

THE COLONIES

Industrial Conflicts and the Position of the Workers in British India

By W. Lada.

It is perfectly evident to every communist, that the development of the revolutionary proletariat in the vast lands of East India is of tremendous significance for the world revolution. Years ago it was declared, that when revolution seizes the Far East, then the hour of the world revolution will strike. The communists and the Red International of Labor Unions have demonstrated by their daily activity that they regard this old thesis very seriously. How right they are in doing so is best proved by the recent exchange of notes between Curzon and Russia.

Labor struggles and working conditions are phenomena from which we can inform ourselves on the development of the proletariat as a class. The facts we give below are derived from the *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, of February, and the *Labour Gazette* of May, supplemented by information from a few other sources:

In 1921 about 400 labor conflicts took place in India, involving over 1½ million days. In 1922 there were only 278 conflicts, participated in by 435,434 workers, and involving a loss of 3,972,727 working days. Evidently an ebb-tide following the flow, a phenomenon which we may observe all the world over. But all the same a really imposing movement, when we consider its comparative youth.

The industries chiefly affected by the struggles are the jute industry, the railways (including the railroad workshops), the cotton industry, machine building, iron and steel works, shipyards, and the jet industry. The five industries together sustained 32% of the total lost working days.

The majority of the conflicts (42%) arose on the wage question, the working staff question accounted for 18% and the working hours question for 12%. 67% of the labor conflicts ended completely in favor of the employers, 12% ended in favor of the workers, and 9% with a compromise. Thus the percentage of lost struggles was extremely high. It is highly probable that the imperfect organizations possessed by the workers frequently place them at a great disadvantage.

The provinces in which the strike movement has concentrated are as follows: Bengal with 1,803,50 lost working days, Bombay with 763,111, Bihar and Orissa with 744,941.

In the June number of our Indian brother organ: *The Vanguard*, which is published in Zürich in the English language, we find further statements on the strike movement in 1923, the figures being taken from the official statistics. In eight provinces of India there have been 72 labor struggles involving 68,759 workers and a loss of 317,783 working days. 33 struggles took place in the cotton factories, 8 in the jute factories. In 35 cases the disputes arose on wages, in 5 the question was that of bonuses on account of increased prices, in 14 the working staff question was the cause of conflict, and in 3 cases only the working hours. Only 16 conflicts were won by the workers, whilst 43 were lost; in 8 cases a partial victory was won.

That the wage-slave drivers among the English in India are beginning to take alarm at the labor movement may be seen from the decision to publish statistics of labor conflicts regularly in future. This is to be the barometer showing the trend of feeling obtaining among the Hindu working masses.

In this same number of our Indian brother organ we find a notice to the effect that for the first time in Madras, the first of May was celebrated by two mass meetings, as a proletarian festival and fighting day.

The general course taken by the latest struggles may be seen from the results of the textile workers' strike in Ahmedabad, which broke out in consequence of the determination of the manufacturers to cut down wages by 20%. Besides the introduction of scab labor an extensive propaganda of lies, was conducted against the refractory wage slaves re-inforced by lock-out measures. One part of the workers chose rather to return to the villages than give in. The struggle lasted for about 2 months. Finally the employers carried off the victory. But the hate which they have sown — and continue to sow — in the hearts of the vanquished, by compelling these to work for starvation wages, they will reap as a whirlwind — and without the aid of the "seditious propaganda" of Soviet Russia, of the CI and the RILU!

The truly starvation wages paid to the Indian workers are forcefully commented upon in an interesting report made by

the Bombay labor bureau, published recently in the organ of this bureau, and containing the following statements, taken from the May number of the London *Labour Gazette*:

The investigation extended to the households of 2437 workers' families and to 603 unmarried workmen; 49.5% of these were factory workers. The average family in Bombay consists of 1.1 man, 1.1 woman, and 2.0 children; besides this, an average Bombay family has 0.6 relations outside the city. One hundred families yield 154 productive workers, these comprising 104 men, 42 women, and 8 children. The average weekly income of a family amounts to a total of only 17 shillings and 3pence. It is perfectly obvious that this income means an existence on the verge of starvation. And there are many who do not earn even as much as this, whose total income is only about 13 shillings a week. For this the workers can naturally buy little else than rice for food, and rice is the staff of life for 95% of the workers' families. For the Hindus, rice is almost the same as potatoes to the Germans. Only 5.5% of the Indian workers eat beef. Mutton is eaten somewhat more, milk is consumed by only 47.7%, and a sort of native butter by 48.9%.

Even more palpable evidence of the misery of the Indian workers is afforded by the housing conditions. 97% of the workers' families live in dwellings consisting of one room. In 1921 in Bombay there were 3,125 one-roomed dwellings, inhabited by one and more families, and of these there were 1,955 "dwellings" inhabited by two families, 558 by three families, 242 by four, 136 by five, 42 by six, 34 by seven, and 58 by 8 and more families! The beds were common property of several persons. The report states that there is great infant mortality in these "over-populated" dwellings. With that love of truth so characteristic of every son of Albion — including of course Lord Curzon! — the report further admits that the housing conditions "leave much to be desired".

A further proof of the misery in which the Indian workers live is given by the statistics on indebtedness. 47% of the workers' families are in debt, and have to pay 75% and even higher interest. 37.2% of the families buy on credit, 29% partly in cash and partly on credit. This signifies that they are firmly in the clutches of usurers in money and goods.

These side-lights may serve as a preliminary illumination of the situation and struggles of the Indian proletariat; that proletariat which Lord Curzon, with paternal care, is endeavoring to protect from the "demoralizing" influence of Soviet Russia, of the CI, and of the RILU.

THE UNITED FRONT

The Fight for the United Front

By V. Vaksov (Moscow).

The International Federation of Transport Workers, and the Russian Unions of Railwaymen, Transport Workers, and Seamen, took the first steps towards a proletarian united front against the attacks of reactionary bourgeoisie, on the occasion of the joint conference held in Berlin. The conservative section of the ITWF, protested energetically against the formation of a united fighting front of the proletariat. This resistance will be the less calculated to detract from the united front of the proletariat now in process of formation, if the other craft internationalists rapidly follow the example of the transport workers, and take up the joint struggle against War, Reaction, and Fascism. The revolutionary minorities must work in this direction with increased energy.

It is now the turn of the International Metal Workers Federation. This forms the strongest and most decisive organization belonging to the Amsterdam International. The International Metal Workers Federation numbers about 3 million members. But the Metal Workers Federation is no firmly organized, it is lacking in international discipline. But on the other hand it counts among its members such gigantic organizations as for instance, the German Metal Workers Union, with its 1½ million members.

A powerful opposition exists within the ranks of the IMWF, an opposition representing the ideology of the Red International of Labor Unions. The strength and influence of this opposition varies in the different national unions, from almost 50% (German Metal Workers Union) down to 10 or 15% (in a number of unions in Great Britain). The origin and growth of this opposition has a two-fold effect; in the first place the reformists (especially those of the extreme right) are roused to boiling point; they cause all sorts of repressive