

Defend the Meerut Prisoners!

By L. BURNS

ON March 20, a year ago, the thirty-two Indian proletarian revolutionaries, the leaders of the revolutionary workers movement of India, were arrested and imprisoned in Meerut. They have been charged by the Anglo-Indian authorities with conspiring "to overthrow the sovereignty of His Majesty the King in British India with a view to the establishment of a Socialist State under the dictatorship of the proletariat and the supreme command of the Communist International."

These men are charged with endeavoring to achieve their aims by organizing a Communist Party, Worker-Peasants Parties and Revolutionary Trade Union Organizations in India with a view to embittering relations between labor and capital, by inciting them to strikes and by publishing papers and using every other means of propaganda and agitation.

Although the Meerut Prisoners were arrested a year ago, their case has only recently been submitted to the High Court where it is now being heard without jurors, despite the continued protests of labor organizations in every part of the world. A lot of "cooked up" evidence is being used at this trial, about 400 witnesses, some coming even from Europe, having been called, among whom there are many provocateurs and spies.

It would be hard to overestimate the significance of the Meerut trial. Like a mirror it reflects the whole political situation in India

today; the intensification of the class struggle, the advance of Communist ideas, the progress of the revolutionary workers' movement, the growing role of the working class in the national emancipatory movement, the reactionary policy of MacDonald's imperialist Government, the treachery of the native bourgeoisie, the strengthening united front between the workers of Great Britain and India and many other developments.

The Meerut trial was "framed up" by the British authorities to stem the remarkable development of the labor movement which started in India in 1927.

Ever since that year the whole of India has been swept again and again by mass strikes. During this struggle the Left Revolutionary wing, which had been formed before this time, became crystallized, for the working class trusted it with the leadership of the struggle and it quickly extended its influence among the workers at large. Powerful revolutionary trade unions were beginning to be formed in the country. The working class was beginning to take active part in political life, demanding not only complete independence for India, but the establishment of a Soviet Republic. The revolutionary emancipatory movement, directly it was headed by the workers, began to develop rapidly and become sharper. Brutally exploited by imperialism and the feudal landowners, the Indian peasantry slowly began to raise their heads.

Alarmed at the growing threat of the revolution, the British imperialists mobilized all their forces to fight the revolutionary workers' movement. Their aim was to smash the workers' movement before help could arrive from the great reserves of the Indian peasantry. Their first move was therefore to "round up" the finest leaders of the workers and in this fashion "behead" the movement.

Among the arrested men—who belong for the most part to the Communist Party or the Worker-Peasant Parties—you will find such popular individuals, well-known to all workers, like Dange, one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Union of the Bombay Textile Workers, the leaders of several revolutionary Bombay unions, including the Girni Kamgar Union and the Great India Peninsula Railwaymen's Union; Joglekar, Nimbkar and Miradjar; Muzaffar Ahmed, the Chairman of the Worker-Peasant Party of Bengal; Thengdi, Executive Committee member of the Trade Union Congress and many others.

Besides the Indian comrades charged in Meerut, there are several representatives of the revolutionary wing of the British Trade Union Movement—Bradley, Spratt and Hutchinson—who are also accused of conspiring "to overthrow the sovereignty of the King Emperor in British India." This is a clear example of 'the growing ties of solidarity springing up between the workers in the imperialist countries and the oppressed colonies who are joining forces today to smash imperialism and capital, their common enemy.

All the men arrested on the Meerut charges were "rounded up" at the same time, with the exception of comrade Hutchinson, who was arrested later. On the night of March 20, when the arrests and searches were made in Bombay, Calcutta and the other towns, troops were moved into the factory districts for the authorities feared possible "disturbances." Searches were made everywhere, the comrades who had to be arrested being hunted down like beasts.

The Meerut trial, which began when Baldwin's Conservative Government was yet in power, is still continuing although you have a Labor Government, with MacDonald

at its head, in office today. So far from any change in the Cabinet improving the situation, we find that two other comrades were arrested in connection with the Meerut Trial. The authorities bluntly refused to have the case tried by jury. The prisoners were put on a far severer regime than previously. While comrade Campbell, the representative of the Communist Party of Great Britain, who intended to be present at the trial as the political adviser of the arrested men, was refused a passport to India.

The Indian nationalist bourgeoisie, who fear the revolutionary working class movement far more than imperialism, completely support all the terrorist measures instituted by the Anglo-Indian Government and welcome the present Meerut trial. As a matter of fact it is the Indian bourgeoisie who are increasingly urging repressions against the working class movement.

Indeed, the responsibility for the Meerut trial must be laid wholly to the door of the reformists in the Labor Movement. Together with the imperialists and Indian bourgeoisie they have been shouting from the house-tops that the danger of Communism was threatening India, that Moscow was getting control of the T. U. movement, that insurgent elements in the country were receiving "Moscow Gold," etc. With their continued lies and misrepresentation the reformists prepared the ground for the terroristic measures instituted by the Government.

Having arrested all the leaders of the new Left wing unions in accordance with a carefully laid plan, the Government had hoped to disrupt the whole movement and leave the masses without a leadership when the struggle was at its height. But all these careful plans fell through, for the working class of India has reached a stage of development today when the arrest of a few individual leaders cannot stay the development of the movement as a whole.

Despite the outrageous attacks of rabid reaction, the masses did not lose their heads. A wave of protest strikes, mass demonstrations and meetings swept the country. This was the workers' reply to the Meerut "frame-up." New leaders, from the rank and file, steeled

in the struggle, were immediately put forward to take the place of the arrested leaders. Under their leadership the working class came out more determinedly and energetically against imperialism and "their own" bourgeoisie, and are continuing the fight at the present time.

This is amply borne out by the big strikes of 1929-30, the political significance of which can not be over-estimated. Indeed, they show that the working class struggle has been raised to a higher plane at the present time (witness the five-months' General Strike of the 100,000 Bombay textile workers in 1929, the General Strike of 240,000 Calcutta jute workers, the General Strike on the Great Indian Peninsula Railway and also the recent mass political movements of the working class, the First of May Demonstrations, the Lenin Memorial gatherings and the demonstrations on Independence Day, January 26, last, etc.).

Despite the extremely adverse conditions the working class of India is putting up a heroic fight. It is the obligation, indeed, the duty of the international working class movement to support the workers of India in every way.

Now that twelve months have passed and the Meerut prisoners are still detained, *it is the revolutionary duty of the whole international working-class movement to start up a broad campaign of protest against the Meerut trial, against the interested parties who are engineering this frame up—British imperialism and in particular the British Labor Party, in office today.* This campaign should not be confined as hitherto only to India and Great Britain, or be taken up in fits and starts as the months go by. This campaign must be pushed forward *by all the workers in every part of the world.* It must be continued until the Meerut prisoners are released from the jails of imperialism.

