

# AGAINST COLONIAL OPPRESSION

## Persecution of the Labour Movement in India.

Promises and Practice of British Trade Union Leaders.

By M. N. Roy.

Lately the reformist leaders of the British Labour movement have been visiting India ostensibly with the laudable object of helping the workers in that country to organise themselves in order to resist capitalist exploitation. On more than one occasion the Trade Union Congress has passed a resolution to the same effect. Even now two trade union leaders, Purcell and Halsworth, are touring India promising help to the Indian workers in their struggle for a better life.

The government has not put any obstacle in the way of these activities of the reformist leaders. From this it may appear that through the normal development of trade unionism in India the injuries done to the standard of living of the home proletariat by the exploitation of cheap and unorganised colonial labour, can be counteracted. It may be triumphantly pointed out by the reformist leaders of the British Labour movement that the conditions of the Indian working class can be improved by peaceful means; that there is nothing preventing joint action of the British proletariat and Indian working class to defend their mutual economic interests in a peaceful way; that Indian workers can improve their economic conditions while remaining subjects of the British Empire. But in practice the plan does not work out so smoothly. There is a big distance between promise and practice.

While Purcell and other reformist leaders are actually in India promising to help the workers of that country in their struggle against capitalism, another member of the British Labour movement, Philip Spratt is arrested. Why? Because he put into practice the promises made by the leaders of his movement. Spratt is arrested for actively assisting the textile workers of Bombay to resist a wage-cut — the third in two years. He is arrested while distributing leaflets among the strikers, which are alleged to contain "communist propaganda". This charge of communist propaganda is sheer nonsense. Spratt and the members of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of India, who are arrested with him on the same charge, were not preaching social revolution to the strikers. They were agitating in favour of continuing and spreading the strike to resist the proposed wage-cut. It is not communist propaganda. It is actually helping the Indian workers in the struggle for a better life, and this the imperialist rulers of India would not permit. They would not object to, they even encourage the reformist leaders visiting India and making speeches expressing platonic sympathy; but actual help to the Indian workers in the struggle is forbidden. This is the reality of the situation which should be taken into consideration by those who earnestly want a fighting alliance between the British proletariat and Indian workers in the struggle against imperialist exploitation.

A better life for the Indian worker will mean a better life for the British worker. The present strike in Bombay is a case in point. It is closely connected with the attack on wages in Lancashire. The defeat of the workers in Bombay will contribute to further wage-reductions in the British cotton industry. Had the British Labour movement helped the Bombay workers to resist the successive wage-cuts in the last two years, the pretexts for the present attack upon the wages in Lancashire could be eliminated. While British imperialism actively assisted the Indian mill-owners to crush the resistance of the workers, these received no practical and effective aid from the British labour movement.

Tom Shaw went out to India to investigate the situation, as if the situation were not clear enough. Out there he made the usual speeches, and came back to induce the Lancashire operatives to accept lower wages. What else could he do? World conditions have changed. Colonial plunder can no longer indirectly contribute to raise the standard of living of the home proletariat. In the present period of capitalist decline, exploitation of cheap colonial labour is a means to reduce the standard

of living of the home proletariat. No reformist policy as regards the colonial question can arrest the constant worsening of the conditions of the working class of the metropolis.

Disruption of the empire is the only way out of the blind alley. For imperialism would not part with the right of exploiting cheap colonial labour at the request of the Social Democratic leaders. Any act of actual assistance to the Indian workers in their struggle over even the most elementary demand is a threat to imperialist power, and therefore is not tolerated.

The promise to help the Indian workers in their struggle for a better life has no meaning unless it is the promise to help India to overthrow imperialist domination. As the reformist leaders of the British labour movement are decidedly against that the Indian people should be free from imperialist overlordship, they are not in a position to put their promise into practice. They not only fail to keep their promise to the Indian working class; they connive with, if not consciously support, the capitalist offensive against the home proletariat as well. This is demonstrated by their eagerness for industrial peace.

As the imperialist bourgeoisie know that with their political outlook the reformist leaders can never put into practice their promise to the Indian workers, they do not mind their visiting India and making speeches which not infrequently are quite radical. For example, Purcell went to the extent of declaring that the conditions of the Indian workers demanded a revolution. But soon after making such a radical speech he visited Kharagpur, where 15,000 railway workers had been locked-out for three months and half. There he advised the workers to obey the bourgeois leaders who were at that very moment feverishly negotiating with the government to sabotage the decision of the workers to declare a general strike over the entire railway. Purcell knew that the workers wanted a general strike, which would have brought the bosses to terms, and that the bourgeois leaders were endeavouring to sabotage the struggle of the workers, still he supported the leaders as against the workers. When one renders such valuable practical service to imperialism, emotional speeches about the necessity of a revolution can be ignored; since obviously they are not serious.

On the other hand, Spratt did not talk flamboyantly of revolution; but aided and encouraged the workers in the struggle for their minimum economic needs. Nevertheless, he is arrested! The British working class must draw lessons from these events. The miserable conditions of the Indian workers is a standing menace to the welfare of the British proletariat. Any attempt to improve these conditions of the Indian working class will encounter resistance on the part of imperialism. The obvious conclusion from this situation is that the struggle for the betterment of the conditions of the Indian workers, which is necessary for defending the interests of the British proletariat, is essentially a political struggle having for its object the overthrow of imperialist domination. Those who sincerely want to help the Indian worker in his struggle for a better life, must help him in the first place to overthrow imperialism. The British workers must demand that the leaders put their promise to the Indian worker into practice. Should they do it, they would no longer find a visit to India a pleasant diversion, but a visit to the battle-front where the task is not to talk but to fight.