

REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS IN THE COLONIES

The Punjab Workers and Peasants Congress.

By M. Ali.

Signs of the rise of the peasant movement in the present situation in India, characterised by the growth of the revolutionary movement of the workers and the petty bourgeois youths, are making their appearance. Such signs include the demonstration of the Sikh peasants at Lahore, the no-tax movement in certain districts of Bengal, and the workers and peasants conference held at Lahore on December 26th and 27th.

The conference was more a peasants' conference than a workers' and peasants' one. This is evident from the nature of the resolutions passed by the conference and the attendance, which was largely peasant.

The conference was attended by 25,000 people, many of whom had come from distant villages. The volunteers and organisers of the conference wore red badges on their breasts with the sign of hammer and sickle and the slogan "Workers of the world unite" inscribed on them. The elected president of the conference **Ranadive** of the **Red Flag Union** of Bombay could not preside on account of his arrest and conviction to one years vigorous imprisonment. On hearing this news, all the delegates and others present shouted "Long live revolution, down with imperialism".

The opening of the conference was very impressive. A man clad in a coarse blanket stepped forward and said: "I am an oppressed peasant having no education. The government concerns itself in only squeezing out rent and taxes from me and has done nothing for my education. My address therefore will be read by another comrade". This simple peasant (Karam singh by name) was the chairman of the reception committee of the conference. Some extracts from his address are as follows:

"Comrades, I greet you in the name of the poor workers and starving peasants of the Punjab . . . On account of the crushing burden of the direct and indirect taxes imposed by the government, the loot and plunder carried on by the money lenders, the severe terms of the landlords and the want of land, the condition of the peasants is going from bad to worse. . . . The workers also are in a miserable plight. Working all day a worker does not get enough to save himself from cold and hunger The unemployed middle class intellectuals are in worse conditions than the workers themselves.

"The government is based on capitalism, therefore it cannot do anything for us. The nationalist leaders who claim to be the representatives of the Indian people want to win over the workers and peasants with the promise of the Swaraj, which is vague and does not say what the workers and peasants will get from it . . . These capitalist leaders want to deceive us with Swaraj, but we should refuse to be deceived any more. We know our interests.

"While the government repression against the workers and the youth is at its highest, the bourgeois leaders are preparing for a compromise with imperialism. . . . Under dominion status the conditions of the workers and peasants will become still worse. . . . We should therefore condemn it and declare that 98% of the people do not want it."

In the absence of **Ranadive**, **Kartar Singh** (a peasant) was elected as president of the congress. He said:

"My election to the presidency means that the workers and peasants should lead themselves. This is very just, for our experience teaches us that to allow ourselves to be led by the Indian capitalist leaders is very dangerous . . . The Congress was in the hands of the capitalists who were compromising with imperialism. The Indian National Congress does not defend the workers and peasants. It helps the capitalists. . . . The noise of complete independence raised at the congress was nothing but a deception.

"The Congress aims at replacing the government of the British capitalists by that of the Indian capitalists . . . The workers and peasants should act themselves if they want to improve their conditions.

"The government, in order to crush the peasant movement, accuses it of being Bolshevik. We declare that we are not Bolsheviks. We want complete independence so that the conditions of the workers and peasants may be improved. If to demand complete independence is Bolshevik, all India is so. The movement of national freedom cannot succeed until and unless it is supported by the masses. The object of the workers' and peasants' movement is to free India and to overthrow the yoke of slavery by organising workers and peasants."

A resolution was adopted appealing to the people of India not to give any help in men or money to the imperialist government in the next war.

Another resolution laid down that the land belongs to those who cultivate it and not to parasitic landlords who suck the blood of the toiling peasants. An amendment to the resolution to the effect that the workers in the factories should be given equal share in the profits was also passed.

A resolution which demanded that there should be no land tax but instead an income tax was withdrawn on the plea that it amounted to a request to the government.

Other resolutions condemned the Nehru Report, the Whitley Commission, the government repression and the statement of the congress leaders in reply to the Viceroy's declaration.

A message was read to the conference from the Workers' and peasants' Party of Punjab, which stated:

"At this time when the repression carried on by British imperialism against the two anti-imperialist movements, namely, labour and youth movements, is at its height . . . our capitalist leaders led by Motilal and Ghandi have definitely gone over to imperialism . . . The betrayal of the Indian masses by the capitalist leaders is complete . . .

"The object of the workers' and peasants' Party of Punjab is to organise the workers and peasants of India on the lines of class struggle and to lead them to establish an independent government of worker and peasants.

The course of the conference and the decisions adopted are evidence of the growth of the revolutionary movement among the broad masses of the toilers of India.