

The Sham Constitution for India

By R. Page Arnot (London)

"India must become the touchstone of British politics," said **Winston Churchill** recently, and unwittingly spoke the truth. He was only making a grandiloquent assertion of his difference with Baldwin as to the best method of plundering India—for, on the necessity of continuing to plunder India, both Baldwin and Churchill are in full agreement. But the underlying truth in Churchill's remark was already brought out in the manifesto on **India**, issued by the Central Committee of the **C.P.G.B.**

The manifesto was issued on the occasion of "the White Paper"—that is, the National Government's plan for a new sham Constitution of India and of the discussion of this plan by a Joint Select Committee of "Lords and Commons."

The **White Paper** arises from a series of Round Table Conferences (1930 to 1932), which followed from the Simon Commission; which in its turn was based on the Government of India Act of 1919. Under that Act, which carried into law the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals of 1917 (hastily put forward after the Russian Revolution), there had to be a statutory commission set up to review the working of the Act of 1919, and to recommend an extension or a restriction of its provisions.

Now in the setting up of the Simon Commission it was of the utmost importance in the eyes of the British capitalists that a united imperialist front should be presented to the masses of India. Therefore Lord Birkenhead, then Tory Secretary of State for India, in announcing the appointment of the Simon Commission announced also that he had secured the full agreement of Ramsay MacDonald, then leader of the Labour Party. Moreover, when the appointment was to be ratified in Parliament, special pressure was exerted by the Labour Whips to ensure that not a single Labour vote would be cast against it.

The **Simon Commission**, when they landed in Bombay in 1927, were met by the execration of the masses of India: strikes, wholesale boycotts, and hostile demonstrations greeted their progress from province to province. When finally their report was being prepared in the early part of 1930, it coincided with the rise of the great revolutionary mass movement, with the rising in Chittagong, the movement of the Red Shirts in the North-West, and the heroic action of the Garhwali Rifles.

The proposals of the Simon Commission were, in essence, for a tightening of the grip of imperialism. Their "concessions" can be described as follows:—

The provinces (of British India) are to have Ministers responsible to the Legislatures (but the Provincial Governor chooses the Ministers as he pleases, and can vote or over-ride their decisions). They are to have enlarged Legislatures (but votes in the Legislatures are not necessarily to be binding on the Ministries). They are to have enlarged electorates (but the workers and peasants are excluded, and the Communal basis of representation is to be maintained and extended). The Governor can, in any emergency—i.e., if the Constitution is not working to the satisfaction and greater gain of British imperialism—scrap the whole machinery and revert to unveiled autocracy. Above all, the Government of India has continuous power of intervention: and the Government of India is under orders from the Secretary of State in Whitehall.

These proposals the Simon Commissioners described as a step towards an "ideal of Federation for All-British India"—i.e., a combination of British India and the Indian Native States.

This "ideal" of the summer of 1930 was suddenly added to the Simon Commission proposals in the November of that year, in the first Round Table Conference, called to stem the rise of the mass movement: and the result was declared to be a great step in advance. In point of fact, it was a further step in fraud, for, under the pretence of widening the Simon proposals, it strengthened still further the grip of British imperialism.

The Round Table Conference brought in the Indian Native States, the corrupt oriental despotisms that are maintained by British bayonets. These Maharajahs and Princes in the autumn of 1930 announced that they were prepared to come into a scheme of a Federal Government for All-India, provided it had Ministers responsible to an Assembly, in which the Indian States would take part.

Here is the chief difference between the Churchill group on the

one hand and Baldwin—i.e., the Liberal, Labour, and Conservative Parties—on the other: Churchill, Lloyd George and others prefer the Simon Report, in which the "mailed fist" stood forth more obviously than in the "velvet glove" proposals of the Round Table Conference now set forth in the White Paper.

Under Simon, the Central Government of India was to have no responsible Ministers, but was to be carried through by the direct autocracy of the Viceroy.

In the White Paper, with its fraud of a Federal (really feudal) Central Government, the Central Government of India becomes, in words, "responsible Government," while, under these trappings, British imperialism not only maintains its grip of the "mailed fist," but actually strengthens its own social support by the introduction of the Indian princes and landlords.

Let us examine the White Paper further in this one main point (the Central Government), in which it differs from the Simon Commission.

First there is to be a Federal Government, chosen from an elected Assembly, containing representatives of the Indian States, as well as representatives of the bourgeoisie, etc. (no votes for workers or peasants!), of British India—but this Government has no authority, not even paper authority, over the Army or External Relations. The armed forces remain directly in the hands of the British capitalist class.

Secondly, the Governor-General can govern India completely separately from the Ministers. He can take things out of the hands of the Ministers, and can veto any Bill of the Assembly. More than that, he can push Bills through the Assembly, and, despite any majority against them, they become law under the name of the Governor-General's Acts. Already, in 1924, the entire budget was "passed" in this manner.

Thirdly, the Governor-General can dispense even with this sham and can govern directly, issuing whatever legislation he wishes under the title of Ordinances.

Fourthly, there is the Governor-General as Viceroy, dealing directly with the Indian princes; and outside the whole of these schemes, controlled directly by the India Office in Whitehall.

Is this not enough? No. There is a whole further series of provisions to make this hollow sham hollow still. Thus the Federal Government will only be competent to deal with such subjects as the Indian princes (oh! those princes!) agree to give over to its jurisdiction. Thus the Federal Government will not come into being until half the princes agree, until the Federal Reserve Bank "outside political control" (by Indians, that is), has been set up, until the normal trade balance of India is restored.

And the Indian Civil Service? This "steel framework," as Mr. Lloyd George called it, is to be provided for by decisions: neither of the future Federal Assembly, nor of the Ministers, nor even of the Governor-General himself—but by the decree of the Secretary of State.

Thus an examination of the White Paper, in the preparations for which Liberal, Labourites, and Tories worked in harmony, shows it to be a sham, which only increases the grip of British imperialism and leads to a further development of poverty and slavery for the toiling masses of India.

Compare this reality with the hypocritical resolutions of Labour Party Conferences promising self-government for India.

Compare these hypocritical resolutions with the reality of Labour rule in India, with the Meerut trial, with the shootings and floggings, and the jailing of 50,000 political prisoners.

The Manifesto of the Central Committee tears through all these shams, and calls the attention of the whole working class to the importance of the struggle of the Indian people for independence. But it does more: it shows that the struggle of the Indian masses for emancipation is bound up with the struggle for a free Socialist Britain. In fighting against the new slave Constitution, in fighting for the complete independence of India, the workers of Britain are acting in their own class interests.

In this sense, of the fight to overthrow the capitalist system, it is indeed true that "India must become the touchstone of British politics." And in this sense the immediate demands put forward in the Manifesto (for the release of Meerut and other prisoners, for withdrawal of British troops, for freedom of speech, press, etc., for the right to strike, etc.), should be taken up and pushed forward by every class-conscious worker. In this way a united working-class front can be built against the new sham Constitution, and for the full independence of India.