

★ For Punjab Labour Seats ★

Factory Bosses And Open British Agents Oppose Communists

FOR eight years, Labour has been "represented" in the Punjab Assembly by men who had no connection whatsoever with the working-class. One representative was Rai Bahadur Sohanlal, a rich industrialist and toady. What better comment on his ability to serve the workers can there be than the fact that today he is contesting the Commerce seat for the Assembly where the electorate consists of top-ranking industrial and commercial magnates of the Province?

For the constituency of the so-called organised labour of the North-Western Railway, Honorary Magistrate, Rai Bahadur Sitaram, was a member till the dissolution of the Assembly. Notorious as a money-lender, he scarcely knew what his voters looked like.

Only from the Amritsar-Gurdaspur seat was the sitting Member (Diwan Chamanlal) of the Congress, one who had connections with the working-class movement. But he too had ceased in recent years to take active interest in Trade Unions.

But during these eight years, the workers in the Punjab have grown considerably in strength. The Provincial Trade Union Congress with its affiliated Unions has an aggregate membership of 25,000. It is the leaders of this organised movement who are standing for election to the Provincial Assembly as Communist candidates for the three Labour seats—men who have lived and worked among their voters for years—FAZL KLAHI QUREAN, ABDUL GHAFUR TAISH and B. P. L. BEDI.

But once again, against them stand opportunistic toadies, Rai Bahadurs and Sardars, millowners, landlords, the enemies of the workers. I saw them all, at the time of the scrutiny of the nomination papers. There they were accompanied by highly-paid lawyers—a prize bunch with their big bunches in expensive suits, their chauffeurs parked outside.

A Good Look At Them

Take a good look at them. One of them is Sardar Barkat Hyat Khan, who stands against Qurban from the North Non-Union Labour Constituency. He is the brother of the Late Unionist Premier, Sikandar Hyat Khan—a big landlord, Director of the Wah Cement Factory and of the Rawalpindi Electric Supply Company.

What does he count on? Well, he admits openly that his seat was specially created for Sikandar Hyat's family (the Khattars). A large number of voters come from the Wah Cement Factory (owned by the Khattars), and all workers here are tenants of the 'Khattar' lands.

Take a look at another, Rai Bahadur Devichand Khanna, also standing from the same constituency. He is a big industrialist with none too savoury a record of treatment of workers. What does he count on? Help from fellow employers who will force their workers to vote for him. Devichand is really one of a whole team of Rai Bahadurs who are seeking to represent labour.

For the Railway seat, against the Communist candidate B. P. L. BEDI, stand three Rai Bahadurs. The first is, the old sitting Member, Sitaram. The second is Ramjaya Kapur who owns one of the biggest printing establishments in Lahore and aspires to become a leading industrialist of the province. The third is Gangesaran, another industrialist and commercial magnate. Treasurer of the Imperial Bank of India,

his only connection with Railways is that he supplies a chain of cashiers to them.

What do these men count on? They make no bones about it—cash and more cash!

For the Amritsar-Gurdaspur Non-Union Labour seat, there is no Rai Bahadur for the bureaucrats and toadies to back up. There is, however, Bashir Bukhtiar, the notorious leader of the Government-favoured Royist Federation of Labour. He is said to be a friend not only of the employers, but of the police and the bureaucrats too.

His record is a long string of tales in which he figures as an agent of these friends of his. Thoroughly discredited to-day, he relies only on these friends for votes, and there is no doubt that official pressure will be used in favour of Bukhtiar.



Fazl Klahi Qurban

If it were a straight fight against the toadies, the Communists would trounce them despite all the machinations, despite the way the constituencies have been demarcated and all the pressure of employers and officials.

But the Congress has also put up candidates. And there are some Leaguers standing too.

Splitting The Progressive Vote

For the Amritsar seat, Maulana Daud Ghasnavi, President of the Provincial Congress is himself standing. Maulana Sahib has never in his life done a stroke of

trade union work, nor has he really anything at all to do with the workers of Amritsar.

Yet he is contesting this seat. The reason is simple: Maulana Sahib cannot enter the Assembly from any Muslim constituency in the whole of the province; so he is trying for a labour seat, quite openly depending on the help of Congress-minded employers.

The Maulana has also, it is understood, plenty of funds at his disposal for opening branches of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh—whose offices have surprisingly enough sprung up in the constituency almost simultaneously with his decision to stand.

For the North, the Congress has put up a Congress Socialist, Abdul Aziz, who used to do some Trade Union work in Rawalpindi about five years ago, but has since been in jail.

For the Railway seat, the Congress ticket is said to have been given to an Amritsar lawyer named Bhagirath Das who is a complete nonentity, unknown to the public or to Congress workers. It is a complete mystery why he has been selected by the Congress.

Though the League has set up no official candidates, yet in each

constituency, there is a candidate claiming League support. In Amritsar, one E. K. Mir is standing. He is said to have some support in Gurdaspur.

In the Railway Constituency, the Muslim Employees' Union has put up a candidate with little backing from the workers and with a strike-breaking record. In the North Constituency, one Hyat Bukhsh Mistri of the Electric Supply Company is standing. He has a clean record, but has nothing to do with the Trade Union movement.

All these claim League support. None of them has any chance of success, and will only serve to split the progressive vote.

Withdraw In Favour of Genuine Trade Unionists

It is this division of votes between the Congress and League candidates that is giving hope to the Rai Bahadurs, the Tribal Chieftains, Barkat Hyat, and the notorious Bukhtiar. If the Congress and the League leaders are at all anxious to see that real representatives of workers go to the Assembly, they should withdraw their candidates in favour of genuine Trade Union leaders set up by the Communists.

In Ganjam (Orissa) Dist. Board Elections

COMMUNISTS FIGHT CORRUPT RAJAS, SINGLE-HANDED

Win One Seat in 3, Good Poll in Another

Congress Leaders Ally With Zemindars

Corrupt and crafty landlords like the Raja of Khallikote have been lords of Ganjam district for years. Their men packed the District Board which was elected nine years ago. They were a terror to the people and bought over some of the Congress members of the Board, who were led by a certain Dibakar Patnaik.

Patnaik deserted the Congress in 1940 to join the 'Swaraj Party' formed by renegades from the Congress and became the Chairman of the Board with the backing of Khallikote. There has been mismanagement and corruption and gross injustice to employees of the Board and school teachers maintained by them.

WHAT was wanted in the elections this time was the election of incorruptible men, devoted to the service of the people who would not bend before the zemindars' terror. The Congress with its immense hold on the masses, could have smashed the zemindars in a straight fight this time.

This is exactly what the Communists tried their best to bring about. But the Provincial Congress leaders preferred to strike a bargain with the zemindars and careerists instead and the Communists had to fight them all single-handed, in Samakhemidi and Dharakota-Saragada.

Scramble For Congress Ticket

When the elections drew near, the Ganjam Congress was bitterly divided into rival factions led by Biswanath Das (Congress ex-Premier of Orissa) and Umscha-

being put forward by Biswanath Das and Patnaik. Sjt. Mehtab said nothing definite, talked of winning the elections by 'any and every means' and did not dare to announce the names of the candidates till the last day for filling nomination papers.

The Communists did all they could to persuade the Congress leaders to make a clean sweep of the old clique in a straight fight. In a letter addressed to Sjt. Mehtab, Communist leader, Gurusaran Patnaik, made a strong appeal for a Congress-Communist joint front against renegades and corrupt agents of the zemindars.

He cited the case of Kshetramoni Panda, associated till recently with the National War Front, who was now being given a Congress ticket. Sjt. Mehtab discussed the matter with Patnaik, seemed to disapprove of Panda's nomination, but later sent a written reply that there could be no co-operation with the Communists.

Gloves Off Against Communists

What is tragic is that Sjt. Mehtab decided instead to co-operate with Khallikote in the name of fighting the Communists. Out of the seven seats in the Khallikote zemindari, he surrendered four seats to the Raja, so as to go all out against the Communists in the three seats they were contesting because they have strong kisan bases there.

After that, it was gloves off against the Communists—with

the support of anybody and everybody and by all means, fair or foul.

Not only notorious black-marketeers, but Adars (Revenue collectors) of zemindars too turned 'Congressmen' overnight.

In Samakhemidi, and Dharakota, the Court of Wards officials canvassed for the Congress and against the Communists so as to intimidate the Raja's tenants.

On polling day, the Dharakot Estate proclaimed by the beat of drums the seizure of the property of Mohan Bhuyan, a poor peasant, who was a Communist candidate. The idea was to throw out a broad hint to all who voted for him.

The Raja of Saragada himself went round holding meetings of the village rich, asking them to vote either for his own nominee or the Congress candidate, but never for the Communist.

Not long ago, Raghunath Panda, the zemindar of Aska, had presented a purse for the War Fund to the Governor of Orissa. But now he turned a "Congressman" overnight and poured out plenty of money for the Congress election campaign and lent his cars and buses for it.

Towards the end, these elements went all out to fool, bribe, brow-beat the people, disregarding all principles.

They offered money to poor peasants to get them to vote Congress. In Mukhtundpur village, people were offered money, but they refused indignantly and declared they would vote Communist.

They got hold of men who had returned from the military labour corps, and took them round calling them heroes of the Indian National Army!

In Gunthapur area, the Congress candidate, who in a village purohit (priest) got desperate when nothing seemed to move the village folk. In the end, he called them all together, fell prostrate at their feet, and begged for their votes. The same religious sentiment was also exploited on polling day, when Brahmans asked for votes for the

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School-Teacher To People's Tribune

Universally Respected: Offered Tickets By Both Congress-League

For eleven years Headmaster of the Bijapur Central Urdu School: founder of the Bijapur branch of the ALL-INDIA CHARKHA SANGH which provided much-needed employment to 1,000 poor Muslim women; builder of the ANJUMAN-I-ISLAM; loved and respected by Hindus and Muslims alike so much so that he was invited by the local Congress and League leaders to resign from the Communist Party and stand as their candidate, for the coming Provincial elections—such is NABI SAHIR (known as Balsingh Master), Communist candidate for the Bijapur District Muslim Constituency.

BORN of a poor family of Muslim fruit-sellers which had migrated from Balsingh, a village near Sholapur, Nabi Sahib's parents had to stint themselves hard to give him an education in Urdu. After doing the 7th Standard in Hindi, he went to Ahmedabad's Urdu Training College where he ultimately became a trained teacher and returned to his home-town.

Secret Propagandist

In 1925, he became a teacher in the Bijapur Urdu School. There were altogether 12,000 Muslims in Bijapur town, but they were extremely poor and backward. How poor they still are can be gauged from the fact that the total Muslim vote from Bijapur for the recent Central Assembly elections was only 17!

Love for his own poor Muslim people, and the desire of freedom of the motherland both moved the young teacher. Being a teacher in a Government school, he could not take part in politics. But in his lessons to his students he roused their patriotic anti-British sentiment! "Our country is a slave country, it is the job of all youngmen like us to free it," he would say.

In 1927 Nabi Sahib decided to learn English and within two years he passed the Matriculation Examination.

In those days the branch of the Anjuman-i-Islam in Bijapur had no building of its own, Nabi Sahib took a leading part in raising public funds for it and the building he had set his heart on was finally completed in 1934. He was a member of its Managing Committee.

"Islam Against Slavery"

The Congress-Khilafat movement of the early twenties, while he was still a student, had left its mark on him. In Ahmedabad, he had heard Gandhiji's indictment of foreign rule and the call of self-sacrifice, so too the flaming defence of Khilafat by the All Brothers in his own native Bijapur, after their release from Bijapur jail. Now the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 stirred him deeply. His love for liberty pulled him towards the struggle but life had saddled him with a responsibility as the only earning member of a poor family. He could not join the struggle. Neither could he do open political propaganda.

But Nabi Sahib found a way out. He taught himself Arabic, studied the Quran and from 1933 began to hold weekly religious services in the Juma Masjid. Here he awakened in the Muslims pride in their cultural heritage to rouse them to fight for freedom.

He would talk of the Prophet's life and show that Islam calls upon every Muslim to fight against slavery for no true Muslim should bend his knee to any earthly tyrant.

He would cite the Prophet's injunctions of zakat, khairat, etc. to show that Islam, hales misers who hoard money and the rich who fail to help the poor.

And he would appeal to his poor Muslim brothers not to be extravagant at the time of marriages etc. and call on them to educate themselves.

First Contact With Socialism

In 1930, Nabi Sahib became the Headmaster of the Urdu Cen-

tral School, with seventeen assistants and 450 Muslim students in his charge. In 1936 he made his first contact with Socialist ideas.

At that time G. ADHIKARI (one of the top leaders of the Communist Party) was interned in Bijapur after his release from jail in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. Adhikari used to go to the local oil mills and work there. In the oil mills also worked several young Muslims, who had studied under Nabi Sahib. Liked him for the great love he had for the poor and admired him for his wisdom.

When Adhikari talked to these boys in the mill on an India free from the British and from poverty, they immediately said: "Our master also used to talk like that. He is a fine man, You must meet him."

And so the students brought Nabi Sahib to the oil mills to meet Adhikari. Nabi Sahib hated poverty but had no clear ideas then as to how to fight it, he believed that it was God-ordained and all that good and true men could do was to help the poor.

It was Dr. Adhikari who initiated him to Socialist ideas. He gave him an Urdu book on Socialism entitled "Duniya Mein Garibi Kyon?" (Why is There Poverty in the World?)

Propagandist For Socialism

Nabi Sahib took it home and read it the same night. It moved him greatly. He now had what he had hitherto vaguely desired, an effective weapon to do away with poverty and misery among his people. The next day the Headmaster called up his assistants and told them that it was a book they all must read.

Thus began Nabi Sahib's interest in Socialism. He wanted more books on Communism. He used to get the illegal Communist organ of the Communist Party, and later the National Front, and the Marathi Krami from Bom-

bay. He spoke to the students on Socialism, and held weekly discourses in the Sikandar and other Masjids. They used to be on the Prophet's life as of old, but they had now a new content, a new message—the message of Socialism.

Warnings For Political Activity: In Jail

All these activities could not for long be concealed from the authorities. They came to know of them and Nabi Sahib received several warnings from the Educational Inspector and the Chairman of the Municipal School Board. But he kept on doing what his urge dictated. In the 1937 Elections, only the League put up Muslim candidates, and he and his Congress colleagues worked for their success. In 1938, he enrolled members for the Congress, and did open propaganda for it.

In 1940, when Individual Satyagraha began, Nabi Sahib could not keep away. For many years his great desire was to take part in the National struggle and this time he did so and was sent to jail. During the nine months he was inside, he came in touch with several Communists and at Yeravada got the chance to attend the Study Classes on Marxism run by Nath Ghanekar, who is now standing as a Communist candidate from Satara for the Bombay Provincial Assembly.

Released from jail, he had lost his job but found more time to work for the people. He gave private tuitions for two hours a day and earned fifty to sixty rupees a month to maintain his family. But he spent the rest of the time in helping his people. It was at this time that he opened a branch of the All-India Charkha Sangh which provided employment for 1,000 poor Muslim women.

Every week for two or three days he would go to the neighbouring villages and speak to the villagers. The main theme of his speeches was that they must

fight for freedom from the foreign rulers and from the native parasites, the zamindars and the capitalists.

In 1942, he came to the Bombay AICC session as a visitor. He heard the speeches of Sajjad Zaheer, Ashraf and Sardesai, the Communist members. Their policy of Congress-League unity for National Government for defence of the country and against the threat of struggle in that situation, found an echo in him. He was convinced it was the only correct policy.

But when he returned to Bijapur, a warrant was already out for his arrest and he was detained in jail for sixteen months. He was released in December 1943. Inside the Belgaum jail, Nabi Sahib, though not a Communist, defended and explained the Party's policy in every discussion with his Congress colleagues.

Organiser Of The People

As early as 1939, Nabi Sahib had seen the need to organise the toiling masses. He together with Sit Joshi and other radical Congressmen organised the Beedi Workers' Union and soon brought out all the Beedi workers on strike. They won their demands. In another strike, a settlement seemed difficult and in order to bring pressure on the owners Nabi Sahib invested his entire savings of Rs. 1,200/-, collected more funds, and started a Co-operative Beedi Factory employing about 150 strikers.

The owners had hired goondas to attack Nabi Sahib, but the beedi workera, who discovered the plan, volunteered to provide a guard for him. For many days it was quite a sight to see Nabi Sahib being shadowed by the ruffians to get a chance to strike, and the workers shadowing them to strike back if they dared to lift their hand against their leader.

When Bijapur was in the grip of famine in 1942-43, over 1,000 people signed a petition demanding Nabi Sahib's release to help the people in their distress.

When Nabi Sahib came out of jail, he was so overcome by the people's suffering that he told N. K. Upadhyaya, the Communist organiser who had been exonerated from Dharwar and Hubli and who was then in Bijapur: "I cannot bear this, I will go back to jail!" But Upadhyaya argued with him and convinced him that it would be escapism and his job was to stick to the people and help them.

From then on Nabi Sahib has been tirelessly serving his people.

He took a leading part in organising the People's Food Committee, and the popular campaign against rotten Jawari which was being sold in Government depots, for a rice ration, etc.

Anti-Communism In The Congress

He organised Red Flag Unions of tailors, motor knagars, hamals and led their strikes against wages, victimisation, and for increase in wages etc. All these strikes were successful.

In Bijapur to-day any tongu-walla, cartman, or any of the mass poor who have any complaints always go to the Red Flag and Nabi Sahib for redress. They regard him as a real people's tribune.

In 1944, Nabi Sahib, became a whole-time of the Communist Party. It was a natural and inevitable step for him.

But so much was he respected for his sterling integrity and sacrifice that he was included in the Karnatak Provincial Congress Workers' Assembly as a member of its Working Committee. Whereas all over the country the newly-formed Congress assemblies were based on exclusion of the Communists, in Karnatak Nabi Sahib was included in its highest Committee, and was elected Secretary of the District Constructive Work Sub-Committee though he was a whole-time worker of the Communist Party then.

All Want Him

When the question of elections came and the exclusion of the Communists from all Executive posts inside the Congress had already become semi-official Congress policy, prominent local Congress leaders requested Nabi Sahib to resign from the Communist Party and stand on the Congress ticket for the Assembly Elections.

For Nabi Sahib this seemed like trifling with something sacred and he promptly replied: "I will never give up my Party, but I will remain outside the Congress and work for the same end, the freedom of our country through a united struggle by our people."

Soon came the offer by the local League leaders. They urged, "Come into the League and stand on the League ticket." Nabi Sahib's reply was "If you take me while I remain a member of the Communist Party, I will come."

"Votes And Notes" For Balsingh

When the Party wanted him to stand as a candidate and the Central Committee announced his candidature, the town poor were happy. Many of them said: "Masterab Apke hie vote bhi denge aur note bhi denge" (We will give both our votes and money for you). And some of them contributed cash on the spot.

That is how the town poor, the toiling people, love him. They know that Nabi Sahib does not stand merely to get a seat, but to fight for their interest and for the only programme that ensures freedom for India both from foreign rule and gruelling poverty.

Who will stand against him is not yet known. There are only two Muslim seats and as many as twelve applications have been made to the League. I asked Nabi Sahib if there was any good candidate among them and he replied with a pained expression: "They are all capitalists, black-marketeers or persons who have never lifted a little finger to help the people."

Inside the League there are many who say Nabi Sahib must be supported. Inside the Congress too there is a section which says, "He is the best man. We should support him. What does it matter if he is a Communist and talks of Palestine—That is a thing which affects the Punjab (!). Here Balsingh Master will be with us in everything that is good and just."

Such is the love and respect that Nabi Sahib inspires in all sections of the people.

by A. S. R. Chari