

The Persecution of the Egyptian Communists.

By J. B. (Jerusalem).

On the 27th September 1924 there was commenced in the Egyptian Law Court in Alexandria the trial of the leaders of the Communist Party of Egypt. In all, eleven comrades were accused: Husni el Arabi, Anton Maroun, Sheikh Safouan, Abdul Fath, El Shabath Ibrahim, Abdel Hafez Awad, Mohamed Ibrahim el Samkari, Shaaban Hefez, Abdel Hamid Samra, Mohamed el Shagir and two comrades who could not be found by the police; therefore the proceedings took place with the presence of nine of the accused. Each of these had already spent from four to six months in prison while awaiting trial and some of them had only been let out on bail a few weeks previously.

The charge against the nine communists, which was brought forward by the representative of the Attorney General of Egypt, stated: the accused were charged with having organised a conspiracy for the purpose of overthrowing the Egyptian government and setting up the Soviet Anarchy (!) in its place. The import of the charge, as well as the events which preceded the trial, were the following: The occupation of factories in March of this year, the intervention of the government, the sharp persecution of the communists and the breaking up of a communist conference. Further, the personal sympathy which the accused, especially comrades Husni el Arabi, Anton Maroun and Sheikh Ibrahim enjoyed among broad circles of the Arabian public caused a tremendous attendance of the public at this trial.

Quite at the beginning of the trial the prejudice of the court against the accused showed itself. Comrade Anton Maroun, who was medically certified to be ill and not capable of standing a trial, was brought before the judges in a sick condition and the proposal of the defence that the proceedings be postponed was not complied with.

The first two days were devoted to the cross-examination of witnesses. No less than 38 witnesses were brought forward on behalf of the prosecution. A police official claimed to have heard with his own ears how comrade Maroun, who was a representative of the workers during the big strike, said to the workers:

You are treated like mere cattle, the capitalists suck your blood, you must fight for better conditions..." The manager of one of the factories involved in the strike also stated of Comrade Maroun that "he could have broken the strike by a mere word; the workers had unlimited confidence in him". Other witnesses stated that the Communist Party is against religion; Husni el Arabi was charged with having said this openly. Finally, it is worthy of note that one of the witnesses for the prosecution was asked by the defence whether it was correct that the Egyptian government had sent him to London in order to study there the methods of the fight against communism. The witness replied in the affirmative. Ingram Bey had spent several months in England for this purpose.

On the third day of the proceedings the speeches for the prosecution and for the defence were to begin. The cross-examination of the witnesses had increased the interest of the public in the trial and the court building was literally besieged. Then the prosecution proposed to the court, that in order to secure a peaceful hearing of the trial the trial be continued behind closed doors. The protests of the defence were in vain. The public had to leave the court and the further proceedings were carried on in secret.

On the 6th of October the President of the court, Ahmed Taleat Pascha pronounced judgment upon the communists. It is a class sentence in its most blatant form, which places the government of Zaghlul Pacha on a level with the white governments in Europe. Six of the accused (Husni el Arabi, Anton Maroun, Ibrahim Shehat and Scheich Abdul Fath, as well as the two absent accused) were each condemned to three years hard labour, the rest to six months, which, however, they had already almost served while awaiting trial. The sentences were immediately carried out. The result of the secretly conducted proceedings had a depressing effect upon the great crowd which had gathered in order to hear the verdict. It was generally regarded as an expression of vindictive justice.

On the other hand the bourgeois press raised a great howl of triumph, especially the organs of the English and French governments "One must know how to draw the moral from this sentence" wrote the "Bourse", "it is sufficiently severe to condemn communist principles and to show the leaders of the strike movement that that which has occurred in Alexandria has incurred the penalty of the law. In this connection we may point to the recent strike in Maassarah (a big cement factory near Cairo in which 700 workers went on strike for six weeks until the intervention of the government put an end to the strike in favour of the factory owner; the factory is an English undertaking. J. B.), and it is time that all those who are responsible for this strike were brought up for trial."

Arabian workers are condemned to hard labour by Zaghlul Pacha, and the French and English capitalist press triumphs. Zaghlul, however, speaks in the name of the Egyptian people and of the Egyptian workers. The "condemned" communist movement in Egypt will do its best to unmask as quickly as possible this two-faced policy.