

Memorandum for the Annual Conference of the British Labour Party.

By M. N. Roy.

Comrade Roy has addressed the following Open Letter to the delegates of the Labour Party Conference:

Mr. Chairman and Delegates,

In the Conference of this year, you will be discussing the programme of your party in the light of experience gained in office. Those who took up the government and have been administering it for these seven months on your behalf, and on behalf of the British working-class, will be giving an account of themselves to their constituents assembled in this conference. They will be expected to show that in office, they have adhered to the Party Programme as staunchly as out of office. There is, however, one point in the programme of the Labour Party which I propose to stress in this Memorandum, lest it be overlooked, even by the rank and file of the Party.

The question I desire to call to your attention, is the so-called "Indian Question". The Labour Party is committed to the principle of Self-determination of peoples. Looked at from this point of view, the Indian question is not very intricate, unless the right of Self-determination of subject peoples is hedged around with the theory of "Responsibility" on the part of Imperialism to introduce "good government" into the colonial countries. This theory of responsibility was invented to gild the chain of political slavery and economic exploitation of the subject nations. Nevertheless, the Labour Government, headed by Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald, who once upon a time was a severe critic of Imperialism and an advocate of self-government for India, has abandoned this principle of Self-determination in favour of the preposterous theory of Responsibility. Instead of recognizing the right of the Indian people to a free national existence, in consonance with the principles advocated in your programme, the Labour Government has on the contrary, endorsed the claim of British capital to hold the Indian people in subjection, and as administrators of the Empire, have undertaken the shameful task of enforcing this subjection. In doing so, the Labour Government has talked of Britain's "responsibility" no less hypocritically than the governments of Curzon and Lloyd George.

Here I do not propose to demonstrate that the conspicuous failure of the Labour Government to stand by its programme is due to the faultiness of its principles, half-heartedly professed. The Wilsonian doctrine of Self-determination, formulated to deceive the subject nationalities and to aggrandize the Entente Imperialism at the cost of the Central Powers, is mere hypocritical cant. By subscribing to this doctrine, the colonial programme of the Labour Party becomes a mockery. The imperialist attitude of the Labour Government is the inevitable result, for the doctrine of Self-determination goes hand in hand with the theory of responsibility.

The following facts will show how the Labour Government has neglected to apply to India a policy remotely approximating even to this equivocal doctrine of Self-determination.

1. The faith that Indian Nationalists had in the good will and love of freedom of the Labour Party was rudely shaken by the jingoist message that Mr. Macdonald sent out just on the eve of assuming office. He had not a word of sympathy for the Indian people fighting for the right of Self-determination; on the contrary, forgetting the countless acts of despotism, tyranny and brutality committed by the British rulers of India, he valiantly championed the cause of "law and order." May we not ask the Labour Government in conjunction with the British working-class; "Which is lawless? The right to freedom, or Imperialist domination?"

2. The National Demands, formulated by the members of the Indian Legislative Assembly, elected on the franchise granted under the Constitution sanctioned by the British Parliament, have not been heeded. So meagre are these demands that they do not even require anything more than a partial application of the principle of Self-determination. A Round Table Conference of the people's representatives and those of the government, is the crux of this demand. It was not granted. The Secretary of State for India declared in Parliament that the demand for a Round Table Conference could not be entertained. The Nationalists did not fail to indicate in advance that in the proposed Conference, they would be moderate. The cardinal points of the Nationalist programme in the Conference would be; a) Provin-

cial autonomy, that is, the provincial governments (still parts of the imperial political organism) to be made fully responsible to the Legislature; b) Partial responsibility in the Central Government, which would continue to be headed by a British Viceroy; c) a promise to grant Self-Government, not necessarily with the control over the army, foreign affairs or relations with the native states, at the expiry of a fixed period of time, and d) Indianisation of the public services, that is, to man the latter with more Indians and fewer English. If the principle of Self-determination means anything at all, and the Labour Party honestly adheres to it, these demands should be looked upon as the irreducible minimum, and therefore, granted immediately. A resolution calling for the Round Table Conference and tacitly embodying these demands, was carried through the Legislative Assembly by the elected majority in the face of government opposition. This voice of the people, expressed through the medium of a constitutional instrument forged by two high British officials and sanctioned by the British Parliament (Reforms of India Act of 1919), has not been heeded. Neither was the resolution acted upon, nor did the Government resign as it should, being directly hostile to the wishes of the electorate.

Precisely in such embarrassing positions, the theory of "Responsibility" conveniently comes in. It was maintained that the Nationalists who carried this resolution, were not speaking in behalf of the "dumb millions", having been elected by barely two per cent of the population, and that the British Government could not abandon its sacred responsibility to protect the interests of the illiterate masses. In order to maintain this preposterous position, the Labour Government should answer two questions: 1. Who entrusted British Imperialism with this "responsibility"? and 2. Were the Indian Nationalists ever satisfied with such a limited franchise, which was imposed upon them grudgingly, after one hundred and fifty years of undiluted despotism? The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, accepted by the British Labour Party (even before it assumed office) as the Magna Charta of India, are either a democratic instrument or an undemocratic one. If it is democratic, the voice of the Legislature elected according to it should determine the governance of the country. If it is undemocratic, then it should be scrapped and replaced by a democratic constitution. The Labour Government has done neither the one nor the other. It has eagerly sought to maintain the *status quo* of Imperialism.

3. The so-called Indian Deputation which recently visited Britain, presented a Memorandum whose contents are known to you all. They are even more moderate than the demands made in India. The eventual grant of Dominion Status was not made a *sine qua non* of the programme of this deputation. Lord Morley's policy of "rallying the Moderates" impelled the Labour Party to extend semi-official encouragement to this Deputation, which represented one-twentieth per cent of the population, if the Nationalists in India represent less than two per cent. But even this Deputation, composed of confirmed loyalists wedded to the doctrine of Imperial Federation, with its ridiculously modest demands, was finally sent home without any official assurance that even this beggarly pittance would be granted. On the contrary, the redoubtable members of the Deputation have obviously been instructed to throw mud at the Nationalists at home for obstructing the way to an "honourable compromise".

4. Nationalist leaders in the Indian Legislature, who have sacrificed and suffered imprisonment for advocating the right of Self-determination, are not recognized by the Labour Government as representatives of the people; but the "dumb millions" of India may use as their mouthpiece such an eminently reactionary ex-official as Sir Sankaran Nair, whom the Independent Labour Party proposes to put up as their parliamentary candidate.

5. During the last half-year, a resolution demanding the release or trial of political prisoners held indefinitely without even being told what is the character of the evidence against them, has been several times carried through the Central and Provincial Legislatures by the elected majority. The Government disdainfully ignored this resolution, and continued to hold the prisoners in unlawful custody.

6. In two provinces, (Central Provinces and Bengal) the Governors have unceremoniously dismissed the Legislative Councils and have usurped all the power in their own persons. They did so, because the Opposition was in the majority, and refused to sanction supplies to the Government so long as their demands were not considered. In Bengal, a large part of the opposition was directed against the individuality of the Ministers, who are

supposed to be responsible to the Legislature, but are appointed and dismissed by the Governor. The latter would not even consent to change the Ministers, who were *persona non grata* to the majority of the Legislature.

This sort of parliamentary deadlock was threatened by the Nationalists when they entered the Legislatures, previously boycotted by them, and it was in this legal parliamentary obstruction that Mr. MacDonald detected "violence" which, he gratuitously warned the Indian public, would not "cow down any party in Britain". If Mr. Baldwin had sought to remain in office after the last elections, we would have found the same Mr. MacDonald abandoning his pacifism, and leading similar "violent" attacks in the very heart of the British Parliament. But what is sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander, according to the political ethics of the Labour Government and that section of the Labour Party which unconditionally supports the Government.

7. The theory that British Imperialism rules over India for the benefit of the Indian masses, has been made its own by the Labour Government. But it is under the Labour regime that socialists and labour agitators were for the first time prosecuted and sentenced to long terms of hard labour in India. Their "crime" was an unproved connection with the Communist International, and to have received letters from Indian communists abroad, advocating the organisation of a working-class party, having the overthrow of British rule for a point of its programme. The Labour Party is supposed to stand for replacing the capitalist system by a socialist order. Since His Majesty's Government so far is essentially capitalist, the Labour Party, by its desire to put an end to the capitalist system, can also be accused, by the same process of reasoning, of waging war against the King. Therefore Mr. MacDonald and his colleagues should today be residing, not in the mansions of Downing Street, but in the Tower of London! Again the same illogicality; Democracy at home — sacred responsibility in the colonies. The Labour Government believe in this doctrine.

It is maintained that the British Government of India must protect the masses from the irresponsible and demagogic nationalist agitators; but even under a Labour regime, Socialist and Communist literature is proscribed in India; Trade Unions are not legalized; there is no limit to the working-day; there is not a minimum wage fixed by law; women, and children under twelve years, are employed underground in the coal-mines; hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are employed in the plantations practically as bond-slaves; Feudalism is protected by law; any revolt of the exploited peasantry against the intolerable excesses of landlordism is suppressed by the armed forces of the government; the demand for the abolition or even the curtailment of the privileges of the landed aristocracy are denounced and persecuted as "Red Revolution" and "Bolshevism", and striking workers are shot down at the behest of the employers. What have the Labour Government done to redress these grievances of the Indian masses, the responsibility of protecting whom they have inherited from their bourgeois predecessors?

Ever since the Labour Government came into office, these grievances of the Indian working-class have been repeatedly brought to their notice. They have been urged by all means to intervene in the infamous Cawnpore Communist Trial. They have been requested to release others who are held in jail without trial as suspected "Bolshevik agents". They have been asked to remove the ban on Socialist and Communist literature entering India. The answer to all these demands on behalf of the Indian working-class has been always tacitly in the negative. Myself and my writings are excluded from India, because I am a Communist. I applied for permission to enter Britain to inform the British proletariat about the condition of their Indian comrades, and to work for the joint action of the two for mutual benefit. The Labour Government never gave me a reply, but their representatives in India replied by issuing a warrant for my arrest, sent to England for execution. If I entered England, the Labour Government would arrest and extradite me to India, acting under the instruction of the Indian police! Since when did Britain become a colony of the Government of India? An Indian Court has no jurisdiction over England, but this flagrant action has never been repudiated by the Labour Government.

Such in brief, is the record of the Labour Government in India. Now, is the Party Conference going to examine this record and declare that its nominees in office have betrayed the party programme in letter and in spirit? Will the Party Conference censure the Government, and direct it to take at least the first steps towards applying the principle of Self-deter-

mination to India? These first steps should be to accede immediately to the Nationalist demands, as expressed through the resolutions adopted by the Legislature, and the removal of the above-mentioned grievances of the Indian working-class. Nothing less; this is the irreducible minimum.

In conclusion, let it be remarked that the Labour Party should not approach the Indian question in the spirit of charity or humanitarianism. The dismemberment of the Empire and the consequent liberation of the colonial masses are conditions which will largely determine the end of wage-slavery in Britain. The fact that the bourgeoisie worship the Empire and will not countenance any tampering with it, should be sufficient to prove that this sacrosanct Empire is but a golden chain for the British proletariat. If the Labour Party would be the true leader of the British working-class, let it not defend, but help the break-up of the Empire.

Zurich, Sept. 27, 1924.
