White Terror against the revolutionary workers.