

Labor Party Organized In India

By Evelyn Roy

RESPONDING slowly to the pressure of events and the spirit of our age, a labor party has been launched in India and formally announced during the session recently concluded of the All-India Trade Union Congress. Its sponsors are Messrs. Lajpat Rai, Sir Sankaran Nair, Chaman Lal, D. P. Sinha, M. N. Joshi and other well-known leaders of the Indian labor world. Reference has been made to the nature of the declarations made by these leaders in the preliminary conferences which led to the formation of the labor party.

The prevailing spirit was that of opportunistic nationalism seeking a new instrument to further its own purposes, rather than the creation of a truly working class party which would reflect the genuine interests and aspirations of the Indian proletariat.

Moderatism and excessive caution marked the speeches of these pioneers of an Indian labor party. The sentiment was expressed by one of them that "an Indian capitalist was preferable to a British one," and it was further declared by another that the newly-formed party should not over-emphasize the labor point of view! It is considered undesirable by these new-found champions of the Indian working class to introduce into India the doctrine of the class struggle, or to create such a party which will in any way jeopardize the interests and ambitions of Indian capitalism.

In such hands, the new labor party will not go very far. The birth of a political organization of the Indian workers is a still-birth, and no amount of theoretical schemes on paper will succeed in breathing the breath of life into this defunct embryo.

Yet the growth of an Indian labor party is a historical necessity, already long overdue. The position of India as the seventh on the list of industrialized countries of the world, and her aggregate total of 20,000,000 proletarian workers prove that some organization to express the economic and political needs of this vast mass

of workers must come into being sooner or later.

The divagations of Indian nationalism have so far hindered rather than helped the growth of labor conceptions and labor ideals, for the masses have obediently followed those self-appointed leaders who have been drawn invariably from the educated middle class, and who are linked closely in sympathy and interest with the Indian bourgeoisie.

It is the Indian bourgeoisie in conflict with the inordinate monopoly of British capitalism furnishing both its ideological direction and the sinews of war in the shape of necessary funds. It is but natural therefore, that the program of Indian nationalism was subordinated to the needs and interests of the Indian bourgeoisie.

BUT the non-co-operation movement succeeded in one thing, in diffusing the idea of emancipation with all its manifold implications, among the masses of the Indian people. An expression was provided for an unrest which had hitherto remained dormant and unself-conscious among the ignorant and illiterate workers and peasants. Strikes and hartals, adopted as the instruments of the non-co-operation campaign, taught the dumb millions of India their potential strength and the power that lies in co-ordinated action on a large scale. The national movement, from being confined to a small sect of the rich and propertied class or to the revolutionary student groups of different provinces became for the first time a nation-wide movement of the toiling masses.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to lull to sleep those forces once awakened to consciousness. But it is very easy to mislead those forces by false programs and tactics. Mr. Gandhi, once the undisputed leader of one of the mightiest movements known to history, abdicated ignominiously before the battle-array of British imperialism and the prospects of meeting force with force, and now heads a small faction which seeks to lead the Indian movement along the channels

of social reform on a program of the boycott of foreign cloth, Hindu-Muslim unity, the production and use of homespun khadar, and the abolition of untouchability and the drink-evil. The sole message which he gives to the demoralized and dispirited country is that of the charka (spinning-wheel).

C. R. DAS, head of the Swarja faction which succeeded to the control of the Indian National Congress at Belgaum in December of 1924, has given another slogan to the nation,—that of council-entry "for the purpose of mending or ending" the present system of government. He has led his own particular faction back to the folds of safe and sane constitutionalism, away from the stormy sea of mass-action envisaged in the original program of non-co-operation. Both he and Mr. Gandhi have repudiated all forms of direct action, including civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes, and they have automatically cut off from themselves the very backbone of the great mass-movement that shook the country from 1919 to 1922—the Indian workers and peasants.

The inevitable slump and disintegration of the militant nationalist movement since the abandonment of mass action in favor of the "constructive program" and council-entry, has become patent to all. The consequent policy of repression, launched upon by the Indian government, with the consent of the labor government in Britain as well as of its successor, the present tory administration, has become bolder and more far-reaching. The incipient reversion to terrorism on the part of the young revolutionaries, who had held themselves in check during the course of the non-co-operation campaign, was anticipated by the government with unerring prescience, and measures were taken to check it before it could get under way. The employment of agents provocateurs to push the rash and inexperienced youth of the country to acts of terrorism, previously unmasked to the police by their vile hirings; the publications of false documents incit-

ing the country to violence, and the organization of "inspired" parties of terrorism, led by government spies, are but a few of the methods employed by the most unscrupulous and cunning police-system in existence. These provocative measures were taken and broadcasted thruout the world in order to justify the policy of unrestricted repression launched upon since the collapse of the non-co-operation movement.

THE only reply to such methods is the reorganization of the national forces along new lines, conforming to the interests and desires of the Indian masses. But so strong is the spirit of class-interest, and so selfish the leadership of the movement, that the prospects of freedom are deliberately jeopardized by a policy of compromise and concession. The Indian bourgeoisie is selling the birth-right of the Indian people for a mass of pottage secured to themselves by bargaining with the imperial overlord. Both the Indian upper classes and the British rulers have combined to prevent and stifle the growth of a united national movement based upon a program of social and economic liberation for the toiling masses, along with political freedom. The movement is divided, disintegrated and moribund, for lack of that program and those tactics which correspond to the crying needs of the overwhelming majority of the population—the abolition of landlordism, reduction of taxation, an eight-hour day and a minimum wage for labor, protective social legislation, the nationalization of public utilities and profit-sharing in large industries. Instead of rallying the nation to the cry of political independence and the establishment of a democratic federated republic based upon universal suffrage Mr. Das and the Swarajists join with Mr. Gandhi and his followers in repudiating national independence, and accepting "home rule within the empire."

Meanwhile, the economic condition of the Indian working class grows steadily worse, as wages are forced down and hours of work increased to

enable Indian capitalism to compete with its British rival. The deadly competition of Indian sweated labor with British labor in the metropolis is becoming a real fact; wages in Great Britain are being forced down to the level of "coolie labor" in the colonies, before the constant threat of unemployment and "the dole." Hence the new cry in British labor circles for the organization of Indian labor to protect itself and its British confrere from extermination between the upper and nether millstones of British and Indian capitalism. Hence the new alliance between the British labor party and certain leaders of Indian nationalism who pretend to see farther than the rest.

BUT what is needed in India is a real party of the working class and peasantry, which will reflect the vital needs and interests of their class, irrespective of the complex and often conflicting interests of Indian nationalism, and of certain privileged sections of the British labor bureaucracy. Until such a party is formed, under leadership which unhesitatingly places itself in the service of the Indian proletariat, upon a program which corresponds with their fundamental needs and desires, no mass movement is possible in India, and without a mass movement, no success can be achieved in the realization of the demands put forward.

The new labor party under its present leadership will be a pale reflection of British labor at its most reactionary and conservative stage, strongly adulterated by the questionable influences of Indian bourgeois nationalism. It may be the herald of the dawn; it cannot usher in the splendid day of the birth of Indian labor to its heritage of power as an organized and revolutionary factor in Indian national life. What is needed is a peoples' party, embracing the vast masses of India, led by men and women with a revolutionary vision, who can bring the Indian movement for social, economic and political emancipation into line with the world movement for social revolution.