

# THE COLONIES

## **"Bolshevism" for India: a Melodrama**

*By Santi Devi.*

"Bolshevism for India." These electric words assailed the conservative British press of the "Times" and "Morning Post" school, on December 21st and 22nd of last year, and were flashed across the seas by Reuter to startle the unwary nationalists, about to assemble in the last week of December for the 37th annual session of the Indian National Congress. What must have been the feelings of bewilderment and concern with which the worthy gentlemen of the National Congress, the majority of them devoted followers of the imprisoned Gandhi, awoke from their innocent slumbers on the morning of December 22nd, to find their favorite Congress organs bristling with the dire project of Bolshevist aims in India, by which Reuter saw fit to describe the three columns of a mild social-democratic program drawn up for the consideration of the National Congress by exiled followers of "The Vanguard" party. And what must have been the outraged horror of the Indian capitalist and landlord class, whose "loyalty" to the alien government has been so often and so loudly proclaimed by their every speech and action, to discover, in the moderate nationalist or Anglo-Indian daily which interprets the world's events for them, that Bolshevism,

overflowing the confines of Russia, was at last spilling its poisonous water into India and inundating the land. Again, picture the mad fury of the choleric Anglo-Indian, I.C.S. or military, accustomed to look upon India and the Indians as their sole, legitimate prey, to read, as cabled by the faithful Reuter, that someone across the seas was dreaming and writing of "complete national independence, free from all foreign rule", which must precede the fulfillment of the rest of an amazing program calling for economic and social, as well as political emancipation, — the abolition of big landlordism, nationalization of public utilities, reduction of land-rents, graduated income-tax, industrial profit-sharing, an eight hour day, — in short, the program of that heretic body, the British Labour Party, applied to India.

But to complete this feast of the imagination, one must conjure up two more mental images, — the vigilant finger of the British Foreign Office and of its Agent, Scotland Yard, upon the pulse of Indian public opinion, as reflected in the Extremist, Moderate and Loyalist Press, reacting to that carefully-timed and theatrically-staged cable of Reuter on the eve of the National Congress, — and the amazed concern followed by delight, of that faithful little band of exiles, authors of the Famous "Program", to behold their propaganda efforts rewarded in so unexpected and unheard of a fashion. "Imperialism, mad with rage, destroys itself."

Such in short, are the various elements of the Dramatis Personae who willy-nilly, enacted the tragi-comedy planned by British Imperialism and so skilfully staged by Reuter and the Indian press. Enraged Anglo-Indians, dumbfounded Moderates, trembling Nationalists and gleeful Vanguardist danced momentarily to the tune of the Imperialist piper. But the end of the drama is not yet. The Program, so lovingly planned and so laboriously broadcasted among what was hoped a tiny section of the Indian intelligentsia, by the Vanguard Party, seized upon so ruthlessly and flung to the breeze of countrywide publicity by the cunning Imperialist, will do its own work in its own way, among that section of the population to whose deepest needs and highest aspirations its clauses correspond. The end is not yet in sight. "Imperialism, mad with rage, destroys itself."

If the purpose of the Official Prompter behind Reuter was to terrify the Extremist Nationalists and to draw the loyal Moderates yet more closely within the Imperial embrace, one must congratulate him upon his temporary success. Indian Landlordism and Capitalism have run, shrieking, to the arms of their Protector; so-called Indian Extremism has shudderingly disclaimed all identity or sympathy with a program which does not go farther in its demands than the advanced republicanism of modern Europe. The attitude of both classes is characteristically revealed in their press. Says the liberal "Leader", organ of the Moderates:

"The program is drawn up in accordance with the modified principles of Bolshevism, and is intended to appeal to the cupidity and self-interest of the masses. — We neither believe in Utopias, nor in the efficacy of direct action for attaining them. — In the existing conditions of India, attempts at revolution would lead to a terrible reaction."

Thus is it made clear to the Imperial Overlord that the Liberals, that growing politically-minded class of big industrial capitalists, will stand by the Government against any attempt to upset the existing order, in which they possess a sufficiently large stake. As for the Landlords, always outspokenly Tory in sentiment and notoriously pillars of the Empire, let them speak in the words of the President of the Bengal Landholders' Association, addressing the Viceroy on December 24th:

"Your Excellency can rely on the ungrudging support and sincere assistance of the landlords in the maintenance and preservation of law and order. We trust that Your Excellency's Government will not lend countenance to the agitation which may be engineered by interested parties against the rights and privileges of the Zemindars (landlords) which have been long enjoyed by them, and which have been recognized by the sovereign powers for centuries."

To which His Excellency, the Viceroy, replied:

"You may rest assured that I realize the great services rendered by your class in the past, and that I look to the maintenance of close and cordial relations. You may feel confident that your rights will not be disregarded, and that your aims and aspirations will receive sympathetic consideration at all times. — I am not unmindful that from one quarter, an attack has been made upon your rights and position. I gave you the clearest assurance that it is a mischievous campaign of this kind takes definite shape, you may rely on the government to afford you the fullest support of the Law in combatting it."

We may assume from the above citations, that the Government has been successful in rallying its two main props to meet

a threatened (and fictitious) crisis, — the Big Landlords and the ambitious Liberals, consorting the upper strata of the Indian bourgeoisie. This alone was worth the expense of an excessively long cable.

But this is not all. The consternation that reigned in the Extremist camp at the publication of a program gratuitously attributed to Bolshevik sources and coupled with the names of some of the Nationalist leaders threw the entire Congress into confusion worse confounded, and in their extreme haste to whitewash themselves of any evil intentions, certain very interesting confessions of faith have been made, not less interesting for true Indian revolutionaries, determined to overthrow existing evils; than for a government equally determined to maintain them. The class-character of the majority of the Congress Extremists has been revealed, for what it is, — petty-bourgeois reformists, bent upon winning for themselves a place in the sun, ready to use the bent shoulders of the masses to climb thereto, but in no way willing to lift those masses higher than their present miserable state. Harken to the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, organ of Extremist Nationalism and erstwhile champion of the oppressed proletariat and peasantry:

"Our first duty is to avoid, by every possible means, antagonizing any section or class of our population at this juncture. For India to accept what may at best be described as political and economic experiments as the solution of our problem, will be far from safe. What lines the National State in India will take to work out a reasonable reconciliation between the conflicting interests of landlord and tenant, of capital and labor, must be searched, discovered and adopted by us, after we have secured control of our own state life. In the meantime, all classes or interests in the community must combine to work together."

The Government may rest content, but one interested in the freedom of India is tempted to enquire, "How, without the determined backing of the masses, are you going to secure control of your own state life?" And how, given the inevitable class-affiliation between Indian landlords and capitalists with the Imperial overlord, are you going to make every section of the Indian community combine in cooperation?

The *Independent*, organ of Congress Extremism, writes editorially in its issue of Dec. 24:

"The Program stands condemned on its won merits, because in its plan (of mass action and a countrywide general strike) there is no room whatsoever for Love Force; our faith is in Non-Violent Non-cooperation based on Love Force."

The Government should chuckle, and probably does, but we would enquire: "How are you going to do it when Mr. Gandhi, a greater prophet of Love Force than any one of you, tried it for two years and failed?"

The *Bangalor Katha*, organ of Mr. C. R. Das, himself the author of a new "mass" program, said by the Anglo-Indian press to bear a close and tell-tale resemblance to that of the "Vanguard" party, defines its attitude thus:

"We do not agree entirely with this program. The class which will be victorious in a conflict between classes will lord it over the rest. That state of affairs cannot be called the freedom of the whole country. We want freedom for the entire Indian people, — we are not content with the liberation of a particular class."

The Government, hugging the two richest and most politically-minded classes to its bosom, may rejoice at this doctrine of class-reconciliation and freedom for the entire Indian people, but we would point out to Mr. Das and his followers that the experience of that "perfect" democracy, the United States of America, of France and Switzerland and post-war Germany, prove that it cannot be done. The class-domination exists, whether it be of the bourgeoisie or of the proletariat. Champions of the working-class prefer the latter, as in Soviet Russia.

In conclusion, we will quote a few choice sentiments from *The Mussulman*, classical organ of Mohammedan Extremism, at which the Government (theoretically) quakes. Let it quake no longer. The world of Islam, if one may judge by the words of *The Mussulman*, is on the side of the rich and privileged minority, and against the oppressed majority. In its editorial comment of Dec. 29 it declares:

"The Program, — advocates the abolition of landlordism and confiscation of all large estates without any compensation. It is a silly proposal. It advocates nationalization of all public utilities. The acceptance of this proposal means the destruction of all charitable and religious endowments. Neither Muslims nor Hindus will tolerate such interference. The proposal of universal suffrage, if adopted, would mean chaos. Countries which have been enjoying parliamentary institutions for centuries have not yet been able to extend the franchise to every man and woman. The fixing of an eight hour day for five and a half days a week

as the maximum duration of work for all laborers, including agricultural laborers, would, instead of furthering their interests, be prejudicial to them and would not, we think, be in the best interests of the country."

So much for religious extremism, which, exposed in its true colors, becomes rank reaction. British Imperialism will sit tight for many a long day, while such philosophy is safely indulged in and propagated in India, both by orthodox Gandhists and Mussulman Khalifatists. The little experiment in melodrama has borne rich fruit for the Government; it has found out many things which it might have, but apparently did not know before,—the bogey of Bolshevism blinded its usually keen intuition. "*Imperialism, mad with rage, destroys itself.*" The Vanguard program of mild social democracy, sown like the Dragon's Teeth throughout the length and breadth of India, thanks to the insensate fear and fury of blind Authority, has sunk deep in the soil and will spring forth, one day, in the shape of new leaders, armed with the power of a new Idea, which will sweep the Indian people on to Victory and Freedom.