

POLITICS

Labour Justice.

By M. N. Roy.

The trial of the Indian Communists at Cawnpur has ended. Four of the accused present before the court have each been condemned to four years rigorous imprisonment.

The history of this is more or less known, although the capitalist press and news agencies maintained a strict conspiracy of silence. It was a trial of the Communist International. The act of accusation is a remarkable document. The charge against the men on trial was that they had relation with the Communist International; that they stood for the liberation of the Indian people from the yoke of British Imperialism; that they proposed to organize the workers and peasants into a political party with the purpose of fighting for this liberation, and that in the program of the projected party, due consideration was given to the economic needs of the working masses. It would be interesting to quote the whole act of accusation, which is a rather lengthy document; but space does not permit.

The charge of "attempting to overthrow the sovereignty of the King Emperor" could not be substantiated by the evidence produced, even if the veracity and authenticity of the latter were taken for granted. Therefore, the program of the Communist International was hauled in to prove the guilt of the men on trial. The act of accusation runs thus: the Communist International is a revolutionary organization; it proposes to organize sections in the Eastern countries, the object of the Indian section

being to deprive the King Emperor of his sovereignty of British India.

Of course, there would be nothing extraordinary in this accusation, had not the trial been undertaken just at the moment when a "Labour Government" stood at the helm of the British empire.

It would be useless for Mr. Macdonald and his colleagues to argue that they were not responsible for this outrageous action of the Indian government. Granted that the trial was undertaken without the consent of the Labour Government, there has been enough time for the latter to intervene if it wanted to. Even the "Daily Herald" and the "New Leader" raised the voice of protest against this persecution of the Indian working-class. The Government, collectively and severally, have been memorialized on the question. But Mr. Macdonald kept quiet. What does it mean? It means that he approved of this persecution, which is not only a violation of the principle of democracy, but of the right of the working-class to political and industrial organization. Evidently Mr. Macdonald desires to carry his warfare against the Communist International into every corner of the globe.

There were three issues involved in this trial, namely constitutional, political and legal. On each of these three points the case was against the prosecution. If anything was proved by the prosecution evidence, it was that propaganda was made by the accused for the organization of a working class party. But counsel for the prosecution himself admitted that to hold communist views and preach those views did not in themselves constitute a crime. Organization of a Communist Party and to have relation with the Communist International cannot be unconstitutional in India if it is not so in other parts of the Empire. Politically, the case was equally untenable. Self-determination of peoples is the order of the day. The leaders of the British Labour Party and of the Second International are the incorrigible champions of this doctrine of democracy. Therefore, it cannot be a crime on the part of a certain section of the Indian people to express their desire to liberate their country from the yoke of foreign domination. The Labour Government might find all sorts of excuses to justify its failure to put its doctrine into practice; but to declare one's desire to break away from the Empire can certainly not be punishable as a crime. Legally the case was altogether hopeless. No attempt was made to prove the veracity of the letters supposed to be written by me. Then, to have received letters written by someone, does not by any code of law constitute a criminal offence. It was not proved that the accused before the court had any complicity with writing those letters, which were the only evidence on which they have been convicted. Letters supposed to be written by only two of the accused were produced; but the cross-examination by the counsel for the defence made it evident that those letters were not beyond the suspicion of forgery. With one exception, all the witnesses who testified in favour of the prosecution, were police officers; and this one solitary exception was challenged by the defence as being a police spy. This challenge was not taken up by the prosecution. Much was made of the money received from the Communist International. But the government lawyer admitted that he could not prove his assertions, which the court took for granted.

Now leaving aside the broad constitutional and political issues, the condemnation of the four men cannot even be justified on the ground of legal technicality. It is therefore clear that these men have been sentenced to long terms of rigorous imprisonment, simply because they are suspected of being in favour of organizing a working-class party, with the object of securing the economic and political freedom of the people of India.

The MacDonald Government, and for that matter, the Second International are responsible for this action. The new policy of British Imperialism is to come to some agreement with the Indian bourgeoisie. The corollary of this policy is to crush the labour movement. Mr. MacDonald has been ordered to do this dirty job. He is hobnobbing with the Indian bourgeoisie to convince them of the utility of British protection and on the other hand, rendering valuable services to the Empire by stamping out the working-class movement, which is bound to be a menace to the policy of buying over the Indian bourgeoisie.