

Labour Imperialism and India.

By C. P. Dutt.

The British Labour Government has made its first contribution towards policy in India since its accession to office. The announcement, made through the mouth of the Viceroy in India, follows a line fairly accurately forecast beforehand. This is not surprising, for the foreign policy of the Labour Government, as already exemplified in the case of Egypt, the Middle East and China, is bound within very narrow limits. The first factor in the situation is the increasing development of mass discontent and revolutionary ferment inside India. The second factor is that the Labour Government is pledged to maintain and continue the imperialist policy agreed upon jointly by all British Parliamentary parties and typified in the joint participation in the Simon Commission.

The Simon Commission, the report of which will not be ready until 1930, was rejected and boycotted even by the bulk of the bourgeois nationalists. The Indian National Congress pledged itself last year to take drastic action if the British Government does not offer Dominion Status to India by the end of

1929. Under the pressure of radical forces, growing stronger along with the intensification of repression, the Congress has selected the "left" nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru as President of the coming session in Lahore, Gandhi having declined the responsibility.

Under these circumstances, if the Labour Government made no more concessions, the Congress would be bound to commit itself to some form of action. Yet most of the bourgeois leaders would be glad to find an excuse for retreating. Thus, the British Labour Government has its chance of appearing to do something new which would be eagerly seized by those harbouring expectations from a Labour Government, while at the same time it would in no way alter the policy fixed by imperialism.

The Viceroy's statement does two things. Firstly, it makes a new vague promise of Dominion Status which goes no further than anything previously said:

"I am authorized on behalf of his Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgment it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status."

Secondly, following a suggestion already made by Simon, it proposes a Round Table Conference of "all parties and interests" after the Simon Commission has made its report and for the purpose of discussing the findings of the Simon Commission.

There is nothing here which meets the Indian bourgeois nationalist demand for a Round Table Conference empowered to decide the future Constitution of India. The British Conservative press emphasises that the Viceroy's statement contains "no promises and no change of policy", that the Simon Commission is still the sole channel for proposals on India and that the British Parliament remains the final arbiter.

Nevertheless, as in the case of the Egyptian Treaty, all sections of the Labour Party are busily extolling the new declaration as the basis for a happy solution of the Indian problem, as the I. L. P. "New Leader" calls it. The "Daily Herald" says there is now "complete unity of purpose" in Britain and India and the path to co-operation is now open.

The Executive of the I. L. P. in a resolution "congratulates the Government in its re-affirmation of the justice of India's claim for self-government" and urges an amnesty for political prisoners to create a favourable atmosphere of discussion.

Acceptance of this even by the bourgeois wing of the nationalists is not such a foregone conclusion. If the Simon Commission was boycotted why should its report be discussed? Nevertheless, even Jawaharlal Nehru talks of a Conference being acceptable if the present "war-like" policy of the government is discontinued and the fundamental basis of the Conference is satisfactory. The basis will probably not prove satisfactory but the immediate object of the British Labour Government will be served if the attention of the Indian Congress is diverted to these conditions for co-operation.

The Labour Government is turning from the Simon Commission because it knows that this body is too compromised in India. The Government, however, is carrying out precisely that which the Simon Commission will propose.