

India

Crushing the Working Class Movement in India

The League Against Imperialism has issued the following statement regarding the recent outlawing of the Communist Party of India :

In connection with the recent notification of the Government in India declaring the Communist Party an unlawful association, the following information will give an appreciation of what this new fascist measure actually means.

To support the granting of these sweeping powers, a statement is issued from Simla which says that the Communists have not tried to disguise their part in stirring up the recent Bombay Mill strikes. It then goes on to say that for a whole month the Kirti Kisan Party (Workers' and Peasants' Party), which is not a Communist organisation, had conducted village meetings in the Punjab—and that the Kirti-Kisan movement under various names, had been gaining some ground in areas hitherto little affected. The *Times* of July 27 says: "The movement may be described as the extreme left wing of the Congress with a strong Communist tinge."

So it may be taken for granted that not only organisations or persons that can be labelled Communist, but organisations or persons with a Communist tinge, will be drawn under this most obnoxious measure. This opinion is supported by the two following points:

In the House of Commons, on July 30, the Secretary of State for India, replying to James Maxton, M.P., said: "No other similar organisations have at present been declared unlawful."

It is also interesting to note a reply of the Secretary of State, to a further question by James Maxton, "If it is usual to declare illegal in other parts of the Empire political parties which are quite legal here in our own country?" The reply was, "Whatever may be the general answer, the case of India stands by itself."

A full appreciation cannot be obtained without a few further facts. When it is considered that the **ordinary law** as it stands, was used in the following manner against workers participating in an ordinary strike, some idea can be obtained what this new measure will mean.

In Bombay, during January this year, a meeting took place of delegates representing perfectly constitutional textile workers' trade unions from different textile centres throughout India. At this meeting it was decided that the only way to meet and resist the continued attacks upon the workers' conditions was by a general stoppage of work. At the same time a programme of demands was agreed to, and the date fixed for the calling of the General Strike was May 1.

The Government began to take action against the workers months before this date. A series of arrests took place in Cawnpore, Nagpur, Bombay and Sholapur, for speeches, etc. In the case of a worker, P. C. Joshi, who was arrested on March 8—the order for his arrest states: "P. C. Joshi, of the Cawnpore Majdoor (Workers' Union) has delivered various inflammatory speeches, the tendencies of which are to provoke discord between employers and employees. . . ." This comrade has since been sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment. Sentences of two years rigorous imprisonment for similar reasons have been given to workers in Bombay, Sholapur and elsewhere. One of these was the case of B. F. Ranadive, and it is interesting to note what the magistrate had to say when sentencing him to two years:

In the very beginning the accused had said that by the holding of a meeting, the hungry workers, the starving workers, were declaring war against starvation, against unemployment, against capitalism and against imperialism. The magistrate said that if the speech had contained nothing else, one could have had no objection, and it might have been held that "imperialism" referred to the system of Government, and that "war" was intended to convey nothing more than agitation or struggle, but it had to be remembered that the accused was addressing an ignorant and illiterate audience, consisting mostly of unemployed or as he (the accused) called them "hungry starving workers." The magistrate said, "In my opinion the effect that would be left in the mind of anyone hearing the speech would be not only to excite contempt for the Government, but to arouse feelings of hatred and disloyalty to it. I therefore convict the accused. The speech is a clear incentive to violence and bloodshed, made at a time of great unrest

and trouble, which I think aggravates the offence." (Bombay Chronicle, May 30, 1934.)

On the first day of the textile strike the whole of the strike committee was arrested, under the Bombay Special (Emergency) Powers Act, an act passed ostensibly to be used at the time of communal riots, under which a person can be arrested by the police and kept in prison for a period of three months without trial or without even being produced before a magistrate.

Other powers, such as Section 144, banning meetings and processions, were used against the workers. Pickets were arrested. Lathi charges were a daily occurrence, and at Delhi and Bombay shooting took place, many workers being wounded and some killed.

On top of this the Government have sanctioned a prosecution against eight members of the strike committee under the Trades Dispute Act of 1929, on the grounds that the strike was not legitimate.

Here it is of interest to recall the statement of the Royal Whitley Commission (Indian Labour) Report on the subject of strikes in Indian industry: "But although workers may have been influenced by persons with nationalist, Communist or commercial ends to serve, we believe that there has rarely been a strike of any importance which has not been due, entirely or largely, to economic reasons."

These facts will show the powers the Government of India already have and how they are used. From this it can readily be appreciated what this new fascist measure will mean. And it is clear that these new powers are to be used, not merely against the Communist Party of India, but also against the trade unions, Strike Committees and Workers' and Peasants' Parties to crush any movement to defend or improve economic conditions in the struggle for independence.