

- INTERNATIONAL -

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Editorial Offices: Langegasse 26/12, Vienna VIII. — Central Despatching Department: Berggasse 31, Vienna IX.
 — Postal Address, to which all remittances should be sent by registered mail: Postamt 64, Schliessfach 29, Vienna VIII.
 — Telegraphic Address: Inprecorr, Vienna.

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Open Letter from the Communist Party of India.

To the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Olivier, to the Labour Government and the British Working Class, on behalf of the Workers and Peasants of India.

Right Honourable Sir, My Lord, Right Honourable Sirs and Comrades!

A trial is proceeding in India upon the outcome of which hangs, for the time being, the right of political agitation and association for economic ends of the three hundred million members of the Indian working-class. A charge has been lodged in an Indian Court by the Chief of the Secret Service Department, on behalf of the Indian Government, against eight persons, including myself, for alleged "conspiracy against the sovereignty of the King Emperor", on the grounds that political agitation has been made among the Indian working-class, and that a programme was issued for the organization of the Indian working-class into a political party of their own.

Six out of the eight accused, myself among them, are unable, even did time permit, to present themselves before the Indian Court to defend themselves, four of these six being already interned without due accusation or trial, and the other two being banned from entering the territories of the British Empire. The most arbitrary allegations have been made, without a foundation of proof, and the trial is proceeding to its close without any chance being given to show its true purpose nor the real issues at stake.

Gentlemen of the Labour Government and Fellow-workers of Great Britain, it is not we eight accused who are on trial in Cawnpore. It is the entire Indian working-class and the idea of political agitation and organization of the working-class which awaits the verdict of the august Court. The time-honoured charge of "conspiracy" has been brought against eight individuals, in

order to damn the growing working-class movement in India for social, economic and political emancipation, as illegal. I therefore take the only means which is open to me to address you as the head, not only of the Government of Great Britain, but as the acknowledged leader of the British working-class which has placed you in this high office to defend their interests and that of their class in other countries. On behalf of the toiling masses of India, I call your attention to this flagrant attempt to throttle the constitutional right of agitation, organization and association which exists unchallenged in every other part of the British Empire, and throughout the world. Many attempts have been made to abrogate this legitimate right of political propaganda and organization among the workers of all countries, but everywhere it has been proven that such a right cannot be separated from the fundamental constitutional rights of freedom of press, speech and association which form the bedrock of every democratic Bill of Rights. Without such a recognition of this right of the working-class to organize politically in its own defense, you, Right Honourable Gentlemen, would not sit where you are today. The struggles of Chartism were in their time branded as seditious conspiracy, but you are reaping today the fruits of the Chartist victory.

Such a struggle is proceeding in India, not only on political, but on economic and social lines as well. The movement is all-embracing and is revolutionary in the truest sense of the word, for in its course, the entire outlook and condition of the people are destined to be changed. You cannot, even if you would, limit this great revolution to the upper nor even to the middle classes,

it has already spread to the wide masses of the working-population as well. The strike and lock-out of 150,000 textile workers now proceeding in Bombay, in defiance of the bombs and machine-guns of British Imperialism brought to defend the interests of Indian capitalism, proves this fact. To call such a movement, broad-based on fundamental human needs and aspirations a "conspiracy" artificially fostered by a handful of agitators with foreign gold, is to fly in the face of reality. The trial and conviction of dozens, nay of hundreds of individuals may delay, but it cannot prevent the steady growth of this movement of the Indian working-class towards emancipation from the most unbearable and heartless exploitation it has ever been the lot of any working-class to endure. Dozens of young men have already been arrested and imprisoned; others have been interned without trial, for the crime of having attempted to give leadership and direction to these growing aspirations of the Indian working-class. A new term has been invented in India, not found in the Penal Code, for depriving these people of their liberty. The familiar but false and obnoxious epithet of "Bolshevik Agent". People have been found guilty and sentenced to punishment on this charge, without a shadow of proof or legality. We demand that you protest, as do we, against the allegation that in working for the freedom of the Indian proletariat and peasantry, we are working for anything but the interests of our class. Only the other day, Bombay workers were shot down by the armed forces of the State, which combine with the capitalist class to prolong their starvation and misery, and to force them back to work on the terms which the employers dictate, at the point of the bayonet and by means of the machine-gun! Under such circumstance is there no need in India for a political party of the working-class to defend its own rights and interests, not less than for a party of the middle-class, which claims for itself a larger stake in the country? Yesterday it was this claim of the Indian bourgeoisie that was persecuted and condemned as "seditious conspiracy". Today it is the claim of the Indian proletariat that meets with tyrannous suppression.

Were another party in power in England now, we could expect it to sit idly by, while the weapons of the bomb and the Star-chamber proceed unchecked in India. But you are a Government of the working-class, pledged to support the interests and welfare of your class wherever these are jeopardized. As a Party, you have always proclaimed the international solidarity and brotherhood of the workers. As a Government, you are bound to protect the rights of the Indian workers to freedom of political association for economic ends. Under cover of a trial of a few individuals charged with "conspiracy", for the crime of having preached wholeheartedly the organization of the Indian workers and peasants into a political party of their own, a whole creed, an entire principle and the long history of working-class struggle for betterment is at stake, — the creed and principle and tradition upon which you yourselves, as a Party and as a Government, stand.

Therefore, Right Honourable and Honourable Gentlemen and Fellow-workers of Great Britain, I call upon you in the name of the Indian working-class and in the name of the Communist Party of India, whose right to exist as a legitimate organ of working-class opinion and aspirations is on trial in India today, along with the right of the Indian workers in general to organize themselves into a political party of their own, — I call upon you as the elected representatives of the British workers, and upon those workers themselves to see that justice to the Indian working-class prevails in India, no less than in other parts of the British Empire. Has Socialist and Communist propaganda, — that is to say working-class propaganda, — been declared illegal in Great Britain and the Dominions? Then why should it be illegal in British India? Have Socialist and Communist Parties, — that is to say, working-class parties, — been denied the right to exist in any other part of the British Empire? Then why should India be denied that right? Does affiliation to the Third International constitute a crime on the part of the Communist Party of Great Britain, of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa? Then why does such affiliation on the part of the Communist Party of India constitute "seditious conspiracy?"

The toiling masses of India will record the verdict of the British Labour Government upon this chapter in the history of their struggle for emancipation.

On behalf of the Communist Party of India
(signed) Manabendra Nath Roy.

March 21, 1924.