

The Revival of the Labour Movement in Egypt.

By J. B. (Jerusalem).

Under the reactionary dictatorship of Zivar Pasha, even those remains of the Labour organisations, which had survived the great attack on the trade union movement in 1924, were annihilated in Egypt. Since the victory of the Zaghlulists at the election in the summer of 1926 and the formation of the moderate Government of Adly Pasha, the Labour movement is gradually reviving.

Adly Pasha and the Zaghlulist majority in the Egyptian Parliament by no means, of course, favour the Egyptian workers or the Communists. All the measures of the fight against communism have been retained by the Adly Government. Every attempt of the workers at class organisation continues to meet with the most violent resistance, the anti-Communist laws are put into effect most meticulously, even with exaggeration, a special credit of 3000 pounds sterling has actually been demanded in order to form a "Department of the Ministry of the Interior to combat Bolshevism", the Communist Member of the English Parliament, Saklatvala, has been refused entry to Egypt or even a transit visa.

At the same time however, the discontent of the workers is finding more and more frequent and clearer and clearer expression; a number of papers have dealt in detail with the condition of the housing of the workers, their miserable wages and their oppression by the employers, and have called upon the Government to intervene at once lest Communism "should be nurtured by the economic distress". In Parliament, a commission has been appointed to work out a law for the protection and insurance of workers, which is to be linked up with a law regarding the right of coalition of workers (which has hitherto not existed legally). On the occasion of the discussion of the Saklatvala affair in Parliament, several deputies belonging to the Zaghlul party and describing themselves as representatives of the workers, have advocated the revision of the resolution refusing a permit of entry.

All this is going on under the increasing pressure of the discontent of the workers which is making itself felt with ever-growing intensity. The tramway workers in Cairo, who possess a well organised trade union, have several times threatened to strike. Smaller Labour conflicts, in private factories and in those belonging to the Government, are the order of the day. Small incidents often lead to partial strikes, as was the case in the printing-works of the "Wadi el Nil" (a large daily paper). One of the printing workers, who at the same time, published a weekly Labour journal of his own, was called upon by the owner of the printing-works to give up his paper. When he refused to do so, he was dismissed. Thereupon all the workers in the printing works went on strike in order to force the employers to take back their comrade. The printing-works were closed down.

The result of a by-election for Parliament in the working class district of Minet el Bassel is also characteristic. Whereas otherwise the candidates of the Zaghlul party are, without exception, elected wherever they put up, in this district a candidate recommended by Zaghlul Pasha was opposed by Dr. M. Sabet, the chairman of the trade union organisation of Cairo (at the same time a radical Nationalist), the latter doing his canvassing with pronounced Labour slogans. The election contest was very keen, and finally Dr. Sabet carried off the victory.

Shortly after his election, Dr. Sabet declared that he was going to found a general Egyptian Labour movement, with a paper of its own and with sections in every town of the country. This organisation, if it is true, is to keep its activities within the scope of the law. A general Labour Congress is to take place in the immediate future, which is to declare the foundation of this organisation.

Within the Zaghlulist party itself, the workers form the Left wing, and it is just within the Zaghlulist camp that various functionaries have repeatedly demanded a more resolute policy with regard to the English.

Thus we see that the struggle to improve the economic situation is proceeding hand in hand with the revival of the Labour movement in Egypt and with an intensification of the anti-imperialist fight.