

Victory To Postmen!

DIARY OF FOUR DAYS OF STRIKE IN BOMBAY

First in 1920, and now again in 1946, a quarter of a century after, with the greatest of wars thrown in between. Then the postmen fought and won their battle, single-handed though they were. They will win again, for in addition to their own strength and unity, they have the might of 40 crore Indians behind them.

THE bureaucrats, however, think otherwise. They started off with a war of nerves. Alienate public sympathy from the postmen—that was their first aim.

"The workers demands are too petty and not new," declared Krishna Prasad. "They will cost about Rs. 0.74 crores. Therefore the postcard will have to be priced at one anna," warned another Govt. spokesman.

Threats, Intimidation

Then they tried to intimidate and frighten the postmen.

In Bombay cheap grain facilities were ordered to be withdrawn from July 15.

Occupants of Govt. quarters were warned that they might have to vacate if they went on strike.

Help of military personnel would be taken; police would protect loyal officers; Boy Scouts would come forward to save the public from inconvenience; the strike would be illegal; such were the threats held out before the workers.

To break their morale, they were told that the strike would fizzle out because among other things, the powerful Federation of Posts and Telegraphs Unions, led by Dewan Chamanlal, and the Posts and Telegraphs Muslims' Employees' Association were opposed to it—and they represented more than 75 per cent of the staff.

Calculations Upset

The strike, however, did come off on the 11th as scheduled, upsetting all the calculations of the bureaucrats. And it shows no signs of weakening.

Here are a few snapshots of what I saw in Bombay during the last five days—of the growing determination of the workers and the mounting public support behind them.

JULY 10: A public meeting held in the evening under the joint auspices of the Communist Party, the Girni Kamgar Union (Red Flag), the BCCI Railwaymen's Union, etc., supported the workers' just demands and struggle.

At 9-30 p.m. is held a mass meeting of postmen at Jinnah Hall, amidst unforgettable scenes of wild enthusiasm. A procession of Muslim employees marches in. Punctually at 12 midnight, "Remember 11th July" badges are torn off their shirts by the postmen. July 11th has come. The strike is on.

JULY 11: First day of strike. Crowds gather outside every post office cur-

Krishna Prasad has resumed his sabre-rattling over the radio. His thundering, appeals, cajoling, however, all leave the workers cold.

July 12: The Director General of Posts and Telegraphs indulges in a bit of self-congratulation—"Things are not so bad as I had expected." But facts speak otherwise.

Papers carry columns of news to indicate that the strike is a huge success, and even those areas which were not originally affected are rapidly joining in.

Ultimatum Fails

The Bombay P.M.G. has issued an ultimatum, prominently displayed in the Times of India—"Return to duty within 72 hours or the vacancies will be filled up." Plus this—"In my opinion the strike should fizzle out in a couple of days". The men must return the uniforms, pay regular bazaar rates for their ration—no more con-

cessions and vacate their quarters.

"Threats will not affect the strike in any way", says Dalvi, the All-India leader of the men.

More support for workers—and from no less persons than Gandhiji and Pt. Nehru.

"Conduct your strike peacefully. Success will surely be yours," encourages Gandhiji.

The workers' case appears to be just. Why has the Government suppressed the Report of its own (Krishna Prasad) Enquiry Committee? Asks Pt. Nehru.

Despite all the tall claims of being able to maintain services, the P.M.G. is finding it hard going.

The Civil Pioneer Corps which was expected to clear the dump has not arrived; nor the Polish emigrants, who are usually ready for any dirty job.

But the P.M.G.'s tale of woe is not yet over. He just can't get men, even on Rs. 5 a day, to do black-legging.

Clerks have also refused to clear the mail from the roadside boxes. Not their job, they bluntly say.

Even the military would not do anything more than help in clearing the accumulated mail.

Big work by the students. The Rula College was on sympathetic strike today—postmen addressed them—"Student-Postman Unity Zindabad"—that was the slogan of the day. Meetings held at the Khalsa, Podar and St. Xavier's Colleges. Gate meetings and college meetings, jointly addressed.

The entire organised working class pledged its support to the strikers at a meeting organised by the local trade unions, the BPTUC, AITUC and the BSU, this evening.

At night there is a huge meeting of postmen at Foras Road. Slogans of "Bewoorshahi Murdabad," "Postal Strike Zindabad," "Post Kamgar Ki Jal" rent the air.

JULY 13: Third day of the strike. The strike is spreading. Encouraging news comes from everywhere. Madras, where the strike was not complete to begin with, is now fully in it.

The city from one end to another is suddenly flooded with little red posters—"Out battle is against the Government NOT against the people. The people are our judges," reads one of these. Others appeal to the people for help.

A Congressman is furious with his colleague for getting his letter from the post office. "Certainly you would not have died if you did not read it just today", he shouted. Harsh words, but he was furious over his friend's cooperation with the Government.

Students Again

Big news again from students. The BSU has succeeded in getting closed four distributing centres, the Khalsa and Podar colleges in the North and Wilson and Grant Medical Colleges in the South.

Authorities began to climb down. No more restrictions on buying food at concession rates.

Though a local factory discharged 1,100 men today not one offered himself to the P.M.G., even when the latter offered Rs. 10 a day.

"It is authoritatively learnt that the P.M.G. has been ordered to have informal talks with Dalvi, the All-India leader of the Postmen and Sjt. B. G. Kher, Bombay's Premier".

A mammoth meeting at Kamgar Maidan. Three thousand five hundred men are on strike. But the crowd is over 15,000. The working class of Bombay is behind the men.

JULY 14: Today is a holiday, being Sunday. Thirty lakh letters pile up at the G.P.O. It is the day when 700 men of the Telegraph Dept. will strike. The bureaucracy again threatens: "Illegal strike". The men hit back—"Go and do your worst. We are out."

A mass meeting of textile workers under the GPU supports the strike.

Night once again. Jinnah Hall—scenes of July 10th are repeated. The same enthusiasm. Now the Telegraphmen are on strike. The strikers' ranks swell. Their cause is just. They must win.

—by P. B. Rangnekar

SNAPSHOTS FROM SUPPRESSED KRISHNA PRASADA REPORT

The Krishna Prasad report—go to any meeting in connection with the Postal strike and you will hear of this report. It was written in 1945 by a Committee appointed by the Government of India to tide over the threat of a strike by Postmen. It was presided over by Mr. Krishna Prasad, the present Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs.

THE report was suppressed. What it revealed the Government dared not publish. For it would have created a scandal in the civilised world, so horrifying were the conditions that the Committee was forced to note.

Today People's Age gives the following exclusive snapshots from the "Forbidden Report". Read them and you will know why the Report was suppressed and also why the postal employees are out today on strike, why every Indian must support them. Remember also that these are conditions in the best Provinces. You can imagine what they must be in the worst.

Rs. 1,000. In 1944, 28 cases recorded—sum borrowed approximately Rs. 15,000. Inferior staff—in 1944, 33 cases borrowed Rs. 8,000.

In 1942-43, the Committee recorded from 13 Postal Co-operative Societies in Bombay Circle, there were 3,624 borrowers; loans granted approximately Rs. 5,16,000. Next year, borrowers approximately 4,000; loans granted Rs. 6½ lakhs.

In 1944, of the Rs. 40,000 borrowed by Postmen and lower staff in Bombay city, only Rs. 13,000 were loaned by the Co-operative Societies, the rest, Rs. 27,000, has to be borrowed from Pathans, Marwaris, etc. who charge a rate of usury at 300% or more.

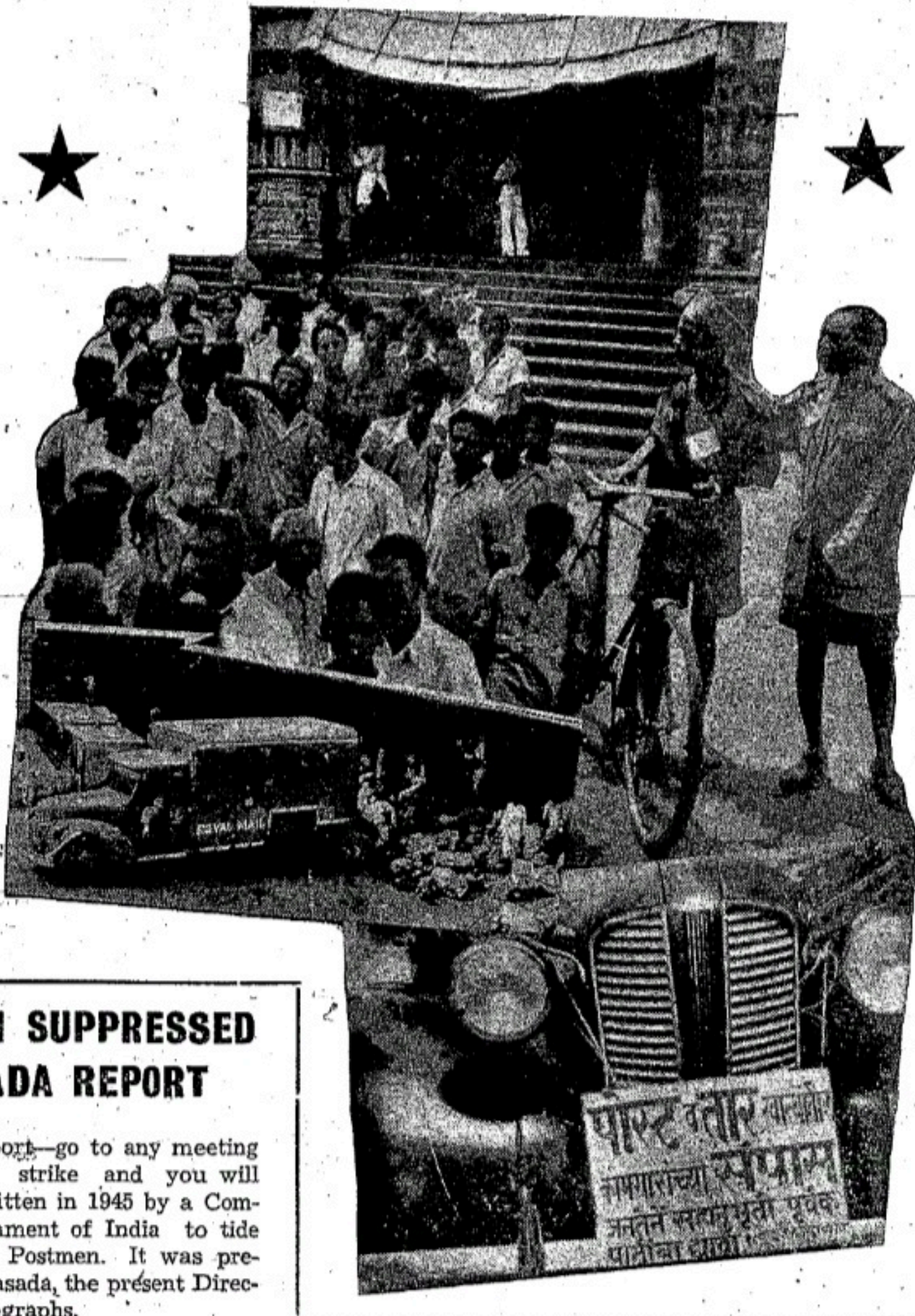
A witness before the Committee was asked about what recreation he had. Recreation? That was a foreign word to him. He never had it. When pressed for answer, he replied: "I take my daughter out, whenever I get some spare time. But on the road she asks for sweets. And then I have to rush her back home"—He could not afford to give her that!

Before the Committee came a shabby village postman, a human skeleton, he had blisters on his feet. "Are you ill", asked the boss. The witness showed how he had to cover jungle areas on foot for seven days at a stretch, carrying even valuable postal parcels. He had no shoes, no place for rest or food. And he obviously could not carry his ration for seven days on person.

They say the Committee was 'moved.'

Exclusive

Indebtedness among employees; (to take just two findings): In Poona among postmen and mail guards—the Committee found four cases who in 1939 had borrowed approximately



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SOME REVEALING FACTS

If ALL the demands of the postal staff, are met IN FULL, it will cost the Treasury not more than Rs. 10.74 crores.

The Post and Telegraph Department during 1942-1945 alone piled up a net profit (Government say it is run on commercial basis) of Rs. Rs. 23.75 crores! It has been making regular profits ever since 1934.

In the last Budget, the Government put an end to the Excess Profits Tax which got them from Tatas and Birlas an annual revenue of Rs. 75 crores. Seven times what it will cost them to meet the demands of the Postal staff.

If 8-hour day be the rule, the men are calculated to be working 533 days in a year. Of course, there is NO extra payment for this overtime.

After the 1920 strike they were granted wage-increase, in some cases from Rs. 12 to Rs. 30 per month. In 1931, there was a drastic cut in these! Because "expenditure had to be brought as nearly as possible in economic relation with receipts."

Unlike railways (also a Central Government Department) the postmen are NOT entitled (except in Bombay city) to facilities for cheap grain.

The lowest wage in Post and Telegraph Department is Rs. 8 per month, lower than in any Government Department, or public or private concern! After 30 years of service, a lower grade employee retires on a pension of Rs. 8 per month.