

Increased Revolutionary Activity in India.

By V. Chattpadhyaya.

In the midst of confidential "peace" parleys with the principal imprisoned leaders of the Indian National Congress, the Government of India suddenly arrested all the members of the Working Committee who had assembled to hold a meeting in Delhi on August 25th, the Government order declaring it to be an "unlawful assembly". Among those arrested are such veteran moderates as Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya.

This drastic action was immediately preceded by the agitation of the die-hards in England and of the so-called "European" Association in India. While the former have been clamouring, as usual, for "martial law and no damned nonsense", the latter, representing the interests of British commerce, industry, banking and the Civil Service, have recently begun demanding stern repressive measures. At a conference of delegates of all branches of the Association held in Calcutta on August 25th to 27th, resolutions were passed calling upon the Government to declare the Congress an illegal body and to suppress it throughout India, as well as to abandon the policy of making concessions or holding conferences.

These resolutions merely reflected the intentions of the Government which found itself compelled "to demonstrate that it has both the powers effectively to deal with subversive activities and intends to use them to prevent its own subversion". British imperialism is faced with a really revolutionary situation, and, while it is most anxious to make concessions in order to win the support of the nationalist leaders, it is making a show of force in order to create the impression that it is not granting concessions out of fear. This is the traditional imperialist policy of repression and conciliation that is being carried out with even greater virulence by the "Labour" Government.

The action taken against the Congress leaders does not prove that these are revolutionary, but only that their surrender, which is inevitable, is being rendered difficult and being delayed owing to the tremendous pressure from the masses. The movement is in reality a spontaneous mass revolt without a clear revolutionary programme and without revolutionary leadership. Notwithstanding the frequently manifested anxiety of the principal leaders to come to an "honourable peace" with British imperialism, the mass pressure

has compelled the Congress Committees all over the country to reject the peace negotiations, declare a sharpening of the boycott and of the non-payment of (certain) taxes, and assert their determination to stand by the Lahore resolution on full national independence.

For this reason, and in the absence of a revolutionary All-India organisation to coordinate and direct the various anti-imperialist currents, it is the Indian National Congress that lays claim to the leadership of the movement. But the composition of the Congress movement has undergone important changes. The Congress Committees are dominated by the youth, the radical middle-class intelligentsia, and in a number of provinces, by the national revolutionary terrorists. It is the pressure of these groups that is compelling the older leaders to continue the use of radical phraseology, while negotiating for "peace". A striking example of this is supplied by **Vitalbhai J. Patel**, whose histrionic resignation of his post as Speaker of the Indian Legislative Assembly, has given him a certain amount of popularity as a leader. At a mass meeting of 25,000 persons in Agra on July 31st, Patel declared that the "so-called peace negotiations are premature and futile", that they "distracted the masses from the struggle", and that the "present was a fight to the finish and that the fight must be kept up till the country gained independence". He emphasised the fact that "complete transfer of the control of the Army was essential if India is to enjoy the 'substance of independence'." But the same V. J. Patel took part (along with Pandit Malaviya and other leaders who had been using similar radical phrases) in the "peace" negotiations conducted by the Viceroy's agents.

But while the Congress Committees, as well as the Youth Leagues and volunteer organisations dominated by the Congress, are extremely active in keeping up and intensifying the movement of civil disobedience (e. g., breach of forest laws, defiance of police orders, etc.), of non-payment of taxes, of withdrawal from schools and colleges, of picketting liquor and foreign cloth shops, of the boycott of British goods, etc., they are also trying to draw in the workers and peasants into the Congress, and thereby to hinder the growth of the revolutionary movement. In Bombay particularly, every effort is being made to make the mill hands join the Congress and carry on their struggle under the Congress flag. The so-called left wing of the petty-bourgeois Youth League of Bombay is demanding that the Congress should "chalk out a positive programme based upon the immediate interests of the workers and peasants" in accordance with the proposals suggested by Jawaharlal Nehru at the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee held in Allahabad in February. At the same time, the reformist trade union leaders are also doing their utmost to appeal to the workers to support the Congress programme. In some cases, successfully, as e. g. in the All-India Railwaymen's Federation, where the reformist Giri succeeded in getting a resolution passed "demanding negotiations with Mahatma Gandhi on the basis of 'substance of independence'" — a fact gleefully recorded by the I. L. P. organ, the "New Leader" (August 29th). But the workers of Bombay, although they join demonstrations and "hartals" organised by the Congress, as e. g. the mass demonstration in Bombay on August 2nd to celebrate the anniversary of the death of the well-known Nationalist leader, Bal Gangaghur Tilak —, do not identify themselves with the Congress. They carry the Red Flag along with the Nationalist Flag, and on the occasion of the Tilak demonstrations, they drove about in motor-lorries shouting "Long live the Revolution!". Nevertheless it would be a grave political and organisational error to underrate the danger to the workers of this highly active Congress propaganda. National reformism and labour reformism have united to try and wean away the workers from the influence of the Communists, who although organisationally weak have a strong ideological hold on the working masses. It is the most urgent task of the Indian Communists today to expose clearly to the workers and peasants the real significance of the tactics of the Nationalist leaders, and to give them a clear revolutionary programme for the conduct of their national and social struggle.

Good work in this respect is being done by the Naujawan Bharat Sabha (Revolutionary Youth League) and Young Workers' League, whose activities are increasing in spite of the most severe repression by the Government. At Lyallpur in the Panjab, the members of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha who had been arrested for "sedition" came to court for trial

on August 4th, clad in red shirts. They raised revolutionary class cries, sang revolutionary songs, and ended their demonstration in court by shouts of "Mahatma Lenin ki Jai". The hearing of the case had to be adjourned. In Bombay all the office-bearers of the Sabha as well as the editor of "Revolt", organ of the Sabha, and a number of other members have all been sentenced to one year's imprisonment each. But notwithstanding the confiscation of the paper and of the cyclostyle machine by the police, the journal comes out regularly in several Indian languages and is "sold freely in the city". The police action against the Sabha and its organ had the effect of leading to the publication of new cyclostyled revolutionary journals such as "Rebellion", in Gujarati, and "Revolution" and "Flame" in English.

During the last few weeks there has been, as was expected, a strong development of terrorist activities, especially in the Province of Bengal where there are a number of well-organised secret terrorist societies. It was one of these societies that had organised the sensational attack upon the Arsenal in Chittagong in the early days of the present campaign. They have now begun to respond to the general police terror and oppression by organising bomb attacks upon police officials and police stations. The attempt made a few days ago on Sir Charles Tegart, the Chief Commissioner of Police in Calcutta and certainly the man most hated by the revolutionaries failed, as most of these attacks had previously failed. These societies are recruited mainly from among the poorer middle-class youth who have no contact with the masses and who see in terrorism the only outlet for their devotion to the cause of national independence.

The student movement has also developed very rapidly, and hundreds of students are now under arrest for picketing the schools and colleges and for persuading other students to leave these institutions. In Bengal and Bombay particularly, the students have been very active in Congress work (boycott, picketing etc.). In some schools where teachers have attempted to carry out the instructions of the Government to prevent students from participating in the national struggle, they have been often assaulted by the students. Among the students, as among the petty-bourgeois sections generally, there is a sharp division growing between the Nationalists and the Communists, as was shown at the proceedings of the Bombay Students' Conference where the nationalist president refused to allow the Congress platform to be used for preaching socialism or, as he said, "to be turned into a murderous, violent socialistic platform". Nevertheless the growing want of employment among the educated middle-class youth is driving them into revolutionary channels, and the number of students, clerks, commercial employees etc. who see their salvation in the revolutionary working class movement is certainly growing.

As we have pointed out in previous articles, the peasant movement is steadily growing both in Gujarat (where the Ryotwari system of land tenure prevails) as well as in Bihar, Bengal and the United Provinces (where the Zamindari system prevails). The movement is being considerably hampered by reason of the fact that the Congress Committees do not allow it to develop under the slogans of unconditional expropriation and the agrarian revolution. For this reason, the peasant movement is still confined in the Zamindari Provinces to the non-payment of the Chaukidari (watchman's-) taxes which are collected directly by the Government. There have been serious conflicts between the peasants and the police in a very large number of villages in these provinces, and the movement is gaining ground in spite of the confiscation by the police of the property of the peasants.

According to the statistics published by the Congress Committees, the Government arrested 15,989 persons during two months ending June 15th. The total number of arrests up to the end of August is estimated at between 20,000 and 25,000. The conditions in the jails have led to hunger-strikes in almost all the important prisons. It is interesting also that non-political prisoners are being released in large numbers before the expiry of their terms in order to make room for the batches of political prisoners that are being brought in daily.

There is not the least doubt that there will be a considerable intensification of the revolutionary movement during the next few months, accompanied, of course, by more severe repression than India has yet been subjected to under any other Government in Great Britain.