

THE REPORT OF THE SIMON COMMISSION

A Cynical Imperialist Document.

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WHENEVER British imperialism finds itself in difficulties in any of the areas exploited and plundered by it, or whenever it is forced to expand the social basis of imperialist rule in order to obtain wider native cooperation in its wars of aggression, it resorts to the appointment of "Royal Commissions" which go out to "investigate" the situation "impartially" and then make "recommendations" of reforms to his majesty's government. During the last three years we have witnessed the sending out of many important commissions whose findings have meant more oppression and more intensive exploitation to the natives of the colonies. We need only mention the Hilton-Young Commission of East Africa and the recent Palestine Commission among the most important besides the various commissions sent to India.

In India British imperialist rule rests mainly on the support of the feudal princes, the great landowners, the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, and the upper strata of the professional and educated sections (lawyers, journalists, university teachers, etc.) who represent the interests of the bourgeoisie and the landlords and who supply the leaders in their political agitation. Four separate commissions were appointed to deal with each category, but their work was to be closely coordinated in order to secure the best results for the stability of imperialist domination. The Butler Committee examined the "grievances" of the Indian princes (of whom there are said to be no less than 680) and the object of the committee was to separate the area administered by the princes, constituting one-third of India, from any political or administrative connection with the new reformed India that was to be created. The Indian princes are now to be placed directly under the crown. The interests of the landowners were protected by the "Agricultural Commission" whose terms of reference omitted any mention of land tenure and whose object was to examine how agriculture was to be improved, and the peasant given more facilities in order to raise his purchasing power and make him a better customer for British manufactured goods and a better tax payer for British imperialist wars. The interests of the industrialists are being protected by the so-called Whitley Commission on Labor, whose report is expected shortly and whose investigation on the conditions of labor are deliberately aimed at destroying the revolutionary trade union movement and the independence of the Indian working class. And for the political representatives of the bourgeoisie whose agitation was growing dangerous in so far as they had succeeded in drawing in the masses, the Simon Commission was appointed in November, 1927.

The outstanding fact about the Commission was that its seven members, all Englishmen, represented all the three British capitalist-imperialist parties, the Tories, the Liberals and the social-fascists, and the report they have now published after two and a half years of "work" is ostentatiously declared to be "unanimous on all fundamental matters" and "will be found to be without dissenting minute." In other words, the two "Labor" members of the imperialist commission are in absolute agreement with this most cynical expression of imperialist arrogance and hypocrisy, with the proposals for continuing the stranglehold of British capital on the Indian masses, while their chief, Ramsay MacDonald, is giving the Indian masses practical demonstrations every day of bombing planes, tanks and machine-guns as instruments for the "progressive realization of reasonable government in India."

The Simon Commission's report distinctly points out in its introduction that the "governing conditions" for all schemes for India were laid down in the pronouncement made on August 20, 1917, by Montagu, then secretary of state for India. That pronouncement was made under the direct pressure of the war, and "no challenge was issued by any party in the state." And what were the "governing conditions" laid down by Montagu with the full support of the Labor Party? He declared:

"The policy of his majesty's government, with which the government of India are in complete agreement, is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British empire."

This policy laid down by a liberal imperial minister in 1917 is exactly the policy adopted at the Labor Party conferences, and it is of interest here to point out how even the language of that imperialist pronouncement has been reproduced in the resolution on India recently passed at the Berlin session of the executive committee of the Second International on May 12.

The policy assumes firstly, that the British empire is the last word in human development and that it is eternal and indestructible; secondly, that India is doomed to remain an integral part of that eternal empire; thirdly, that by the "increasing association of Indians" in the "administration," i. e., in the machinery of exploitation and oppression, responsible government will be progressively realized in that integral part of that eternal empire.

Ridiculous as these statements are, they form the basis of the Simon report. And the document that has now been published has not even the merit of saying anything new or original, or even of supplying any arguments that have not been the stock-in-trade of the imperialist bandits during the last fifty years whenever the question of Indian freedom has been raised. There is not a single chapter which has not been more or less copied from the publications of the government or been drawn up by the permanent officials of the imperialist administration.

The report is being issued in two volumes. Volume I was issued on June 10 and studies "the conditions of the Indian problem," while Volume II, which is to be issued on June 24 [this article was written June 12.—Editor] will contain the commission's conclusions and recommendations. The first volume just issued contains the whole imperialist poison needed to create the impression that India is unfit for freedom and therefore needs British rule. Two weeks are allowed for this poison to soak into the minds of the "British people," that is, especially the British workers, in order to prepare them for the scheme of imperialist stabilization evolved in Volume II.

It is impossible in the course of a short article to expose all the lies of which the report is made up, though there is nothing new

in these lies and they have been answered in every detail by the widespread revolt of the Indian masses and the solidarity fight for independence. But it is necessary to point out that the "statistics" quoted by the report, mainly from the census report of 1921, are deliberately used for misleading the ignorant. This is the statistical picture of India, as presented by imperialism:

A False Picture.

Population, 320,000,000 divided into numerous races and religious communities always at war, viz., 220,000,000 Hindus, 70,000,000 Mohammedans, 3,000,000 Sikhs, 3,000,000 Christians, etc., of the Hindus 50,000,000 pariahs suffer from the social tyranny of the remainder under the domination of 14,000,000 Brahmans; there are 680 princes; there are 222 languages; 2,300 different castes; only 14.4 per cent of men and two per cent of women are literate; etc. etc. Conclusion: it is a crime to withdraw the British army and let the poor people tear each other to pieces, for the Panjabis who supply 62 per cent of the imperialist army would destroy the "peaceful unity of a self-governing India" by attacking the "non-martial" races.

Now, it can easily be shown that the census statistics are wrong and the method of presenting them deliberately misleading. For instance, the census states that there are 222 languages and this figure is repeated by most people without studying the census report. As a matter of fact, there are no more than 13 languages in India, if the subject is to be politically considered, and it is just imperialist trickery to enhance the impression of diversity in order to show that no "unity" can be possible in India—except united slavery to British rule. We quote this example of languages as a typical instance of the use of statistics by imperialism to justify its existence. But the Indian masses are learning how such problems as languages and national minorities have been solved by the proletarian dictatorship.

The main "arguments" presented by the Simon report are: Hindu-Moslem religious riots; rigid caste system; the "untouchables;" the religious minorities; general illiteracy; princes; external enemies; internal disorder; terrible condition of women, etc.

We cannot go into these questions here. But a few quotations may prove interesting. With regard to the Hindu-Moslem riots, the report confesses that things have become worse since the system of separate electorates for the two religious communities was introduced for the municipal, provincial and central legislatures by the "reforms" of 1919. "The true cause," says the report, "is the struggle for political power and for the opportunities which political power confers." When it is remembered that only 2.2 per cent of the population, representing only the propertied class, have a vote, it is obvious that imperialist policy has deliberately created this system to encourage strife, aided by the machinations of the police. But in unguarded moments the report tells the truth. It shows that the "operations of large-scale industry" bring together men of different castes and religions "in the mills and the mines," where these differences do not exist. Similarly, regarding the 260 great landowners of Oudh who belong to both communities, the report admits that "their common interests cut across the communal divisions." In other words, in spite of imperialist intrigue, the horizon class line is cutting across the vertical caste and religious lines, as has been amply shown during the present mass revolt.

The report deals with illiteracy and refers to urban and rural conditions, to the terrible housing conditions of the workers in Bombay and other cities, to the indebtedness of the peasant, etc., etc. But not even the "Labor" members of the commission mention a single word to show the connection between these facts and imperialism. When they state that "any quickening of general political judgement . . . of the average Indian villager is bound to come very slowly indeed," they seem never to have heard of the October Revolution.

The most unblushing part of the report deals with the army in India. In speaking of the "defense and security" of India, the authors say:

"India has to carry a constant burden of anxiety and provide against actual danger on her north-west frontier which are wholly without parallel in the case of the self-governing dominions. India throughout history has had to endure a series of incursions by foreign invaders, who have forced their way through the defiles in the north-west and at other points where a gap was found in the immense mountain barrier which cuts off India from the rest of Asia."

So the imperialist bandits that came by sea are now remaining there to "protect" India against "foreign invaders." Incidentally, of course, those gaps and defiles in the mountains of the north-west are useful to these bandits for the reverse process of making incursions into Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.

As far as the reception of the report in India is concerned, it is described by the nationalist press as an insult and it may be taken for granted that it will be rejected by the nationalist leaders as a basis of negotiations with the government. Not only the National Congress but a number of moderate leaders not belonging to the congress had boycotted the Simon Commission when it was collecting "evidence" in India, and it is not likely that they will today openly accept the Simon report. They will demand that the round table conference be called without reference to the report. The main proposals contained in Volume II are likely to be: abolition of dyarchy in its present form; provincial autonomy for most provinces; administrative separation of Burma from India; placing of the princes directly under the crown; retention of finance, army, police, foreign affairs, and the north-west frontier province in the hands of the central government; some form of separate electorates for the different religious communities; slight enlargement of the franchise. But no word of "dominion status." [When the second volume was printed over a week after this article was written it contained all the provisions foreseen by Chattopadhyaya except that certain princes are brought into a federal assembly.—Editor.]

These reforms may satisfy the moderates, liberals and some congress leaders, but will fail to receive support from the rank and file of the National Congress. An intensification of their activities, especially among the peasantry, may therefore be expected during the next few months.