

The Strengthening of Imperialist Rule in India.

The Simon Commission's Proposals.

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The Second Volume of the Simon Commission's Report was punctually issued on the date that had been fixed for its publication, June 25th. The First Volume purported to contain "the facts" relating to India, and tens of thousands of copies were immediately sold out in Great Britain, India and the United States so as to prepare the "public mind" for the proposals contained in the Second Volume. The British Government attached the very greatest importance to giving the Simon Report wide publicity in America, because of the anti-British and pro-Indian attitude that had been taken up by a powerful section of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. The "Manchester Guardian" reports that important American papers devoted very considerable space to the Simon Report and that "this publication has helped and strengthened many good friends of Great Britain in the United States".

The recommendations for "constitutional changes" embodied in the Second Volume constitute an enormous strengthening of imperialist domination, and there is not a word in the proposals to indicate that India will ever arrive at "Dominion Status within the Empire" which the Congress leaders declare to be the irreducible minimum for their participation.

The book is divided into twelve parts. In Part I general constitutional principles are enunciated which contain the usual phrases that all British Governments have used in connection with subject peoples. The ultimate constitution of India, it is declared, must be federal, that is, there is to be some day, "however distant that day may be", when the provinces of British India together with the States autocratically ruled by feudal Indian Princes are to be united into a Federation "under the aegis of the King-Emperor"—but only insofar as the Indian Princes of their own free will wish to "come into closer relationship with British India". In the meantime of course, it is "a paramount necessity" that "while India is progressing on the road to complete self-government there must be full provision made for the maintenance and efficiency of the fundamentals of government". What that means will become clear in the subsequent chapters.

In Part II the provinces are dealt with. Under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform Scheme of 1919 provincial government was carried on by the Governor of the province with an Executive Council divided into two parts. There were Indian "ministers" with portfolios for the so-called transferred subjects (education, sanitation, etc.), who were responsible to the Provincial Legislative Council while the reserved subjects were in the hands of executive officers, all Englishmen, not responsible to the Council. This system of dyarchy is now to be abolished, the Provincial Councils are to be enlarged, the "Cabinet" of the Province is to be responsible to the Legislature which is to be returned by an electorate about as great as at present (the franchise is to be gradually raised to include about 10 per cent of the population). This new system is called Provincial Autonomy, but the Governor is to have special powers of over-riding the advice of his Ministers and of governing the province autocratically in cases of "emergency".

As regards the franchise, it is specially provided for that the great landholders will receive the guarantee that if members of their class are not returned to the Council in as large a proportion as they now enjoy, the Governor shall be empowered to nominate a sufficient number of landholders. The question of labour representation is to be reserved to be decided upon by each province under rules drawn up by the Governor, "if suitable members are available". (Suitable members are of course meant of the type of Joshi and Shiva Rao.) Above all, the system of communal electorates is to be retained, the Mohammedans and the Hindus each having a

separate electorate, as also the Sikhs in the Punjab and all "Europeans", by which is meant of course only Englishmen, while the so-called depressed caste and other communities are to be represented by members nominated by the Governor.

Part IV deals with the central government. The present Legislative Assembly is to be replaced by a "Federal Assembly" of between 250 and 280 members who will not be directly elected by constituencies, but elected by the Provincial Councils by the method of proportional representation. The Viceroy will be the head of the Government and will be responsible directly to the Secretary of State for India and to the British Parliament. He will be helped by an Executive Council not responsible to the Federal Assembly. And in order to push through imperialist policy, a special member of the Cabinet is to be appointed known as "Leader of the Assembly". Further, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army is not to be a member of the Viceroy's Council.

Part VI advocates the immediate separation of Burma from India, the Governor of Burma being not subordinate to the Viceroy of India but probably to the Secretary for the Colonies in the British Cabinet. The Commission hope that the "new Constitution of a separated Burma would, like that of India, be a stage on the journey to more complete self-government". (It should be here noted that in the language of British imperialism "complete" is really not complete, and that there is such a thing as "more complete" and "most complete".) We shall deal with the new imperialist policy in Burma in a subsequent article, but we must here point out the significance of the statement made in the report regarding "the vital importance of Indian labour to Burma" which will need special protection in the new Constitution.

Part VII deals with the Indian feudal States which are to be some day in the distant future members of the Indian Federation, but which are for the present to be drawn into constant consultation in regard to "matters of common concern to British India and the States". For this purpose there is to be created a "Council for Greater India" of some thirty members ten of whom will represent the States. The Council is to have only consultative and deliberative functions.

Part VIII deals with finance, and a number of new taxes have been invented so as to increase the central and provincial revenues, one of the proposals being the abolition of the exemption of agricultural incomes from income tax.

Part IX deals with the so-called "Security Services" that is, the Indian Civil Service and the Police Service which are to continue on an All-India basis, and the rights and privileges of which are to be "carefully safeguarded".

Part X provides for the administrative control of the all the High Courts of Justice by the Central Government and not as hitherto by the Provincial Governments. The object of this is to bring about a uniformity in the administering of imperialist justice.

Among the most important Parts are those dealing with the North-West Frontier (Part III) and Defense and Security (Part V). The British Army and British officers are considered indispensable to the safety of India, and the Army will therefore be not under the Government of India but "under an Imperial authority which would naturally be the Viceroy acting in concert with the Commander-in-Chief". The expenses of maintenance which even now amount to £ 41,000,000 a year are to be paid from the Indian revenues and will not be voted by the Central Legislature but appropriated by certificate of the Governor-General.

The North-West Frontier Province is to have a Consultative Council both for the control of the Province itself as

well as for the tribal area beyond the frontier, but both the North-West Frontier as well as the North-East Frontier are to be regarded as special areas of Imperial importance. There is a very plain indication that new strategic railways are to be built on the North-East Frontier, which borders on Siam and China and that the military preparations are to be enormously increased. With regard to the danger of "disorder" in India the report provides for the use of British troops to quell disturbances. The provinces that demand the use of military forces for suppressing "disturbances of the peace and maintaining order" will pay for the troops out of the provincial revenues.

To sum up. The Imperial Government has vastly increased its power and capacity of creating internal strife. By the maintenance of the communal electorates the religious riots that Imperialist intrigue has hitherto provoked will now be multiplied by the enlarging of the Provincial Councils and the extension of the franchise. By the introduction of the so-called Provincial Autonomy the inhabitants of each province will be more intensively interested in provincial affairs, and provincial antagonisms will arise and lead to such slogans as "Bengal for the Bengalees", "Punjab for the Punjabis", etc. The election of the members of the Central Legislature by the Provincial Councils will cut them off from direct contact with the mass of electors, while the hope of being appointed from

the Federal Assembly to the Viceroy's Executive Council acts as a constant bribe leading to intrigues and to the support of imperialist policy.

The power to crush the revolutionary movement of the workers and the peasants is increased by the fact that the Provincial Legislatures will have as hitherto an overwhelming proportion of landowners and capitalists and that "law and order" will be maintained in each province by an Indian minister taken from this class, helped as he will be by the Imperial troops when the Police force proves inadequate.

Military preparations in Baluchistan, the North-West Frontier, the North-East Frontier can now be pushed on with increased irresponsibility and the States ruled by the Indian Princes, by being drawn in more closely into the whole Imperialist apparatus will not only strengthen Britain's preparation for imperialist wars, but provide an enormous reactionary force against the workers and peasants.

We shall deal with special aspects of the new proposals in subsequent articles. It is difficult to see how they can be accepted in their present form by the Indian National Congress leaders, but the wording of the Proposals leaves room for manoeuvres on both sides to enable the Congress leaders to cover their retreat under a suitable new formula that will be found.