

HONOUR BOMBAY MARTYRS

Victims Of British Bullets

WE SALUTE YOU, men, women and children, who fell victims to brutal firing by the British Military on the 22nd and 23rd of February.

The streets and pavements of Bombay are red with your blood. They will be a constant reminder to us to carry on the fight in which you fell.

You who were shot dead in the streets, were sons and daughters of common men; you represented the real India, you fell in a noble cause. Your only crime was that you dared to demonstrate your sympathy with those whom the Government had declared to be "mutineers."

The apologists of the Government, the big leaders and the subsidised Press have started calumniating you as goondas and hooligans. But we know you were blood of our blood and your heart bled for the 15,000 Naval boys who were threatened with destruction by the Government spokesmen.

All glory to you that you sacrificed yourselves for the sake of our boys in the Navy; that you did not sit like cowards in your homes when 10,000 young Indians were threatened with death. Let the leaders, big and small, describe you as hooligans. Let the capitalist Press denounce your courage in facing bullets as goondism.

The people of Bombay know you were their sons and daughters, sons and daughters of whom not only they but the whole of India is proud. Your young lives have not perished in vain. They will steel our resolve to liberate our Motherland, though cowards may slink and traitors may sneer.

To the fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and wives of the fallen, we offer our heartfelt sympathies.

Brothers and sisters, we share your grief, we share your sorrow. The entire city mourns the loss of your dear ones and vows war against a regime which brings mourning and tears to Indian households.

We dip our Red Banner in the name of the two hundred and fifty.

—Central Committee of the Communist Party of India.



Inside a city morgue



Worker, with his skull burst open (see hospital report on this page).

Medical Verdict

THE types of wounds show that the bullets used are not of an ordinary kind. In the case of one of the hospital male nurses, MR. DIGWAKAR, shot at by the Military while returning to his duty, DR. BALIGA, in opening the wound found a big hole in the liver caused by a dum-dum bullet. This is his own opinion.

This type of bullet makes a small hole when it enters but because it spins round as it moves forward it makes a very big hole. One medical student saw a wound of 4 to 5 inches in diameter. Such wounds could not have been caused by an ordinary type of bullet. The following are typical:

1. One had a whole knee joint opened out by a single shot.
2. Another had a hole through the thigh the size of a big fist.
3. Another had his whole skull cap opened and his brains had come out (See picture on left).

—From a Hospital Report (Feb. 23).



KAMAL DONDE, Communist worker of the Parel Mahila Sangh, shot dead on the street.



These are not "hooligans" but workers and citizens of all ages, who did not fly from Imperialist bullets, in their own streets, near their own homes.

(Full Story Of People's Hartal : Page 5)

TO DEFEND YOUR DAILY BREAD
-- Your Union Is Your Shield
TO CARVE A BETTER FUTURE
-- Your Party Is Your Sword

Thirty thousand workers gathered on Sunday, February 10, at the mass rally on Parade Ground to hear P. C. JOSHI, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, when he came to Cawnpore to appeal to the workers to vote for the Communist candidates, YUSUF and SONELAL.

"YUSUF and SONELAL are workers who were taught by the Party to organise you, to lead your strikes, to lead the working-class in the battle for India's freedom," Joshi began. "Yusuf has gone to jail 18 times and spent eleven years behind the bars. But today Congress leaders call Yusuf a traitor and have certified Padampat Singhania (Cawnpore's big and notorious millowner) to be a patriot. Against Yusuf they have put up Rajaram Shastri—a man who could not stand firm even in the struggle for the workers' bread. I ask you, how can such a man stand firm in the battle for freedom? But the Congress leaders have decided to fight the Communists and for that they must combine with Padampat."

Referring to India's struggle for freedom, Joshi continued: "For 60 years our people have been fighting to oust the British from India. Why is it that we have not yet succeeded? If you ask other parties, they will only put the responsibility on, and blame, each other. Our Party says we have not succeeded because we have not united to fight the enemy. Everybody, every party in this land, wants Swaraj. Everybody admits that all should fight for Swaraj. Therefore, our Party says clearly and fearlessly that all should unite to fight for Swaraj."

Guarantee Freedom To All

"Our Party says: Guarantee freedom to all, to every nationality living in the land. This will remove their suspicions, their fear of losing their freedom to somebody else after the British are gone and all will unite to fight as they have never fought before."

"Today only the Communist Party says that we must all unite to fight the British. Only we are asking the leaders of the Congress and the League to stop fighting among themselves and start the final struggle for freedom. For, we say, our differences with each other are smaller than our differences with the Government."

"For this, the Congress leaders call us agents of the League and the League leaders try to dub us as agents of the Congress. We are proud of being called so because to unite our peoples against Imperialism is a noble task and we are happy that we are doing our best to perform it."

"We have our differences both with the Congress and the League leaderships, but we recognise and support what is just in the demands of both and reject what is unjust. We do not like the League going in for the Nawab Yusufs and the Noots just as we do not like the Congress leaders allying themselves with Padampat, Ram Ratan and Bagla (the most hated profiteers of Cawnpore)."

"But we do not forget that there are millions of our countrymen behind these parties and we have full faith in our peoples' sense of justice and truth."

Workers' Dharma: To Work For Unity

"It can be asked: why is it that today only the Red Flag and the Communist Party talk of unity while all other flags and parties are abusing each other and fighting among themselves?"

It is because the workers are taught by the bitter experience of life that unity is the only weapon in their hands.

"The sahibs and the seths are very fond of quarrelling among themselves. You know that Padampat and Ram Ratan might sometimes unite against the workers but between themselves, they are always at each other's throats. To quarrel among themselves is their Dharma. To work for unity is the Dharma of the workers, of the common people."

"The Congress leaders who led our struggle for freedom for so many years, are now with their own hands breaking the National Movement into pieces. The Congress and the League leaders by abusing each other and us are spreading poison in the political life of our country. If this is unchecked, our country will go up in flames after the elections. We will neither get Swaraj nor Pakistan but India will become 'Kabristan'." "Remember, our fields will be fertile only when the ashes of our enemy are strewn over them. If, however, the enemy is able to keep us divided and breaking each other's heads, famine and death will stalk our land."

What Is At Stake For The Workers?

"In Cawnpore, there have been communal riots but the workers have kept their bustees free from this poison. But today Congress leaders are spreading this poison even among the workers. They are rousing the prejudices of the Hindus against the Muslims and those of the Brahmmins and Kshatriyas against the Scheduled Caste workers."

"Understand carefully that if they succeed in dividing your ranks and defeating your flag, and your candidates in the elections, the employers will put the workers of different castes in different departments and destroy all you have achieved after 15 years' tapasya and struggle."

"Understand well what is at stake in this election. It is not only the prestige of the Red Flag and the name of the Communist Party; what is at stake is your life, your rozi and future and the future of the nation."

"If employers' goondas are able to beat Sonelal at the gate of the J. K. Mills and the workers do nothing about it, tomorrow goondas will beat you up in your bustees and dishonour your women; mistries and masters will kick you inside the mills and you will have to suffer everything helplessly."

Padampat's Rule Or Yours?

"If the Mazdoor Sabha is the workers' shield to defend his 'rozi' and 'pef', the Communist Party is his sword to carve out his future, free his land and build a new society. If the sword is broken you cannot save your shield. If you are not able to defeat Padampat and his stooges in the elections, your Mazdoor Sabha, also will go to pieces."

"So the issue before you is very simple. Do you want Padampat's rule in Cawnpore or that of the workers? Do you want goondas to reign supreme in your bustees or do you want to go about your business as free and proud citizens? Do you

want your children to learn filthy abuses or do you want to make them honest and decent workers?"

"Yusuf is nothing but what you have made him. His nak is your nak. His victory or defeat is your victory or defeat. Today the Congress leaders say that the Communists betrayed the country in 1942. They are talking of 1942 in order to hide what they are going to do in 1946. For you can see for yourselves who is fighting Police zoolum today. Gwalior, Delhi, Calcutta, Chittagong; wherever the liberties of the people were attacked, it was the Red Flag which first went into action and united all other flags against the Imperialist Police."

New Allies Of Congress Leaders

"But what are the Congress leaders doing? They are showing lathis to us but swear by Ahimsa when they go to meet the Viceroy and the Governors. "The biggest leaders of the Congress are spreading false slanders against us.—Minor leaders are manufacturing the filthiest lies to prove these slanders. Pyarelal Agarwal, the President of the Cawnpore City Congress Committee, goes about saying that in 1942 the Communists went in Police lorries

and raped their own sisters and mothers.

"Once the Congress leaders have decided to fight the workers' Party, they will go to any lengths. They have completely allied themselves with the same Padampat and Ram Ratan against whom they fought shoulder to shoulder with us in 1938. They are using the same mistries and masters as their propagandists who have acted as strike breakers in every strike in Cawnpore."

For One Lathi Of Goondas, Ten Lathis Of Workers

"They are employing Cawnpore's worst goondas to break our meetings."

Let me make it clear at this meeting that we shall not allow any more of goondaism in Cawnpore. For every lathi of the goondas, there will be ten lathis of the workers and the goondas shall not be allowed to enter working-class bustees.

"But consider what will be the workers' reaction to these doings of the Congress leaders. By acting thus, the Congress leaders will not harm the Red Flag, they will only bring shame on the fair name of the Congress. They will not achieve freedom this way, but they will only hand over the Congress to the peoples' enemies and make cloth and food famine inevitable in our country."

"For, remember that Padampat will not do anything to help Pantij to solve the cloth crisis when the Congress Ministry is formed. Only the workers can produce more cloth for the people. Only their organisation, the Mazdoor Sabha, their Communist Party and their leader, Yusuf, can help Pantij solve the cloth crisis."

"That is why we say, not only the workers' 'rozi' and 'rofi' are at stake in this elec-

Joshi's Appeal At Cawnpore Meeting

Rs. 12,500 For Fighting Fund ★

ON Feb. 11, Joshi spoke in the General Body meeting of the Cawnpore Party members and middle-class sympathisers and at the end appealed for contributions to the Party Fund. Rs. 768 were collected on the spot. Communist candidate, SONELAL, gave all the ornaments left by his wife who died when Sonelal was underground.

A donation of Rs. 10,000 was announced on behalf of one anonymous middle-class sympathiser.

Many rings, bangles, and other jewellery were given by women comrades and sympathisers of Cawnpore and Allahabad.

One worker presented a garland of pice which he had collected by saving one pice a day from his meagre earnings. It was auctioned and fetched Rs. 61.

Sympathetic Indian and British soldiers gave about Rs. 300.

Thus in all about Rs. 12,500 were collected in cash and announcements, for the Party Fund.

tion, but also the future of the nation and the well-being of the whole people.

"By voting for Yusuf, you will tell the Congress leaders that the workers cannot be fooled. The workers know what is in the interest of their class and of the nation. By electing Yusuf you will tell Pantij: 'Listen to Yusuf if you want sufficient cloth to be produced for the people; and jail Padampat who steals people's cloth and keeps our mothers and sisters naked and hungry.'"

RIN-RIAF Strikes In Calcutta

PROTEST AGAINST BOMBAY FIRING AND INDIA-WIDE REPRESSION ★

FROM Tuesday, February 19th, 400 R.I.N. Ratings of the "Hooghly" Shore Establishment at Majerhat, Calcutta, went on strike in support of their Bombay comrades. Among them are people of different Provinces; most of them are Muslims.

They have formed a Ten-Man Strike Committee. Some of the members of the Committee in a statement issued on Thursday, Feb. 21, said:

"There is no reason why the Government of India should make any discrimination between the Royal Navy and the Royal Indian Navy. The Indian Navy fought side by side with the Royal Navy and it was always on top whenever there was any competition."

The Strike Committee is in control of the entire "Hooghly" Shore Establishment and is maintaining perfect discipline and peace. In a meeting they strongly denounced the insolent Bombay order of the Flag Officer Commanding against the strike of their Bombay comrades and demanded its withdrawal.

They are also reported to have declared that if reprisals continue, they know how to give a fitting reply.

On Friday, February 22, the Swadhinata (Bengali Communist daily) reporter met the strikers who stated:

"Discontent in the Indian Navy in Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta and Madras is against the India-wide oppression by the British. Our battle is not only for bread, but for freedom. And we expect that our National leaders would come forward and stand by our side."

They evinced great interest at seeing the Swadhinata, which

declaration of the Flag Officer Commanding. Many said that it was an insult to our entire country.

At midday, news spread like wildfire about the Bombay strikers' appeal to the National leaders and of the general strike in Bombay. Boys and even grown-ups were seen stopping trams and buses, and appealing to passengers to get down. The mood of last week's Calcutta upheaval seemed to be coming back. Students in some schools spontaneously came out of their classes and there were clashes with the Police in Jogubabu Bazar. Trams were stopped on the Kalighat section, and by the evening traffic on other sections also stopped.

Armed Police began rushing about in trucks in the most provocative manner.

The Bengal Provincial Students' Federation (Mirzapore Street Federation which is run by the Revolutionary Socialist Party and Tagorites) held a protest meeting in Sradhdhanda Park.

The Calcutta Students' Federation (in which Communists and others work together) has called a general protest rally of all students at Wellington Square on Saturday noon.

The Communist Party has also called a workers' and citizens' rally in the afternoon today (Saturday) to support the just demands of the N. ratings and to protest against the Bombay Police firing.

From Saturday morning complete hartal prevails in the city, while armed Police are patrolling the streets.

—[For subsequent events, see page 8 of this issue.]

To The Leaders And The People

INDIA WANTS INDEPENDENCE
Underlying Cause Of Upheaval
— Says British Communist Paper ★

The London Daily Worker (organ of the British Communist Party) wrote in its editorial of February 22:

THE Indian Naval mutiny is the highest point of the great wave of mass activity—expressed mainly in the great strikes and demonstrations directed against British rule. The underlying causes for this developing upheaval is plain. India wants independence and sees in the various offers of the British Government a series of unscrupulous devices for creating division between Indians and perpetuating Imperialist rule.

"In the background there is the spreading famine.

"Next month three British Cabinet Ministers will go to India. For what purpose? To sermonise in Bevin style or to advance the cause of Indian independence?"

"It is as well to be clear that unless they are going with an entirely different policy from that enunciated by the Government recently, they will utterly fail.

"Indian opinion is absolutely opposed to the suggestion of a Constitution-making body handpicked by the British Government especially if weighed with puppet feudal Princes. The only Constitution-making body that can be honest and fair is the one elected by the Indian people themselves. A Provisional National Government should be established based on equal representation of the two great Indian parties—the National Congress and the Muslim League."

BOMBAY, Feb. 21, 1946.

THE CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE OF THE strikers in the Indian Navy makes this earnest appeal to the leaders of the political parties in India and the Indian people.

WE HAVE ALL OF US BEEN IN THE INDIAN NAVY FOR several years. During this time we have been undergoing untold hardships, low pay, bad food and the most outrageous racial discrimination. Also, today, with the end of the war, the problem of demobilisation and resettlement has come for all the thousands of us.

We have innumerable times made representations to the authorities for the redressal of our grievances, particularly about racial discrimination and for equality of treatment, a demand which every self-respecting Indian patriot will completely support. But the authorities never listened.

Therefore, following the example of the brothers in the R.I.A.F., we decided to go on strike. For the last five days we have been on a peaceful, disciplined, organised strike.

Forced To Defensive

The authorities, however, have refused to listen to us. Instead, they have called up the Military, particularly British troops, since naturally they could not trust our Indian Army brothers. They opened fire on us in Castle Barracks and forced us to take to arms to defend ourselves.

Now the Flag Officer is threatening us with total destruction, using the overwhelming armed force of the Empire.

No Indian would expect us to surrender on such humiliating terms, to bend so low before the threatening jackboot of our Imperialist rulers. And we shall not surrender to threats, though we are always prepared to negotiate about our demands.

Back Us Up

But we know too that the Flag Officer will carry out his threat unless you, our people, and our respected political leaders, come to our aid.

You do not want your Indian brothers to be destroyed by British bullets. You know our demands are just, you must support us.

We appeal to you all, particularly to the leaders of the Congress, League and Communist Parties:

*Use all your might to prevent a bloodbath in Bombay!

*Force the Naval Authorities to stop shooting and threats and to negotiate with us!

*Rally our people to support us, through a peaceful hartal and peaceful strikes!

We appeal to you, our brothers and sisters, to respond. We await your reply.

—NAVAL CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE.

Gratitude And Homage

BOMBAY, Feb. 22, 1946.

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION WAS PASSED BY THE CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE:

"On the advice and intervention of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, we have decided to surrender ourselves in the hands of the Indian people.

"Sardar Patel has taken the responsibility and assures us that there will be no victimisation of our comrades.

"We are grateful to the citizens of Bombay and particularly our comrades in arms, the students, the workers in docks, transport and factories for the solidarity and support they extended to our cause.

"We pay our respectful homage to those brave citizens and workers who have perished or have been injured, like some of our comrades, at the hands of British authority for the crime of demonstrating their sympathy with our cause."

BOMBAY, Feb. 23, 1946.

THE NAVAL CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE wishes to inform the people of India and particularly the people of Bombay that it has decided to call off the strike. It has come to the decision after discussions with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who has assured them that the Congress would see that there was absolutely no victimisation of any of the strikers and that their just demands would be taken up with the authorities. Confident that the Congress would stand by them and sure of the support of the Muslim

League, after the sympathetic statement of Mr. Jinnah, the Committee decided to call off the strike.

The Committee, however, reminds the Naval and Government authorities and tells the people and leaders of all the political parties, particularly Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mr. Jinnah, that the ratings in the Navy will not hesitate one moment to come out and strike again if the authorities make any attempt to victimise a single striker.

The Naval Central Strike Committee once more congratulates the people of Bombay, particularly the workers, students and citizens, for their sympathetic strike during the past two days. These actions have inspired the men and the Navy with the consciousness that all India believes its cause to be just and right.

Military Atrocities Condemned

Together with the people, the Committee mourns the loss of hundreds of lives due to the brutal and absolutely unjustified firing by the British Military forces on innocent men and

women. It condemns with all the force at its command this action of the Military and the Government which has resulted in a bloodbath in Bombay, worse than any India has yet seen.

Long Live The People!

And a last word to our dear people:

You have stood by us. We are glad, proud and grateful for that. We mourn the loss of life. Had you not stood by us and demonstrated in your thousands, our cause and our strike would have been drowned in blood. The authorities may yet try to victimise us and punish us. We shall fight that—we ask you also to be ready to fight that and redeem the solemn promise of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mr. Jinnah.

Our strike has been a historic event in the life of our Nation. For the first time the blood of men in the services and men in the streets flowed together in a common cause.

We, in the services, will never forget this. We know also that you, our brothers and sisters, also will not forget.

LONG LIVE OUR GREAT PEOPLE JAI HIND.
—NAVAL CENTRAL STRIKE COMMITTEE.

S. A. Dange's Press Conference On Bombay Hartal

INDISCRIMINATE MILITARY SHOOTING

--A Record Even For British Rule In India

• Demand For Open Enquiry • Appeal For Aid To Needy And United Front Against Repression

[The following is the full text of the statement made by S. A. DANGE, Member of the Central Committee of the COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA, at the press conference held in Bombay on 25th February, 1946].

IN view of the fact that systematic attempts are made by interested parties to screen the mass-shootings of innocent citizens in Bombay and give a clean bill to the Government, my Party which gave a call for hartal on Friday, February 22, thinks it necessary to make the following statement:

The mass-shootings carried on by the British military have already taken a toll of nearly 250 lives, according to official figures themselves. This unprecedented orgy of shootings constitutes a record even for the British administration in this country.

The strike of the Naval Ratings began on Tuesday the 19th. The public regarded it only as a "strike" and the Government had ample time to settle it. But the Anglo-Indian papers began to raise the cry "mutiny" and foreshadowed repression and trial under martial law.

Why Communist Party Gave Call For Hartal

On Thursday (Feb. 21), however, the people's mood changed when they heard of the regular battle at Castle Barracks. I was at the Gateway of India at 5 p.m. and myself saw how everyone—Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, all were helping the Naval Ratings with food and eatables. They all felt that the Government was determined to crush the Naval strike.

The exchange of shots at Castle Barracks was taken as the final step of the Government to crush the struggle of the Naval Ratings. On top of this came, on Thursday afternoon, the irresponsible and in-

timidating broadcast of Godfrey who threatened to destroy the Indian Navy. This was final conclusive proof to the people that unless they moved the boys would be killed.

The Bombay Committee of the Communist Party considered the situation after it got the report of the battle at Castle Barracks and decided to give a call for hartal on Friday.

The situation was already panicky in the Fort area. Some anti-social elements took advantage of this to break open and loot some shops. This was full twelve hours before the hartal had started.

As yet, there was no intervention, nor any assurance to the people, from any Congress or Muslim League leader. Late in the night Sardar Patel and Sjt. S. K. Patil issued a statement dissociating themselves from the hartal. It was published in the morning papers on Friday.

One Of Bombay's Biggest Hartals

Bombay saw one of the biggest hartals on the 22nd. It began peacefully. All the mills, railway workshops and tramway depots emptied without a single ugly incident. No stones were thrown, none was molested. The people and the working-masses were out for political demonstration and not for hooliganism.

But the Police were on the offensive. The Government officials interpreted the dissociation of the Congress from the hartal to mean that they had a free hand in suppressing the people. The Congress leaders may not believe it, but it is a fact that their statement was exploited only to strengthen the repression. I myself saw how the Police invaded this build-

ing, threatened to beat everybody under the same plea that someone had thrown a stone.

Military Called In To Suppress People

The people were getting angry at this Police offensive. By noon news of firing from the Fort area spread everywhere. The Police also began to adopt a more and more offensive attitude. This developed into clashes at some places. The Police fired indiscriminately. After the first few clashes the Government called in the Military which began to shoot indiscriminately and in all directions from fast moving lorries.

Almost the first victim of this indiscriminate mass firing were Com. KAMAL DONDE, who was shot dead near Elphinstone Road, and Com. KUSUM RANADIVE, who was shot in the leg. Children and women standing in a milk queue, men sitting in restaurants and tailors working at sewing machines, were some of the other victims of this so-called attempt to suppress hooliganism.

In the working-class areas the Military shot in all directions. We have got evidence to show that men sitting in their houses, chawls and shops fell victims to this orgy of shooting. In one shooting at Lal Baug alone, our comrades picked up nearly fifty people and removed them to the hospital. Fifteen to twenty had died on the spot.

Dishonest To Call It "Hooliganism"

It is sheer dishonesty to justify this shooting as merely a consequence of "hooliganism" on the part of the people. It was undeclared martial law operating in the streets of Bombay because the people had dared to sympathise with those whom the Government had declared to be "mutineers." The action of the Government had

nothing to do either with self-defence or restoration of order. It was an open attempt to suppress the people for having dared to sympathise with the Naval Ratings.

The mass-shootings mostly took place in working-class areas. This fact must be noted. For this was an area which was particularly free from breaking open of shops and looting, etc. No shops were looted or broken open in this area. Some tram stands were burnt, but that was done only after the brutal firing had started.

The excuse of hooliganism stands completely exposed when it is remembered that mass shootings were carried on in areas where the political demonstration had not lost its character at all. The attempt of the Government to whitewash its sins in the name of suppressing lawlessness cannot be successful.

No doubt in some parts anti-social elements took advantage of the situation to loot shops and carry on incendiary against the people. This will be strongly condemned by all. But the main and dominant reality of the 22nd and after, was not the anti-social hooliganism but the political demonstration, often resulting in pitched battles between the people and the Military. To describe it as hooliganism is to put an end to all political activity.

People's Unity And Mighty Demonstration

One can understand the Government and its spokesmen raising the cry of hooliganism; but it is distressing to find some of our people and a section of the Press lending support to this interpretation. Such a wrong interpretation only helps the Government in justifying its brutal action and leaves the people defenceless.

Anyone who has seen the dead bodies at the hospital morgues and the hundreds of wounded will realise how our people have suffered and what the British Military has done to them. They who are lying in the hospitals are not hooligans or gondas but honest workers and citizens who came on the streets to help their brethren in the Navy.

They comprise Hindus and Muslims, Touchables and Untouchables, men from Madanpura, Bhendy Bazar and Shivaji Park—in fact, from the whole of Bombay. Never had Bombay seen such a united demonstration of all communities. To describe their unity

(Continued on page 8, col. 5.)

PEOPLE'S SOLIDARITY WITH RIN BROTHERS REGIME OF MILITARY SLAUGHTER

THREE DAYS, FEB. 21-23, 1946, WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED AS HISTORIC DATES IN THE ANNALS OF OUR FREEDOM STRUGGLE.

ON THE 21ST THE STRIKE OF SEVERAL THOUSAND RATINGS of the Indian Navy reached a high spot. These brave strikers resisted the attempt of the British Military to suppress their peaceful strike by shooting.

On the 22nd and 23rd, the workers and people of Bombay supported the heroic action of these men in defence of their just rights, by an unprecedented demonstration of fraternal solidarity, in the form of a complete city-wide hartal and strike.

Unity of Three Flags Against Military

British Military intervention sought to drown the demonstration in pools of blood; but the people and workers showed marvels of resourcefulness and resistance and won a moral victory over the terror. True, in some localities, hooligans sought to take advantage of the situation by organising orgies of loot and senseless burning. But the dominant note of the action of the people during those days was united resistance against Police and Military repression.

The unity of the three flags, which has now become a symbol of joint struggle against the common enemy, was in evidence everywhere.

The blood of men of the forces and that of their brothers in civil life has mingled for the first time in the history of our freedom struggle. The Indian Revolution has entered a new phase.

Thursday, Feb. 21

Already in the forenoon, news that the strikers confined in Castle Barracks had returned the fire of the British Military, who had fired at them first, spread to the people in the city. In the afternoon, Admiral Godfrey threatened to destroy the entire Indian Navy. General Lockhart, Chief of the Southern Command, had established his "advance headquarters" in the Town Hall.

Was the superior armed might of British Imperialism going to crush the brave young boys of the Navy for the crime of demanding equality and justice? The Naval Central Strike Committee, set up by the Ratings, issued an appeal to the main political parties and to the people of Bombay to support their fight with hartal and strikes.

First Clash—Call For Hartal

In the evening, Apollo Bunder was thronged with people looking eagerly and anxiously at the ships in the sea. Ratings came to the wharf in their launches and talked with the citizens. Launch after launch left laden with packets of food and sweets given to them by the people. The crowds returning from the dockyard clashed with the Police in the Kalbadevi area. The Police opened fire twice. In the night anti-social elements in this area began breaking open shops and smashing street-lights. Late in the night it was known that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had issued a statement saying that there should be no hartal in Bombay the next day.

The Communist Party had issued a call to the workers and people to observe general hartal on Friday in support of the demands of the Naval Ratings and to save them from the threatened destruction. In the evening the propaganda van of the Party passed through the entire mill area announcing the hartal. Speakers described the heroic action of the Naval boys and the danger they were threatened with. Forty-seven street meetings were held. The revolutionary action of the Indian Navy was greeted with tumultuous applause.

It was clear from the mood of the workers that there was going to be complete hartal the next day. Already workers on night shift in eight mills, on Fergusson Road, struck work. But the mill area was quiet in the night.

Friday, Feb. 22

In the morning large crowds of workers stood at the mill gates. There was no question of going in. Not a wheel turned in a single mill. The three Railway workshops and all the other small and big factories struck work without exception. It was a spontaneous and voluntary exodus. Over three lakhs of workers were on strike.

Processions of workers paraded through the streets shouting slogans. Some of them terminated in meetings in nearby maidans. S. A. Dange, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India, addressed one such meeting on Kamgar Maidan. The workers' procession from the G.I.P. Parcel workshop carried all the three flags.

These processions were peaceful and disciplined. There was not a single case of burning or destruction in the mill area in the early hours of the morning. It was the provocative attacks of the Police on these processions which made the workers retaliate. The Military then came in to let loose a regime of wanton and indiscriminate shooting.

In the FORT area, a peaceful procession of Dock workers was suddenly ridden into by a Military lorry crushing two workers on the spot. The workers rushed forward to rescue their comrades. In this commotion, the Police who were standing by opened fire, wounding two workers. This infuriated the workers. Thereafter, two Military lorries which passed were attacked and burnt. This brought in the British Military on the scene; for two hours they kept up the firing from rifles and tommy-guns, wounding and killing several.

At LAL BAUG after the morning demonstrations, the Police began to enter into the chawls and beat up workers. They entered Teju Kaya Mansion, caught hold of a worker and were taking him away. When a crowd of workers followed them demanding his release, the Police opened fire. The workers faced the bullets and charged the Police. As many as 50 people were wounded in this skirmish. Red Flag volunteers of the area took the wounded to the hospital. These were helped by four Muslim lorry-drivers, who lent them their vehicles for the job.

After a little while, a lorry load of British soldiers armed with rifles and tommy-guns arrived on the scene. Their indiscriminate firing claimed some 50 victims. Three fell dead and over 40 were wounded. Then the soldiers got down from the lorry and pushed into nearby lanes and chawls straggling and sundry by their wanton fire.

There was no looting or hooliganism of any sort here in this area. By three o'clock the British Military lorries were running amuck throughout the streets of Bombay, and especially the streets of Parel, firing at the crowds without the slightest notice. They had established themselves with machine-guns at all strategic points. One such camp was right in front of the office of the Bombay Committee of the Communist Party of India, at Parel.

Wanton Murder At Poibawdi

At four in the evening, a Military lorry came rushing along Dadar Road and swerving round the Parel traffic island, rushed up the Elphinstone Bridge. As it turned it fired for no reason again and again. KUSUM RANADIVE, Secretary, Parel Mahila Sangh, KAMAL DONDE, Treasurer and AHILYA RANGNEKAR, all three members of the Communist Party, were going towards the Railway Station. A bullet passed through Kamal's body. Kusum-Ranadive was wounded in the leg.

As the news reached the office of the Bombay Committee of the Party nearby, they rushed to the scene. By this time, the lorry came back still firing. Patkar of the Girni Kamgar Union (Red Flag) carried Kusum Ranadive to the hospital. Donde himself carried his wife to the hospital in the last hope of saving her. It was no use. The bullet had killed her. More than 40 people were wounded in this firing. Many lost their lives. People sitting in their homes or shops too were hit. Those who witnessed the firing can never forget the pools of blood reddening the whole street in which so many people were shot down in one heap.

A little boy and his sister were going to a milk ration shop to obtain milk. They got bullets instead. A man who had just arrived in Bombay with his wife and child got down at Dadar Station. As he came out of the station and was walking along, firing began. He and his child fell dead on the spot. His wife had to be removed to the hospital. Their coolies threw their luggage down and ran away.

It is reported that two armed Police constables and a Sub-Inspector on guard at Parel Poibawdi Naka also received bullet wounds. Two clerks from the Haffkins Institute who were going home were shot. One died on the spot. The other was removed to hospital.

Peaceful Demonstration Becomes Mass Slaughter

At DE LISLE ROAD, the workers gave a frontal battle to a detachment of some 100 armed Police for full three and a half hours. The Police party had to take to their heels twice. Four constables took off their uniforms and ran away. Finally, came along the inevitable Military lorry, firing. Even this was met by a hail of stones. A Ghati worker who was wounded in the side, was asked by someone, "What's happened?" "Oh, I just missed them," came his reply.

Thus the day which began by disciplined political demonstrations of the workers soon became a day of mass slaughter, thanks to the indiscriminate shooting by the Military. Out of the total figure of 250 dead for the three days (official figure), 97 were counted

in the morgue of the K.E.M. Hospital in the working class area. In other words, nearly half Bombay's death roll was in the working class area. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of cases of lootings of banks, burning of post offices, breaking open of shops, etc., took place in the dominant non-working class area of the South.

This knocks the bottom out of the allegation that the Communist Party's call for hartal was responsible for the hooliganism. Similarly, it brings out sharply the fact that the bulk of the firing was directed against workers' demonstrations and not against hooligan activities.

Students Hartal And Demonstrations

The Bombay Students' Union (affiliated to the All-India Students' Federation) on Thursday had given a call for a one-day general strike and hartal of students on Friday, Feb. 23.

Most of the colleges and schools in the North as well as South responded and came out on hartal on Friday. The boys of St. Xavier's College took a procession to Azad Maidan. The Muslim Students' Federation boys joined up. Students of the G. S. N. Medical and other colleges collected money for buying food for the R.N. Ratings. The student demonstrations in the South were not interfered with by the Police and there were no clashes.

In the North, a procession of 500 students from Ruia College was lathi-charged twice almost as soon as it started. But the students regrouped themselves near the Tilak Bridge, about half a furlong away. When the procession was lathi-charged again near Hind-Mata Cinema—about half a mile away—the students gave a desperate battle with sticks and bare fists. At Parel the Police finally succeeded in breaking it up with a vicious lathi-charge. One student was badly injured on the head.

Saturday, Feb. 23

Curfew was clamped on the city of Bombay for the whole of Friday night. During the night, armed Military lorries patrolled the grimly silent and empty streets. The workers and people, with relatives either dead or wounded in the hospitals, sat anxiously counting the hours of the night.

On Saturday morning, the papers reported that the entire Ratings of the Shore Establishment and the ships had decided to accept the advice of Sardar Patel and to place themselves in the hands of the nation and call off their strike. But the people and workers were in no mood to resume work yet. Their dead yet lay in the morgues. The Military yet stood in the streets with fixed bayonets.

Workers stayed away from their mills and factories. Shops in all the main localities remained closed. As the day wore on, skirmishes between the Police and Military, on the one hand and the people, on the other, began. The main storm centres were now in the Muslim localities.

In BHENDI BAZAR, some people snatched the revolvers from the hands of two Police Officers. Madanpura, North Brooke Gardens and Duncan Road were scenes of brutal Military firing as well as of dauntless resistance by the people.

The United Battle Of Barricades

The TWO TANKS square near Duncan Road was completely barricaded and was the scene of pitched battles. It is a mixed area lying between Kamatipura and Madanpura—the population being both Hindu and Muslim working class and lower middle class. Against Police repression they all stood together to fight.

When the Military entered this area firing away wildly as everywhere else, they were met by organised resistance. At the very start, the people erected barricades. They were made of bamboos, tightly lashed together and secured to posts on both the sides. They could hold back Military lorries.

On these barricades, Congress and League flags went up—on the Kamatipura side, the Congress, League and Red Flags. Then the people set about to destroy the wooden Police chowki. When Military lorries were seen coming, shrill whistles from the people posted at the corners gave the signal and the people vanished inside houses and lanes. The enraged Military smashed the barricades and fired at random without caring whom they hit. Then suddenly stones used to come whizzing from somewhere and hit them. But persons from whom these stones came were nowhere to be seen.

Baffled, the Military would let loose a hailstorm of machine-gun fire and then go away. No sooner were they out of sight, then the people used to come out on the road again, lift the wounded, carry them inside on cots and hand them over to the women-folk for nursing. The men returned to carry on.

During the day, the British Military fired again and again, but the people did not get panicky or confused. By night, they broke all the street lights in that area and thus made it impossible for the Military to pass through. The Military fired from the outskirts—most of the shots hit only the air, but the lorries were good targets for stones.

The next morning, the area was ideally quiet. When the Military saw no signs of disturbance, they left the barricades and went away. Immedi-

ately seven or eight young men broke off and carried away a brick or a plank from the walls of the Police station and flung it into a bonfire in the centre of the road. This method was preferred in order that the buildings around may not suffer. This went on; but not a single citizen's property was laid hands on.

At about twelve, two Military lorries came rumbling along again and rifles and machine-guns began to crack and splutter. Within five minutes, the reply came with a rain of flying soda-water bottles. The Military raised their rifles and fired. But the "enemy" was nowhere to be seen.

At last it became impossible for the soldiers to cluster in the lorries in the midst of exploding bottles. They leapt down and catching hold of passers-by asked them from where the bottles came. A milkman frightened out of his wits, pointed to one of the houses. Up went the soldiers with cocked revolver, rounded up about twenty men at random and carried them away in a lorry.

This only enraged the people further. Before their united strength, the Military dared not come there and fire again.

In the evening, a Congress Peace Brigade lorry came. They dared not call what was going on "goondagiri" and "riot", as they did elsewhere. They gave a slogan or two for peace and "no strike" and then disappeared.

Then came a lorry with the League National Guards—they shouted similar slogans. One of the crowd on the street said, "Do you know how many were shot dead yesterday. Better start your peace propaganda with the Military and the Police."

Indiscriminate Firing By Military

At SHWAJI PARK, the Military resorted to reckless firing. People inside the Health Department chawls at "Y" Road, and other houses were hit. Mr. PADWAL, a motor-loader from the Health Department, was shot in both the legs.

SHIVRAM TITHAL, a mail, got a bullet in the thigh.

Mr. PINGLE, staying in Tulshiram Tejpal chawls, got a bullet in the chest. This made the people raging mad.

Near Shivaji Park, a huge crowd of students, workers and others with stones in their hands, eagerly awaited the Military lorries. In spite of repeated firing, the crowd did not subside; it rather grew.

In some cases, the anger of the people found vent in acts of senseless destruction.

A petrol pump nearby was smashed, and with the help of the oil, Kohinoor Mills No. 3 and Usha Woollen Mills, both belonging to Killick Nixon & Co. a big European firm, were set on fire.

In the evening, a local train near the Dadar-B.E. & C.I. Railway station was set on fire. The booking office of the Matunga Railway Station was burnt.

At Fergusson Road, from 10-30 a.m., the Military resorted to firing many times and there were many skirmishes between workers and the Military.

Sunday, Feb. 24

To protest against the previous day's reign of terror, the workers refused to go to work on Sunday. Hardly ten or twelve mills worked, and they too partially. Near the Spring Mills, the Police fired on the workers. At Dadar, it was the Military who opened fire.

From noon, the Police entered the chawls in working class areas and be-

gan mass arrests. By now hundreds of workers had been arrested. In the De Lisle Road area alone, more than a hundred workers from Municipal chawls, Kumbhar chawls, Huq Mills chawls, etc., were arrested. They were woken up at night and carried away; they were not even allowed time to dress. The arrested workers have been locked up in Arthur Road jail. When swooping down on the inhabitants of the chawls, the Police freely resorted to beating.

Among those arrested are scavengers from the Municipal chawls.

These same Police were for two days running in all directions when faced by the united might of the people.

Red Volunteers At K.E.M. Hospital

On Saturday, thousands of workers and people of Parel and Dadar, whose relatives were either killed or wounded in the previous day's firing, were crowding into the gardens of the K.E.M. Hospital. The staff of the hospital, doctors, nurses and clerks, overworked by the unprecedented rush of the wounded and dying on the two days, was hard put to it to cope with the demands of the thousands, who had come and who were clamouring to see their dead and wounded.

The situation was eased by the timely intervention of S. S. Mirajkar and the Red Volunteers led by Chikkarmane and Sharat Pawar. Mirajkar first addressed words of condolence and cheer to the workers and called upon them to help the Volunteers by the queuing up of those who had come for their dead. After the dead were identified, the bodies were handed over to the relatives, one after another. The list of the names of the wounded was then read out and their relatives were enabled to see them.

On Sunday, again some 2,000 workers assembled in front of the hospital. Just at this time two Military lorries happened to pass that way. Seeing the crowd they stopped and turned their guns on it. At this moment, some Red Guards, led by Chikkarmane, promptly placed themselves between the military lorries and the people and beckoned them not to fire while others got the hospital authorities to open the gates and take the crowd inside the compound. The situation was saved.

Later the Red Guards got the hospital authorities to put up big Red Cross flags and strainers at the approaches to prevent the Military from shooting in that street. On Saturday, the brutes had actually shot dead a male nurse returning to the hospital in his nurse's uniform on a bicycle.

Everyone was grateful to the Red Volunteers. On Friday, it was they who were bringing the dead and wounded to the hospital, through bullet-swept streets. They went from chawl to chawl looking for the wounded to get them to the hospital.

When on Sunday some Congress Volunteers wanted to use their influence with the Congress-minded high officials of the K. E. M. Hospital to get rid of the Red Volunteers, they were neatly laid off by the officials as well as by the people. They said: "These Red Flaggers have been doing splendid service from the very first day of the firing, while you were nowhere to be seen. So please don't interfere."

The selfless devotion and love with which the doctors, nurses, and medical students of the three main hospitals, viz. the K. E. M., J. J. and G. T., worked on the two days deserve the greatest tribute.

In Vizagapatam

NAVAL RATINGS' STRIKE Repression Against People

By Wire

Vizagapatam, Feb. 23.

THE Navy boys of Vizagapatam (Andhra) struck work from Feb. 21 for their rightful demands. All 600 of them demonstrated on the streets of the town. The strike is continuing. About 300 of the Ratings were arrested on Feb. 22 and all Naval officers were cordoned off by the Military. No one was allowed to move out.

A largely attended public meeting under Communist auspices, addressed by Communist leaders VIJAB KUMAR and RAMALINGAYYA, condemned the arrest of the 300 Navy boys. A demonstration with placards reading "Release the arrested Navy boys," "Concede their demands," "Down with Imperialism," "Condemn firings", attracted the attention of thousands.

The authorities are continuing their arrests. They have imposed Section 144, banning all processions and demonstrations in sympathy with the strike of local or outside Naval Ratings.

Notices have also been served on Communist leaders for one month.

FIGHT THE ZAMINDAR, MAHAJAN, HOARDER

- They Are The British Agents Inside The Village

OPEN OFFER TO BIHAR CONGRESS LEADERS

"Let Shree Babu (Shri Krishna Sinha, Bihar Congress Ex-Premier, who is opposing Communist-Kisan leader, Karyanand Sharma, in the elections) get the Congress to make a definite declaration that within a year of the establishment of the Congress Ministry in the Province, he will get the three following laws enacted by the Legislature: the law abolishing the zemindari system with compensation; the law banning usury, and mobilisation of all urban and rural capital in the hands of co-operative credit societies loaning out to kisans at 3 per cent interest; and thirdly, the law banning private trade in people's food and cloth and ensuring equitable distribution through co-operative stores run by village panchayats. And if Shree Babu can make this commitment on behalf of the Congress, then our Party would be prepared to withdraw both its candidates from the General Rural seats in Bihar."

SO declared P. C. JOSHI, General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, in the course of his speech at the mass kisan rally at Sheikhpura, Bihar, in Karyanand Sharma's constituency.

It was Joshi's first public speech in Bihar in connection with his election tour. Nearly 10,000 kisans carrying banners and Red Flags marched from long distances to hear Joshi speak. About 1,000 had come from Barbhingha, nearly 10 miles away, and several hundreds had covered even longer distances to be able to listen to Joshi's message.

Several hundreds of those who had gathered at Lakhiserai, on an earlier occasion, but could not hear Joshi due to organised goondaism on the part of Congressmen, had literally run to Sheikhpura to make up their loss.

Kisan Strength Holds Back Congress Leaders' Disruptive Plans

The meeting was to begin at 3 p.m. but from early in the morning Jathas of kisans, marching and singing with their traditional drums and bugles, came pouring in for the meeting. There were Hindus and Muslims, touchables and untouchables, old and young—indeed peasants of all castes and communities had flocked to the gathering.

The small hillside town of Sheikhpura looked literally red with Red Flags and banners and bore a festive appearance. Even a large number of town-traders, school-masters and others walked for more than 3 hours in order to listen to Joshi's speech and to the beautiful songs that were sung in their native tongue.

All this had such a demoralising effect on the gang of District Congress leaders led by Nand Kumar Babu and Shyama Babu—who after the Lakhiserai hooliganism were dogging Joshi like Policemen from place to place—that they would not peep out of their local Congress Office.

News of the brutal assault on Sharma at Lakhiserai had electrified the whole atmosphere. Joshi began his speech by referring to the rich cultural heritage of Bihar which is justly proud of being the land of Gautam Buddha. "But things have gone to such a limit today that brother stones his brother, and even breaks his head, and organises murderous assaults by hired goondas," he said.

Struggle For Freedom Of Village And Of Country

Explaining the Communist election policy, Joshi said:

"We do not come to seek your votes in the name of Swaraj. We do not say, 'Vote for us and we will bring you freedom'. We do not believe in such tall talk. This country has had enough of it. What we say is that Swaraj is the common need and common objective of all Indians. So, live

and learn to fight for Swaraj, otherwise Swaraj will just not come. Our Party seeks to show you—show all freedom-loving Indians of all areas, castes and communities—the path of the struggle for Swaraj. Our Party seeks to tell every group and class of our society as to what each has to do to achieve Swaraj. Our Party seeks to tell you kisans, as to what you have to do for achieving Swaraj for yourselves, for your village and for the country."

Explaining the present set-up in the village, Joshi said:

"Agents of the British are there in your own village. They are, the zamindar, the mahajan, the hoarder and the Police. They are all creatures of the British for the purpose of their rule. They did not exist before the advent of the British, but were created by the latter for the purpose of enslaving the villages. It is they who are responsible for the unspeakable misery and utter poverty of our villages. They have sucked your blood dry; ravaged whole areas in the days of famine and epidemic and have even traded in human flesh. How can you be free unless you destroy these leeches? How can you uproot the British unless you weaken their agents? So strike against these three agents of the British—strike as hard as you can. This is your contribution to the country's struggle for freedom."

You Are Our Army

Then Joshi detailed the measures which the Communists would put before the new legislatures and for the enactment of which they would lead mass campaigns from outside. Addressing the kisans, Joshi declared:

"I do not say that you will get these things because they feature in our Election Manifesto. I only say they are good for you and therefore you should fight for them. Of course, Sharmaji will fight for them inside the Assembly, but you have to struggle from outside. Sharmaji is your general and will always be in the forefront in every battle, but you are the army and it is you who have to do the main fighting. The more you fight, the more you gain. The more you gain, the more the country gains, since your interests are identical with those of the country as a whole. The interests of the zamindars, usurers and hoarders are against the interests of the country, since they are the creatures of the British, and so basically anti-national."

Referring to the Congress claim of "impartiality" as between zamindars and kisans, Joshi said:

"Look at your own province. Here in Bihar, the Congress left four seats uncontested to the zamindars. But it is not prepared to leave two seats for the kisans, and not even one for mazdoors. The Heavens would not have collapsed if the Congress had allowed trusted kisan leaders like Sharmaji and Brahmadeo to go uncontested to the Assembly. The kisans constitute about 80 per cent of the population of Bihar. But they are not being allowed to have even two seats out of 250."

It is here that Joshi made the open offer to Shree Babu and asked the Congress supporters present in the meeting to go to Shree Babu on our behalf and persuade him to agree to these

three demands of the kisans. Elucidating the point, Joshi further declared:

"We do not seek to go to the Assembly for any personal gain. We only want to serve the kisans, to save our people from utter ruin and degradation. Our object would be achieved if Congress can be committed to these three basic demands."

Joshi exhorted the kisans to work wholeheartedly for Sharmaji, since it was their battle that he was waging. His victory as well as his defeat would be theirs.

Lathis And Knives Cannot Exterminate Red Flag

Joshi concluded with the reference to the horrible incident of Lakhiserai where responsible Congress leaders had organised goondaism and had sent lathis to break Sharmaji's head.

Appealing to the audience to stop this goondaism, Joshi said:

"This is not the way of civilisation, but of barbarism. But you cannot defeat the kisans by goondaism. We have withstood goondaism of the Government and of the zamindars.

We can face this goondaism of the Congress leaders too. The more they resort to such methods, the more do we gain in the estimation of the people. We may lose even a few comrades in this battle. But that will only make us immortal in the hearts of the people.

"We are immortal because we are rooted in the people. We cannot be exterminated by lathis or knives. But goondaism kills the patriotic fervour of the people. It tarnishes the fair name of the Congress. It tarnishes us too, for people begin to think: they are fighting among themselves and not against the Government.

"Congress leaders ought to take a lesson from this. Now some of their followers have stooped so low as to copy the Police in following me from place to place. In 1942 they proudly shouted 'Quit India.' Today they are saying 'P. C. Joshi Go Back.' Certainly this is not a great advance on their August stand. Will the Congress leaders even now see that the more deliberately they spread calumnies against us, the more their own followers will give up the healthy democratic traditions of the Congress and resort to the mean tactics of the Police and the goonda?"

A Sea Of Clenched Fists Salute Joshi

Eager kisan faces kept gaping long after Joshi had finished his speech. Hundreds of them besieged him when he tried to get out of the meeting. They would not let him go without giving him their 'Lal Salam'. They lined up village by village holding proudly the Red Banner in one hand and raised the other hand in a determined clenched fist salute.

Joshi moved round from group to group, took their salute and chatted with them. It was only then that the kisans took their village drums and bugles and marched back with firmer steps and bigger hearts.

They would come again in larger numbers and with more flags, drums and bugles and proudly cast their votes for their respected leader, Pandit Karyanand Sharma. Is it not the first time that they have the chance to vote for their own man, for the one who is one of them and yet their trusted leader in their struggle against the British and against the zamindars?

Calcutta Mobilises In Support Of RIN Ratings

One Lakh Workers' Protest Strike Against Bombay Atrocities

Sunday, February 24.

On Saturday, February 23rd, over one lakh students and workers of Calcutta staged a remarkable demonstration expressing solidarity with the Naval Ratings and denouncing the Bombay Police and Military atrocities.

NEARLY one lakh workers of the city and suburbs came out on sympathetic strike; there were many disciplined processions through the streets.

Trams observed complete strike though buses ran as usual. A host of schools and colleges were closed but those which were open were not attended at all. Even students of the Presidency College came out and hundreds of school children including many Muslims participated in the demonstration.

The Students' Congress (sponsored by Congress leaders as rival to the All-India Students' Federation in which Communists and others work together) did not participate but despite this, a mass meeting of students was held in the Wellington Square where sympathy was expressed for the Naval Ratings, and the Police atrocities in Bombay were condemned.

But most remarkable of all was the strike of the Railway workers, who practically for the first time in their history, took part in a National demonstration.

Loco workers of the Bengal & Assam (B. & A.) Railway at Sealdah first acted and they soon brought the clerical staff out too. The Traffic Control Office which remains open day and night was for the first time in its history seen under lock and key. The result was that the entire Railway traffic for a hundred miles from Calcutta was at a standstill. Except for two or three trains in the early morning, not a single train came to, or left, Sealdah, during the whole of Saturday.

But the workers throughout remained disciplined and peaceful. Many of them brought out demonstrations, shouting slogans.

On the E.I. Railway also there was dislocation for hours as the track near Belur was blocked by demonstrators. There was no interruption on the B.N. Railway.

In the evening at a huge meeting of the B. & A. Railway workers at Narkeldanga, JYOTI BASU, Communist leader of the Railway workers, declared that the protest strike was for one day and services would resume from the next morning.

Mass Rally Under Communist Auspices

There was a mass rally of workers and citizens called by the Bengal Committee of the Communist Party at the Wellington Square presided over by Prof. K. P. CHATTOPADHYAY. To the rally came marching, processions of the worker-strikers and others from all parts of the city and suburbs, carrying Congress, League and Communist flags.

SOMNATH LAHIRI, Communist leader, explained that the strike for one day had been called to show solidarity with the Naval Ratings and to condemn the Bombay Police atrocities. He said:

"The final battle is yet to come and the present strike is like a rehearsal before the final big battle. It has demonstrated that the working-class is in no mood to tolerate injustice to their fellow countrymen."

CHATURALI, Communist worker-leader, made a powerful and moving speech denouncing the Imperialist insolence against our people and greeting the Naval Ratings and the brave workers of Bombay.

The rally unanimously condemned the Police and Military atrocities in Bombay and supported the just demands of the Naval strikers. It appealed to the Congress and League leaders to take up the cause of these brave men immediately.

Police patrolling went on in Calcutta today. Two tram workers were arrested for peacefully persuading bus passengers not to travel.

On Friday, February 22, two officers of the Special Branch of the Police came to the Communist Party headquarters and said that the Police Commissioner wanted that all political parties should keep the peace and that the Congress and the League leaders had agreed.

Congress And League Leaders Keep Out

The Congress and the League did not participate at all in the hartal today nor have the Congress or League leaders yet issued a word of protest against the Bombay atrocities.

Even the "Congress-labour" and Hindustan Mazdoor Sewak Sangh leaders like Suresh Banerjee, Dutt Mazumdar, Humayun Kabir & Co., were to be seen nowhere at all in the demonstrations that the workers spontaneously brought out.

The city is normal on Sunday morning. The demand for the Communist daily Swadhinata has tremendously gone up everywhere, for the people have seen the great role it played in mobilising support for the just struggle of the Naval Ratings and against the Police and Military atrocities in Bombay.

Dange's Press Conference

(Continued from page 4.)

as hooliganism is to slander them and those who have fallen victims to British bullets.

Our Appeal To All Parties

The people of Bombay—Hindus and Muslims alike—are in need of help and encouragement. Hundreds of them are in mourning. On top of it, the Police have started indiscriminate arrests to terrorise the people into submission. They have to be unitedly protected against further repression.

I appeal to all parties to join with us in stopping the repression and demanding an open inquiry into the indiscriminate firing by the Military and see that a repetition of this bloodbath is prevented.

I further warn the Press against the Imperialist attempt to make my Party a scape-goat to hide its own misdeeds.

WE DIP OUR RED BANNER

Kamal

ON the 22nd of February you fell a victim to the bullets of Imperialist soldiers. Your young life was cut short by those who have sown distress and mourning in hundreds of homes in Bombay.

You fell because you refused to run in panic at the sight of the Military. You were a brave daughter of India and a brave daughter of the Party.

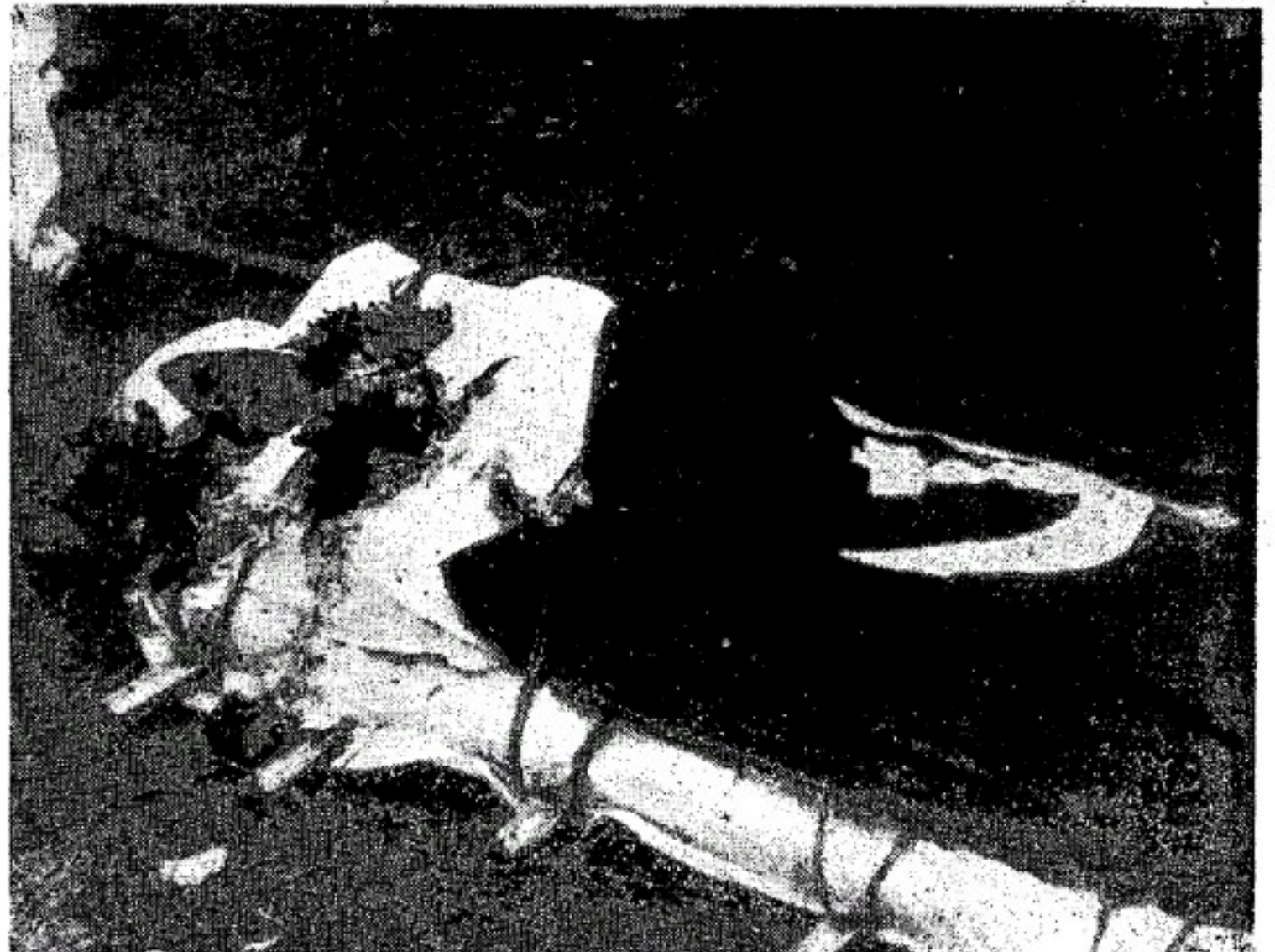
Loved and admired by all as one of our most capable Party members, your death has caused intense grief to all.

Brave daughter of the Party, on behalf of the Central Committee of our Party, I offer you my Red Salute. Rest assured your Party will continue to fight for the cause of freedom for which you worked and gave your young life.

To Comrade Donda

We share your grief. Kamal has died a martyr's death. The way in which you are bearing your sorrow is worthy of a Party member steeled in many struggles. In spite of grief and sorrow, continue to march and we know you will not falter.

— B. T. Ranadive



KAMAL

Welcome Back

THE Imperialist Government has at last been forced to release from behind the bars some of the most valiant fighters for Indian freedom. Among them are:

Baba GURMUKH SINGH, the Ghadr Party leader and legendary hero of the Kamagatamaru; KISHORI LAL, JAIDEV KAPOOR, SHIV VERMA, GAYA PRASAD, DHANWANTARI, TIKARAM SUKHAN, TEHL SINGH—all comrades of BHAGAT SINGH; Swami HANSRAJ of the Suchitgarh Shooting Case, and others.

They are heroes each of whom has spent 15 to 20 years in jail and had been in the forefront of every anti-Imperialist struggle in the land, inside and outside jail.

The CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA welcomes them, and all their recently-released comrades, back into our midst to take their place again at the head of our people in their struggle for freedom.

It pledges itself that the Communist Party shall continue to lead the battle for the release of every remaining anti-Imperialist fighter still behind the bars.

It appeals to the Congress and the League to take up this cause immediately and lead a joint campaign with all others, so that not one Indian patriot shall remain any longer inside Imperialist jails.

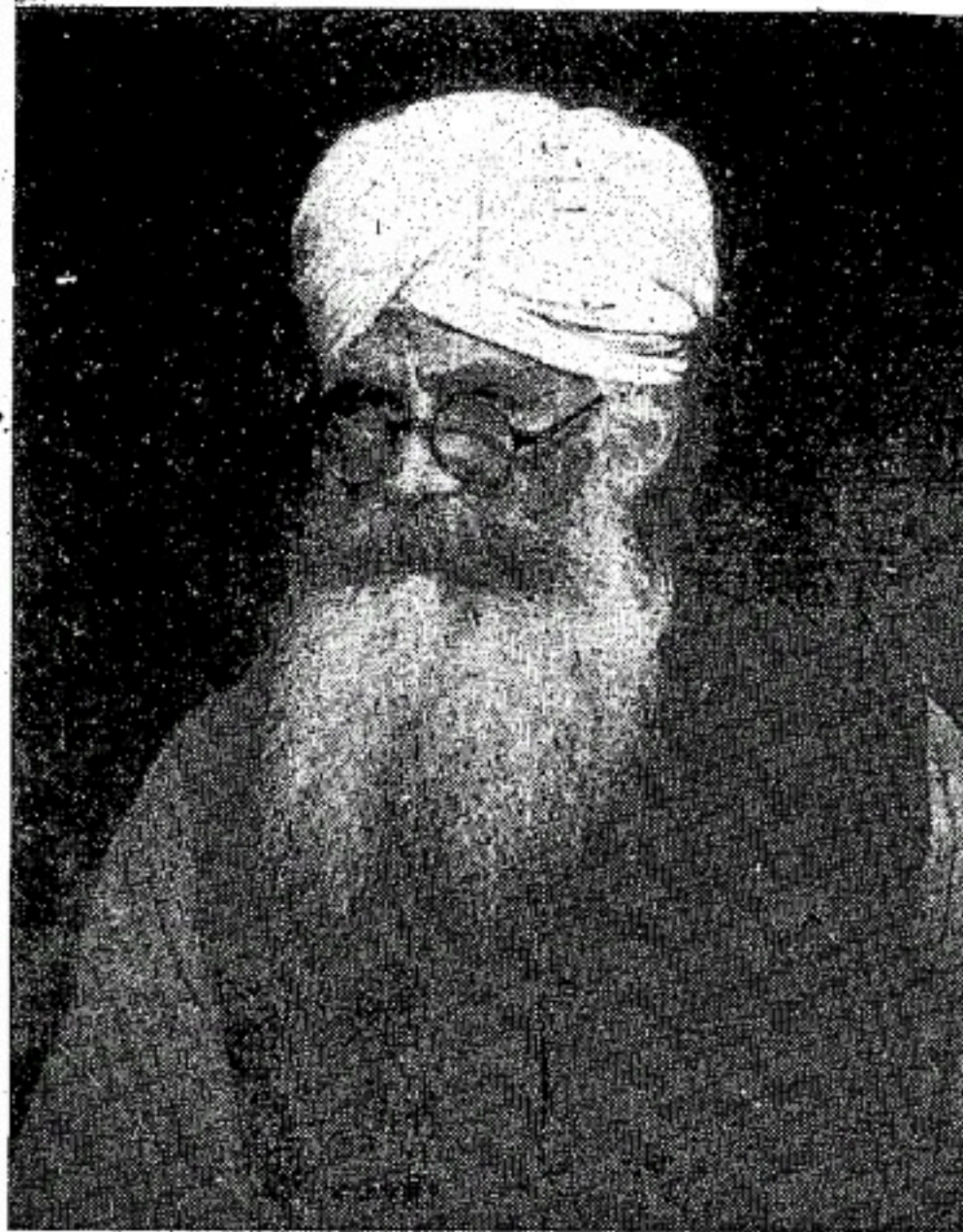
THE Governor of the Punjab at first offered to release JAIDEV KAPOOR, SHIV VERMA and Dr. GAYA PRASAD (when they had completed nearly 20 years including remissions in jail) on certain conditions.

These conditions required them not to commit any "offence," not to associate with "bad characters," not to lead a "dissolute or evil life," to live within limits prescribed by the authorities from time to time and not to leave those areas without the permission of the District Magistrate or the Superintendent of Police and to report their presence at the Police stations periodically and generally to comply with all the rules of Police surveillance over the released convicts of criminal tribes, as enjoined by Section 401 of the Criminal Penal Code.

Refusing the Imperialist offer of release on these humiliating conditions, these Communist leaders wrote back to the Governor:

"Today however we have no request to make to this alien Government, nothing to ask for. In this titanic conflict between the Indian people and British Imperialism, we have the proud privilege to stand in the front ranks of our people and fight against the system that has reduced our beautiful country into a vast and ugly prison-house.

"We did only our patriotic duty, striking at the fetters enslaving us and oppressing us. We do not grudge to-day our being in jail for this. We are not sorry, we are not worried, for we know the system is doomed as sure as our people are destined to win. From



GURMUKH SINGH

behind the iron gratings of our prison cells, we can hear our people marching onwards, ever onwards to freedom.

"Let the Jailors of our people today read the writing on

the wall. India's Victory Day is near. And on that great day, we prisoners all shall have our triumphant march out of our jails into a Free India of free peoples."

At Lahore

PLEDGE TO PARTY

ON February 15th, Communist Party members and sympathisers at Lahore welcomed BABA GURMUKH SINGH, KISHORILAL and Swami HANSRAJ, who had been released recently after serving life imprisonments, TEJA SINGH SWATANTAR presided.

Kishorilal addressing the meeting said:

"The greatest honour for a revolutionary is to possess the Communist Party card and I am proud of being a member of the Communist Party.

"I was pining to come out of jail not because I got tired of jail, but because I was finding myself imprisoned when the Party is fighting a life and death struggle. Today I am free and place myself at the disposal of the Party."

Other Communist leaders, DHANWANTARI, TIKARAM SUKHAN, TEHL SINGH, reached Lahore the same night after serving long imprisonments.



SHAHID

WE DIP OUR RED BANNER

Shahid

MOHAMMAD SHAHID, Communist worker-leader of Bombay and one of the pioneers who planted the Red Flag among the workers of India, passed away at 1-30 a.m. on Sunday, February 24.

Untold hardships and suffering, while leading workers' struggles and years of strenuous jail life, had shattered Shahid's health and made him a prey to cancer at the early age of 40.

Yet such was his strength of will that he bore up and battled against this disease for nearly one year and kept at his post of duty among the workers till the strength to stand lasted.

A procession of workers and workers' families—braving the Police and Military terror going on in the streets at the time—accompanied Shahid's dead body and laid him to rest, paying him the last homage of the Red Flag and the workers of Bombay.

Speaking at Shahid's grave, B. T. Ranadive, leading member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India, said:

"You gave your life for the freedom of the country and to lift the burden from the oppressed millions. You were one of the best sons of the working-class who struggled not only for the interests of your own class but of the whole country.

"The spirits of you and of martyrs like you have brought fruits which we are today witnessing in Bombay, were people in their thousands—Hindus and Muslims together—are defying the Imperialists so bravely.

"We promise you solemnly that the work you are leaving behind shall be fulfilled by us. Lal Salam."

ONE OF INDIA'S BIGGEST RED FLAG LEADERS

Worker-Son, Steeled In Anti-Imperialist Struggles

In the year 1930, Calcutta was at the boiling point. Hundreds of people were being shot down all over the country every day by the British. Things were almost as hot as they are now.

But there were a handful of black-sheep even then, right in Calcutta. One day, they got together at the Calcutta Town Hall to give a reception to the notorious Sir A. H. Ghuznavi. He was leaving for England to help his Imperialist masters 'decide India's destiny.'

The Town Hall audience were giving him a send-off as a 'representative' of the Muslims of the country who would return with 'freedom' in his pocket as a gift from the British.

Professional toughs and immaculate gentlemen packed the Hall and no one got up to tell him to his face that he was no 'representative' of the Muslims.

Then, suddenly, a young lad of 18 got up and protested. The toughs pounced on him at once and beat him up so badly that the papers reported the next day that he had actually died as a result of it.

But till he lost his consciousness, he fought like a sher-e-inqilab and shouted at the audience:

"A son of a Muslim never goes to beg for freedom from these very butchers who are shooting down our brothers and sisters in cold-blood. Only the pet dogs of the British think of begging—the Muslim hates these dogs from the bottom of his heart!"

THAT youngster was MOHAMMAD ISMAIL—one of the best-loved leaders of the Indian working-class today. Our Ismail—as we call him—has led tram, bus, biri, jute, gas and other workers in hundreds of struggles.

After that Town Hall meeting, Ismail became a figure among patriotic Muslims.

He flashed into the limelight again in 1940-41. The Calcutta Congress leaders had been so completely flattened out by the Police and goonda terror let loose by the British, that not one of them called upon the Muslims to observe the anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in which Hindu and Muslim shed his blood together.

It fell to the lot of Ismail and a few of his comrades of the Navayuvak Muslim Party to come forward and do the job in Mohammad Ali Park, Calcutta.

Sparks flew at that meeting, in the midst of the gloom, which lighted hundreds of sturdy-patriotic hearts.

"Kasam un gunjose jo jang karte hain mouste"—were the immortal Urdu poet Josh's words which Ismail recited to the audience (meaning: 'Brother! we pledge by those heroes who come to grips with death!').

Son Of A Worker Family

Ismail was born of actual working-class parents, his father was a weaver in Cawnpore and he himself started life as an unpaid apprentice in a motor workshop—earning his living by hawking cigarettes in the streets during off hours.

Coming from the down-trodden working-class, he saw with his own eyes what misery, pain and slavish degradation the common people of our land have to endure in their daily lives. He also came face to face with the death-defying courage, unity and indignation against slavery they show when roused to a pitch of fury.

That is why, the broad stream of the Congress movement was not enough for him.

He was not satisfied with the general Congress policy of 'going to jail once every ten years and filling up the rest of the time running about, trying to catch votes and patching up a compromise with the British.'

He would tell himself again and again: 'The Congress drew its strength by uniting Hindus and Muslims. But every day, the Muslims and the Congress are drifting further and further apart. How can it fight to dislodge finally the dead-weight of slavery?'

He got the answer only when he heard the call of the Red Flag, and saw this new movement in action.

Among The Calcutta Workers, With Red Flag

At that time, the British had cracked down on leading Communists like Muzaffar Ahmed

lice, of course, did not lift a finger against the rascal, and threatened to arrest anybody who would dare to deal with him.

But Ismail is the same—whether there are thousands marching with him in days of glory or only a few hundreds huddled together in the dark days.

He got up, caught the official by the scruff of his neck and threw him out of the meeting. The workers were a changed lot at once. They stood up in a body and the Police dared not do anything more.

After some time, Ismail was arrested on a trumped-up charge of fomenting a tram strike.

The Police marched him from the lock-up (thana) to court with a rope round his waist and deliberately took him past the Nonapuker Tramway workshop everyday. The idea was to give the workers' morale a knock-out blow.

Many workers would flock to the gate and silently wipe away their tears. Some of them get smuggled food for him into the thana, but they could not muster enough courage to lead 'Release Ismail!' demonstrations.

But neither Ismail nor other Red Flag workers gave up the ghost. Bashir, Mishirji, Brahmadeo, Makhar and other workers who had come forward did not stop fighting. They stuck grimly to the task of organising the tramway workers.

them this card. Answer those who insult you straight and blunt, and with the Red Flag in your hands, raise your united voice.

And it worked almost like magic! Before you knew what was what, the biri workers were a strong and proud lot.

The majority of the tramway workers are Hindus and most of the biri workers are Muslims. But today, they are united under the Red Flag and their leader is Ismail.

But jute workers, gas workers, taxi or bus drivers or rickshaw pullers—there are hardly any workers in Calcutta who don't know Ismail and don't love him.

Here is just one true story of the secret of his immense popularity among the working-class.

How He Led 1937 Jute General Strike

In 1937, when the jute workers were conducting a general strike, no workers' leaders could get across to them. The Police were posted everywhere—at the stations, on the streets; whenever any labour leader went there, he was served with a warrant externing him from the area. The jute kings are British and the Bengal I.C.S. takes its orders from them. So one can imagine to what lengths they would go. Ismail too had a warrant against him—but

by Somnath Lahiri

Today, the glorious story of the tramway workers' union in Calcutta is the pride of the Indian working-class and even of the Calcutta middle-class.

Leader Of Calcutta Tram-Workers

No less than 7,500 workers out of a total of 8,000 are united in the Red Flag Union and not a few of the clerical staff are also in it. In 1942, they won a partial victory through their strike struggle and who does not know of their great strike action in 1945-46—first for their economic demands and then in the two great clashes between Imperialism and the people in November and February recently?

In fact, it was the tramway workers of Calcutta who took the offensive against the Government's and the employers' drive against the working-class in the post-war epoch. When there are wage-cuts everywhere with the end of the war, the tram workers have won an increase of Rs. 2 to Rs. 5 in their basic wage. Their demands for bonus and holidays with pay have been accepted and above all, the management has been forced to recognise their union.

It was Ismail who led them to this victory and he also rallied the Calcutta middle class youth for solidarity with the workers. In the thick of the tramway strike, he found time to go to the chief Calcutta colleges and speak to the students. It was the first time in history, in India, that a labour leader, son of a worker, was rallying the students inside the colleges.

Ismail has worked miracles also with the most backward sections of the working-class—the biri workers of Calcutta, for instance.

The biri workers were looked down upon in the past as thieves and degenerates by middle-class folk. So the Police used to harass them at every opportunity—specially when they went home after work at night.

Ismail planted himself among them and gave them the red card of the Red Flag Union and told them: Hold your head high and when the Police come, show

when has a mere 'scrap of paper' held him back from the workers?

So one day, he put on a dirty dhoti, took off his shirt and shoes and dressed himself up like an ordinary jute mill-hand. Under cover of darkness, he slipped through the Police cordon and went right into the heart of the jute-mill area.

During the day, he hid himself in some workers' hut and as soon as it got dark, he began his one-night-one-centre whirlwind tour. He inspired the workers to continue the strike-battle, fixed up details of the strike programme and organisation to guarantee that there would be no collapse. In this way, from Alambazar (Calcutta suburbs) to Barrackpore (20 miles from Calcutta) he pushed ahead, night after night.

Towards the end, he was rounded up along with 50 other worker-leaders. An informer betrayed him while he was conducting a secret meeting. But even inside jail, he kept at it—inspiring the workers with knowledge of what had been achieved. 'The honour of a successful struggle is far greater than the dishonour of jail life'—his voice would ring out.

It is just here that he differs from so many 'labour leaders' who think they have done enough once they get arrested and have made a 'name' for themselves. Ismail takes jail-going, jail-breaking, underground and secret work as only varying methods to be taken in one's stride in the zig-zag course of the struggle against Imperialism and oppression. That is why the workers count him as flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone.

War & Jap Bombing: Ismail Leads Calcutta

When the war came in 1939, the Communists—and Ismail among them—were the first to come under the axe of Imperialist repression while the Congress leaders were still free. Ismail was clapped into prison for two years in 1940.

By the time he came out of jail, big changes had taken place all over the world and in

India. Japan was attacking on India's borders, not many miles from Calcutta. The Soviet Union was the scene of a clash of arms between the German Fascists and the Red Army.

Some said, 'Let the Japanese come—let Hitler win—we must destroy all the means of fighting them from India, to win freedom from the British'. The arrest of the Congress leaders spread this defeatism among sections of Congressmen.

Ismail has never minced words in criticising the mistakes even of the biggest leaders. He said: 'No! To take Japanese and German help is not to win freedom but to invite the devil to dinner and get Japanese slavery to replace the British.'

So Ismail held the tram workers and organised them into a fighting force for maintaining communications in a bomb-torn city, winning the workers' demands (such as ARP, wage increase, etc.) and for breaking the political deadlock and installing popular leaders in power.

I remember vividly Ismail's straight talk to the tram workers in the thick of the Japanese bombing of Calcutta. Food prices were shooting up in the city, women and children and workers and employees were in great difficulties. When trams stopped running after 9 p.m. in the black-out air raid nights (because it was a heavy strain on the drivers and conductors and depot staff) there was a howl of protest from the middle-class to begin with.

And yet, it was being whispered round that the tram workers are 'traitors' because they would not paralyse and blow-up the tram transport system. Ismail put it straight to the workers: "Do you know what the Calcutta citizens will do if we go on strike? They are so anxious to have the trams in these uncertain times that they curse us for not running them after 9 p.m. So they will curse us still more if we stop altogether. Do you want to begin 'azadi ki lara' with civil war on the first day?" Hundreds of voices answered: NO!

His Work Inside Calcutta Corporation

Ismail was the biggest war-time leader of the Indian working-class. That was proved in the Calcutta Corporation elections in which Ismail and another Communist comrade of his together got 21,000 votes as against the 7,000 votes of their Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, and Muslim League-backed opponents for the Labour seats.

At that time, cynical remarks were heard: "After all there are only two Communists in the Corporation. What can they do?"

But two Communist councillors within one and a half years have done more for the working-class from inside the Corporation than the Congress councillors—who have controlled the Corporation—have done in 20 years. By fighting inside the Corporation—while the workers fought outside—they have got a wage increase of Rs. 3 for every Corporation worker.

It is such workers as Ismail—born of working-class parents, steeled in a hundred struggles—who make the Communist Party a party of a new type of the toiling masses. Ismail is standing for election from the Hooghly Labour seat. Can any worker dream of not casting his vote for him?

(Translated from the Bengali)

Bengal Labour Seats

COMMUNIST CANDIDATES

1. Bankim Mukherjee, Howrah District Labour
2. Somnath Lahiri, Calcutta and Suburban Labour
3. Jyoti Basu, Railway Trade Union Labour
4. Indrajit Gupta, Asansol Coal
5. Chatur Ali, Barrackpore Labour
6. Mohammad Ismail, Hooghly Labour
7. Ratanlal Brahman, Darjeeling Tea Garden Labour

On this page we give a life-sketch of Mohammad Ismail written by Somnath Lahiri, member, Central Committee of the Communist Party of India and one of the foremost Communist leaders of Bengal.

and Puran Chand Joshi. Some of them were sentenced to transportation for life, some were sent for 12 years' imprisonment. The Communist Party was under ban.

But even then, the Communists were putting up a fight: 'No compromise with British Imperialism! We must fight on to the end!' They were digging themselves in among workers and kisans—welding Hindu-Muslim unity in the fire of common struggles.

And so Ismail took the Red Flag in his hand and got down to the job of welding the Calcutta workers into a fighting force.

It was a hard job. The Police were out to smash the Red Flag by jailing and lathi-charging workers. A large number of trade unions were under ban. And on top of all this there were riots engineered on the basis of growing Hindu-Muslim distrust. The Police and the employers between them seemed to have undisputed sway. The workers were cowed down—their morale very low.

Arrested: But Ismail Still Keeps Going

In those black days, our Ismail acted as a pioneer who almost single-handedly defended the honour of the working-class and cut through the stifling atmosphere.

I can vividly recall one such incident. It was 1934 and a small meeting of the Calcutta tramway workers was being held in the Calcutta maidan.

A British official of the Company came to the meeting drunk and started abusing the workers in filthy language. The workers could not come to a decision to do anything. The Po-

PEOPLE'S AGE

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RIN RATINGS' STRUGGLE

Full Story Of Bombay Naval Strike

"We surrendered to India and not to the British. I don't know where they are taking us."
 "We shall never give in. Good-bye and good luck."

THESE are reported to be the last words of the President of the Central Naval Strike Committee, Bombay, to his comrades before he, along with other "ring leaders", was taken away to an "unknown destination," only two days after the surrender.

Nobody knows what is happening to our brothers in the Navy since an iron curtain separated them from our people on the morning of Saturday, the 23rd of February, 1946.

They gave in on the assurance of Sardar Patel and Mr. Jinnah that the Congress and the Muslim League would do everything to see that they were not victimised and their demands were conceded.

The day after the surrender, the Commander-in-Chief cynically went back on his "assurance" to Maulana Azad and Liaqat Ali Khan that there would be no victimisation.

And yet all Sardar Patel and Pandit Nehru have to say about it is that "discipline" has to be maintained and the Naval Ratings were wrong in taking "hasty" action "without consulting their leaders." There is plenty of loose talk, too, both in London and Bombay, that the Communists are the "instigators" of the "mutiny."

When all India, to a man, should stand by our brothers in the Navy, the leaders are back-sliding from the "assurances" they gave, blaming the Ratings—while the British go scot free.

And yet the truth is that our brave brothers in the Navy have opened a new chapter in the history of the Indian peoples, which nothing on earth can wipe away.

"Beggars Can't Be Choosers!"

It is utter nonsense to hunt for "outside instigators" who egged on the youngsters in the Navy to "mutiny". The truth is that the British bosses of the Indian Navy have been sitting on a volcano with cotton-wool stuffed in their ears.

There are 20,000 men in the ships and shore establishments of the Navy in Bombay. These boys come from the Punjab, Bengal and the South. There are both Hindus and Muslims among them. A good chunk of them comes from lower-middle class families—straight from school and college.

They are daring, adventurous, skilful builders of modern India—most of whom have been in action in the sea-war against the Germans and the Japanese. They are proud of India, proud of themselves, self-respecting, many youngsters.

Now the Godfreys and the Rattreys—Blimps who rule the Indian Navy—have been treating this body of fighting youth like dirt. "Sons of bitches", "Sons of coolies", "Black bastards"—this is what they were called by their British officers who outnumber Indians by more than five to one.

No wonder their food is had, travelling facilities at a minimum, demobilisation time-table not drawn up, opportunities for re-settlement in civil life non-existent.

"We know it does not take the headquarters at Delhi ten minutes to direct the entire fleet to scenes of danger and to bases fraught with risks," said one Rating to me, "but we know our demands have the usual official run of several months in the name of investigations."

Anyhow, the boys held back till life became quite impossible a few weeks ago.

One morning, some of them at the Talwar Communications Training School (a shore establishment in Bombay) reported to an officer that the food they got was uneatable. "Beggars can't be choosers"—was the only reply they got. Those who "objected" to gravel in their rice were told to do "fatigue" (extra duty during off-hours) to sort them out!

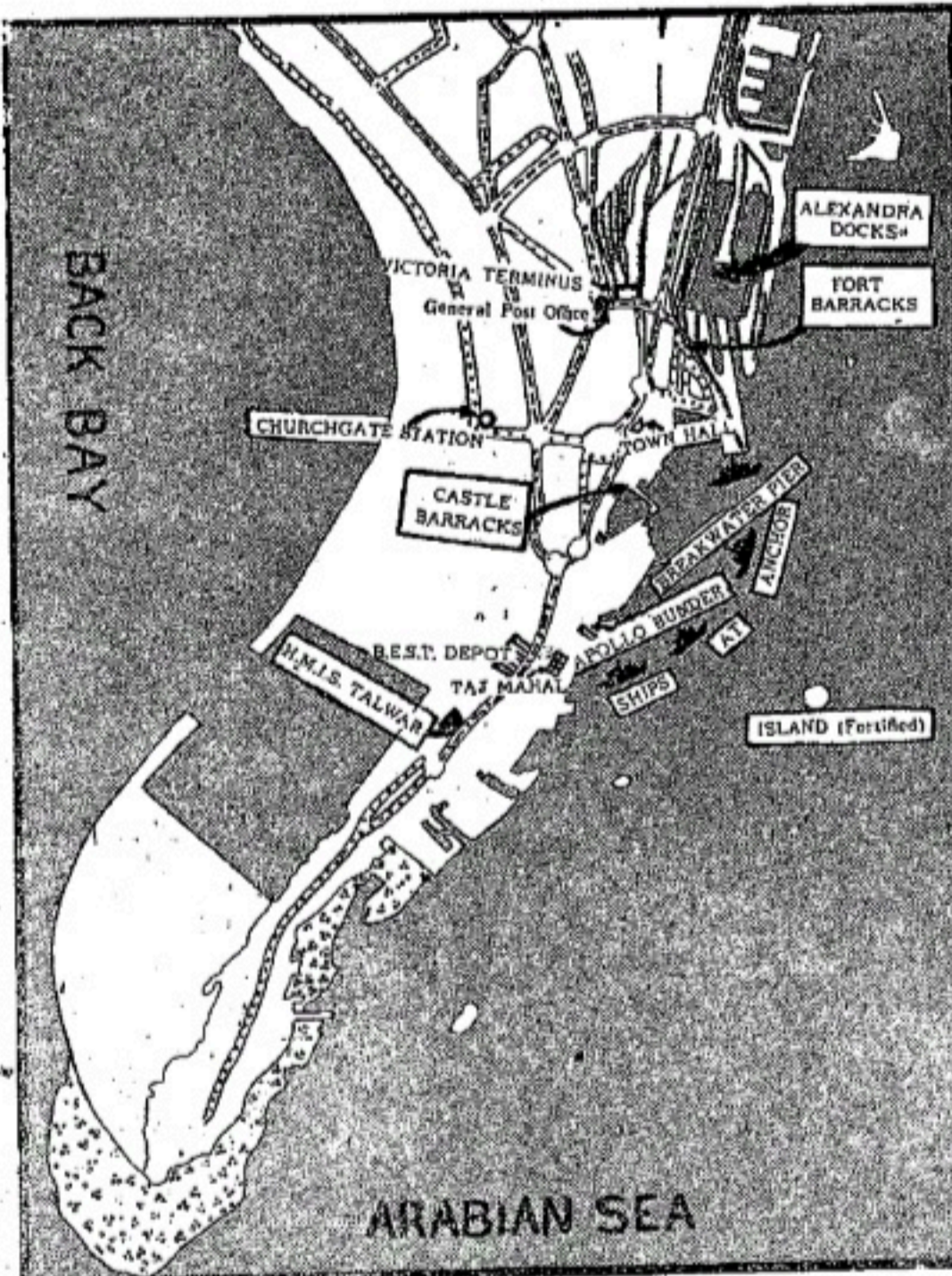
Grimly patient, the Ratings reported the matter. They waited, but nothing happened. The insults went on. One of them was arrested for writing "Quit India" and "Jai Hind" on the walls of the establishment during the visit by the almighty Rattray.

On Monday, the 18th of February, they decided they had waited long enough. Nothing had been "pre-arranged." Some boys went on strike at ten in the morning. As the news spread, they came out in a body. By noon, the strike in the Talwar was complete.

Atlee has said in Parliament that the Communists hatched the whole "conspiracy". Asaf Ali seems to believe almost the same thing when he says that he wants the armed forces to be "impartially patriotic" and Sardar Patel talks of the Naval Ratings not having asked for his "orders."

The fact is they were desperate and wanted to cut through the red tape. Strikes in the British Air Force units stationed in India (which were not called "mutiny" and settled in the strikers' favour) gave them the cue.

And on the very first day of the strike, they very "impartially"



Map Of South Bombay

went to the Congress and the Muslim League leaders for support and guidance. Even the Times of India carried a report by its representative on the first day's events, bearing this out.

"We Are All Leaders"

The whole of Monday, neither the Naval authorities nor the Party leaders approached did anything about the strike. But the Ratings went ahead to rally public support.

By Tuesday morning, 20,000 Naval Ratings in all the 12 shore establishments in Bombay and the suburbs and over 20 ships in harbour were on strike.

At nine o'clock in the morning, they held a meeting at the Azad Maidan (not far from the Talwar) and announced their demands. From there, they marched in procession along the upper-class Fort area round about, shouting "Jai Hind" and "Inquilab Zindabad". British soldiers and civilians scurried away in all directions in fright. An attempted lathi-charge by the Police led to the Police Superintendent being taken to hospital. Armed guards were posted at Government establishments in the area.

Not till the afternoon did Rattray, Flag Officer Commanding (F.O.C.), Bombay, visit the Talwar and ask for a statement of grievances from the strikers. At first, nobody would speak to him. "You will arrest and transfer those who do so as the 'ring leaders'—they told him. But when Rattray promised no such thing would be done, they elected a Central Naval Strike Committee and gave him a list of their demands and repeated their demand that any promise by Rattray must be under-written by a national leader.

Rattray's reply was to come by 4-30 p.m. But there was no reply. Instead, he showed his teeth by putting under arrest 300 Ratings at the Hamia shore establishment after their return to camp in the night.

Army Closes In

On Wednesday, the Naval authorities tried out a ruse. On the one hand, they posted Military pickets at all establishments. At the same time, they decided to throw out a sop to the Ratings by providing Indian food according to the "menu submitted by the strike leaders."

But the strikers started the day with a huge meeting at the Oval, opposite the University, at 10 in the morning. Hundreds of Ratings came by trains from the suburban shore establishments. All together, they drew up a final list of their demands.

The F.O.C.'s big move for the day was to post Military pickets and order all Naval Ratings to return to their establishments by 3-30 in the afternoon. They also took away all arms and ammunition from the Talwar and some other shore establishments.

But the Ratings at Castle Barracks and on the ships saw through the game in time and made the removal of the armed guards a condition for the surrender of arms. They took charge of the guard room at Castle Barracks and on the ships. The Military were not allowed to enter the barracks or the ships.

The Central Naval Strike Committee in a statement condemned the calling in of the Military as a ruse to "isolate them and prevent them from having any access to food from outside". At the same time, it asked the Ratings to "maintain complete calm and not be stampeded into any kind of violent action." The President of the Committee himself saw the F.O.C. and made it clear that if the Military were withdrawn, there would be "no trouble."

All through Wednesday night, there was terrific anger in the ships and shore establishments and a feeling that the "zero hour" was coming and "the authorities were out to starve them to surrender. Food and water supplies were running short. In the shore establishments, the taps might be cut off at any moment. On the ships, only a few had food stocks and water-filtering apparatus. Castle Barracks was very badly off as regards food.

Seven-Hour Gun Battle

By Thursday morning, nerves were on edge at Castle Barracks. At 8-30 in the morning, some of the Ratings tried to go out to fetch food and water and cigarettes.

Very unexpectedly, one of the Maratha guards on sentry duty opened fire. Taken aback for a moment, the Ratings rushed back and took cover. Then they made up their minds in an instant to shoot back if necessary in self-defence. They handed round arms and took up positions.

Then they called out to the Maratha guards: "You too are Indian. Why do you shoot down your own brothers?" After a moment's hesitation, the Indian soldier also made up his mind and refused to fire any more.

But the "supreme command"—the Flag Officer Commanding, R.I.N., Godfrey, who had arrived—had made up his mind to crush the "mutiny" with blood and bullets. British troops swarmed into the area, making the Town Hall, next to Castle Barracks, their "operational headquarters." By 1 p.m. there were at least 17 trucks and armoured cars, with troops armed with Bren-guns and rifles held at the ready.

At Castle Barracks, the British troops took up forward positions and opened fire in a seven-hour battle which lasted from 9 o'clock or so in the morning to after 4 in the afternoon.

Once Castle Barracks had to fire in self-defence, the ships also got ready, with guns uncovered. At about 11 o'clock, the battle-scarred flagship, Narbada is reported to have signalled to all ships in stream:

"All guns loaded. Do the same and if any shots are fired from ashore, open fire."

A large force of British troops, which had taken up positions between Castle Barracks and the docks, did open fire on the ships. Four men on the Sind were hit. The Punjab and the Oudh then answered back with fire from small-arms and one shell. Stray firing went on for some time and ships began to hoist steam in order to manoeuvre and operate the heavy guns.

Courage, Organisation Unity With People

Some day, the full story of the Castle Barracks battle and the harbour battle will be told. There was remarkable coolness and capacity for organisation shown by the Ratings who had taken over the ships and barracks—according to all reports. Communications, gun-fire and internal organisation, while standing by for action in all ships, were all managed by the Ratings.

There were unforgettable scenes in the midst of battle. "We sat expecting death any minute, with shrouds around our heads"—this is how one of them described the tense situation in his picturesque Urdu. A young Naval Officer, siding with the strikers, showed reckless daring in the Castle Barracks fighting. He sat astride the high wall surrounding the building and opened fire. But he was sniped by a bullet and fell dead into the compound.

His comrades gave him a silent salute and painted a red cross where he fell, with their fingers dipped in blood. His body lay in the barracks for two days because the British troops would not even allow the dead to be taken out.

But the source of inspiration to these young Ratings were the people who rushed to their aid even in the thick of the firing. The sea face around the Gateway of India was choke-full of all sorts of people—young and old, men and women and children, Hindus and Muslims, men from all parts of India.

They came with their baskets and packets of fruits and other eatables, to shower on motor launches coming out from the ships. Indian Military pickets would look on and not interfere. Even at Castle Barracks, with the firing going on, ordinary folk were doing their best to get food packets to the Ratings inside.

Many of them risked their lives for the Ratings. One young "working-class lad of about 18 actually got hit as he tried to get across a packet of chana (gram). The British troops sniped him in cold blood.

Armed Truce

The firing reached its peak by about 2 p.m. at Castle Barracks. At 2-20, Godfrey broadcast to the Ratings the threat that "overwhelming forces at the disposal of the Government will be used to the uttermost...even if it means the destruction of the Navy...."

At 4-30, the Central Strike Committee decided to ask for "cease fire". Firing stopped and all ships put up the "cease fire" signal. But all ships were warned to be ready to fire at the first attempt by the Military to board ships. At Castle Barracks, all arms and ammunition were locked up in the guard room, but they were not handed over. The demand was once again made for the withdrawal of Military guards as the first condition for any settlement.

Meanwhile, news came of the strike in Karachi and elsewhere and armed action by the "Hindustan". The radio also mentioned Atlee's threat in Parliament that British Navy vessels were going to Bombay. Delhi Headquarters announced "strong Naval and Military reinforcements are on their way to Bombay, Karachi and Poona."

On the other hand, there was news of a big flare-up in the city to back

up the Ratings. Despite Sardar Patel's "no strike" call, all pointers were that there would be complete strike on Friday. The Central Naval Strike Committee had given the call for "peaceful strikes and hartals." The Bombay Students' Union had fixed Friday for the students' strike and the Communist Party spread the appeal for strike on Thursday night throughout the mill area.

On Friday, there was a bloodbath for the city all day and a further show of armed might at the harbour. Nineteen planes of the Royal Air Force flew in formation over the harbour area. The ships' guns were ready for action, but no plane flew over the ships.

All day long the President of the Central Naval Strike Committee discussed matters with Sardar Patel, and came to the breakwater in the harbour at 3 in the afternoon, with Sardar Patel's message.

Sardar Patel's message said that "the advice of the Congress" was "to lay down arms and go through the formality of surrender.... The Congress will do its level best to see that there is no victimisation and the legitimate demands of the Naval Ratings are accepted as soon as possible."

When Khan read this out through a loud speaker standing on the breakwater, with the crew of dozens of ships crowding on deck and pleading for calling off the strike, there were loud protests from the ships' men.

"We don't want to fight" they said, "but we won't give up the strike." The Muslims among them—and they were many—said, "We don't want to put ourselves in the hands of any one Party. We at least want an assurance from the Muslim League before we give up."

After that, the Central Committee got the permission of the F.O.C. to get the ships' representatives to the Talwar at 2 in the night for a discussion on Sardar's proposals.

Final Decision To Surrender

Over and above the demand for an assurance from the Muslim League as well as the Congress, there was a demand for waiting for the Central Assembly debate on the strike to get an idea of the real attitude of the Government. There was also the demand for consulting other Ratings on strike all over India and the repeated appeal: "Hundreds—have died in Bombay fighting for us. For their sake we have to continue the strike."

The discussion went on for 4 hours and then at 5 in the morning news came through by phone that Mr. Jinnah had made a sympathetic statement at Calcutta and placed his services "unreservedly" at the disposal of the Ratings.

That finally decided the matter. The motion to surrender and call off the strike was carried by an overwhelming majority vote. Once the decision was taken, everyone carried it out loyally without question.

By Saturday morning, all the ships had run up black flags and surrendered. British troops were posted inside the barracks and the dockyard. All rifles and revolvers were taken away from all establishments. The starters of guns on ships were removed.

All day, people kept coming in hundreds to the Gateway of India to take "darshan" of "our ships". Nobody would believe they had surrendered.

There were tears in the eyes of the students and the people when they turned up with their food packets and the "Last warning" from the Naval Central Strike Committee:

"Our strike has been a historic event in the life of our nation. For the first time the blood of men in the services and men in the streets flowed together in a common cause. We, in the services, will never forget this. We know also that you, our brothers and sisters, will not forget. Long live our great people. Jai Hind!"

Just Out

Order Now!

FOR THE FINAL BID FOR POWER!

by P. C. Joshi

Rs. 1-4

Freedom Programme Of The Communists

The text of the Election Manifesto of the Party is given as an appendix.

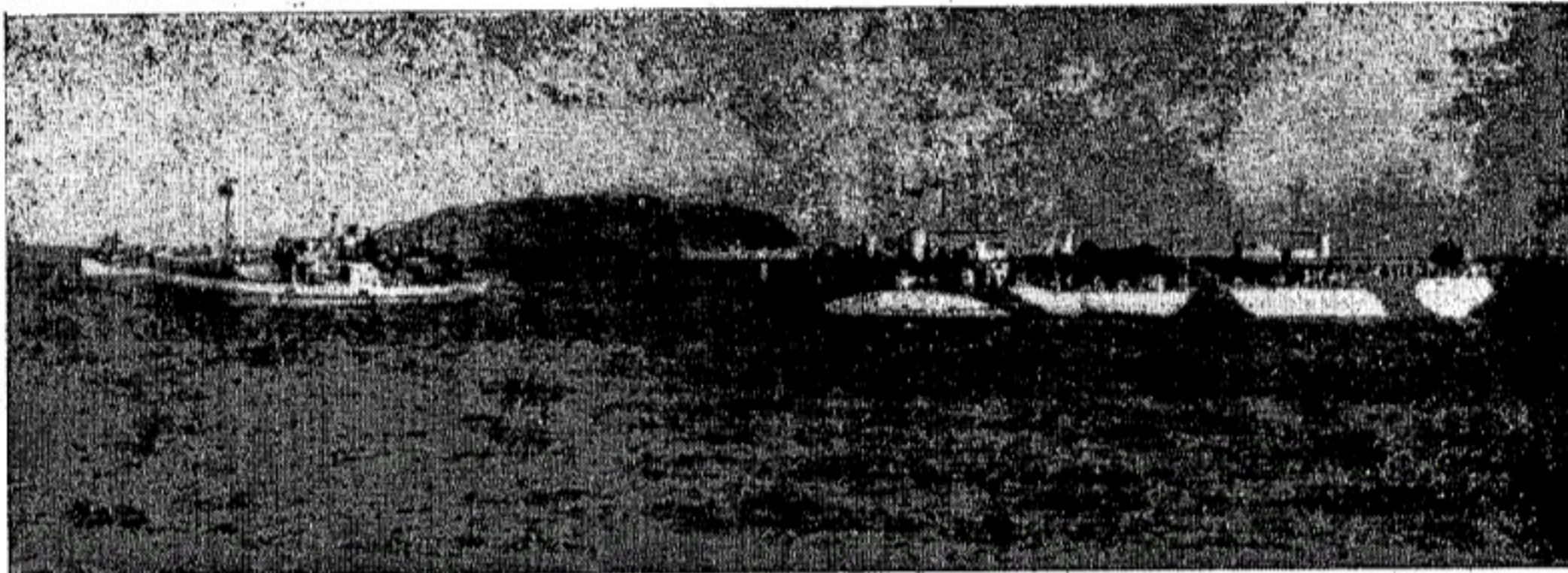
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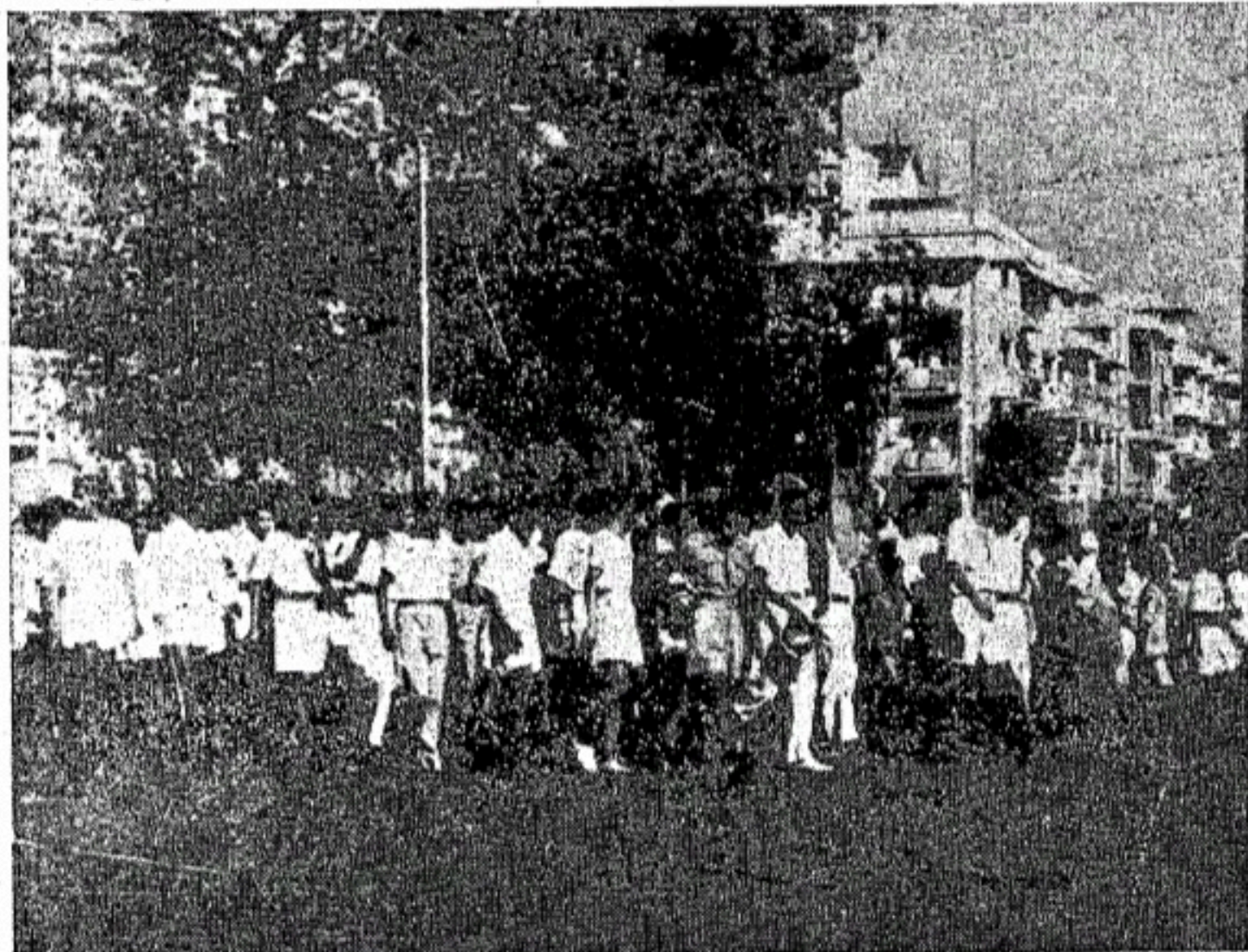
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RIN STRIKE
and
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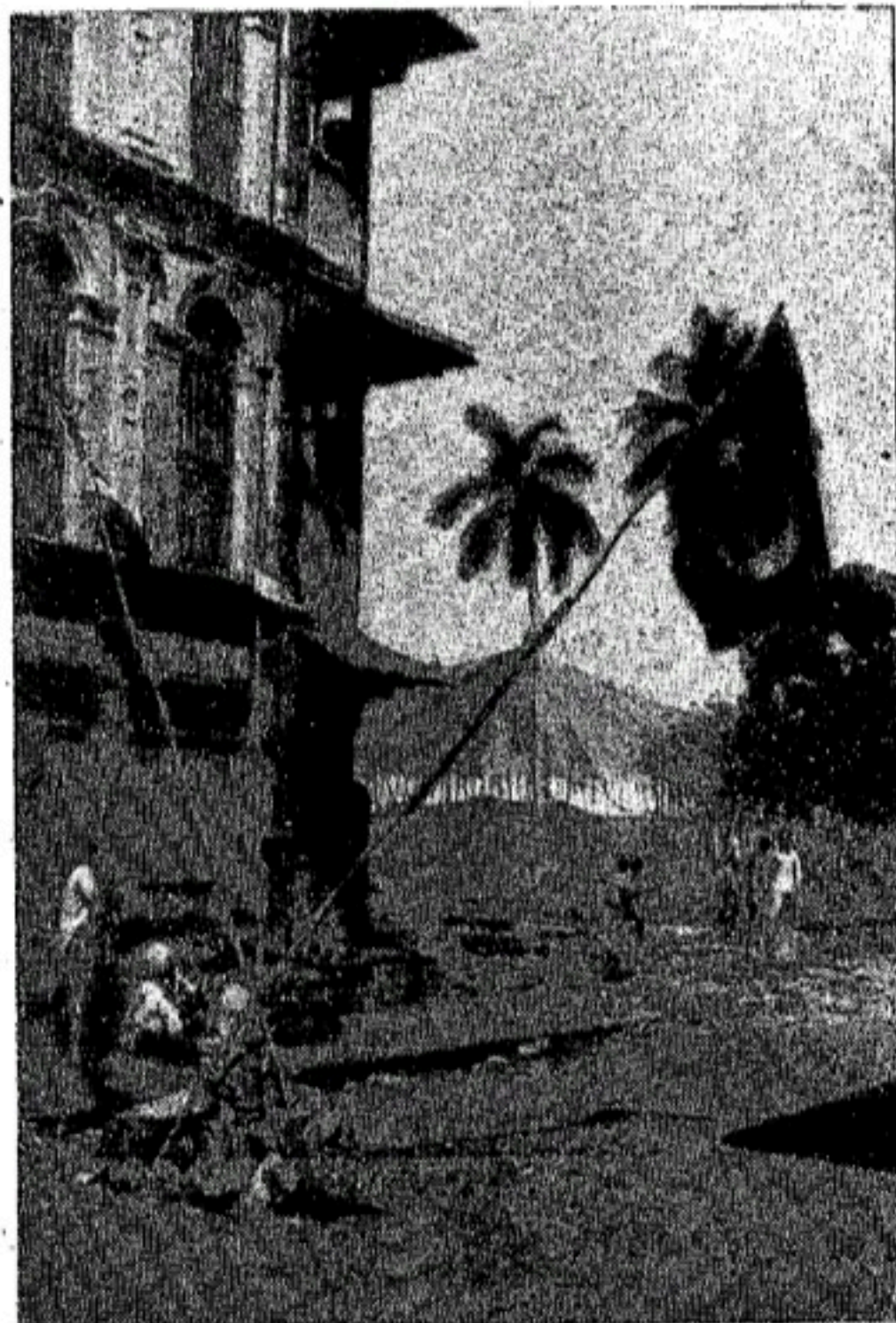
**Full Story
--Pages 5 & 11**



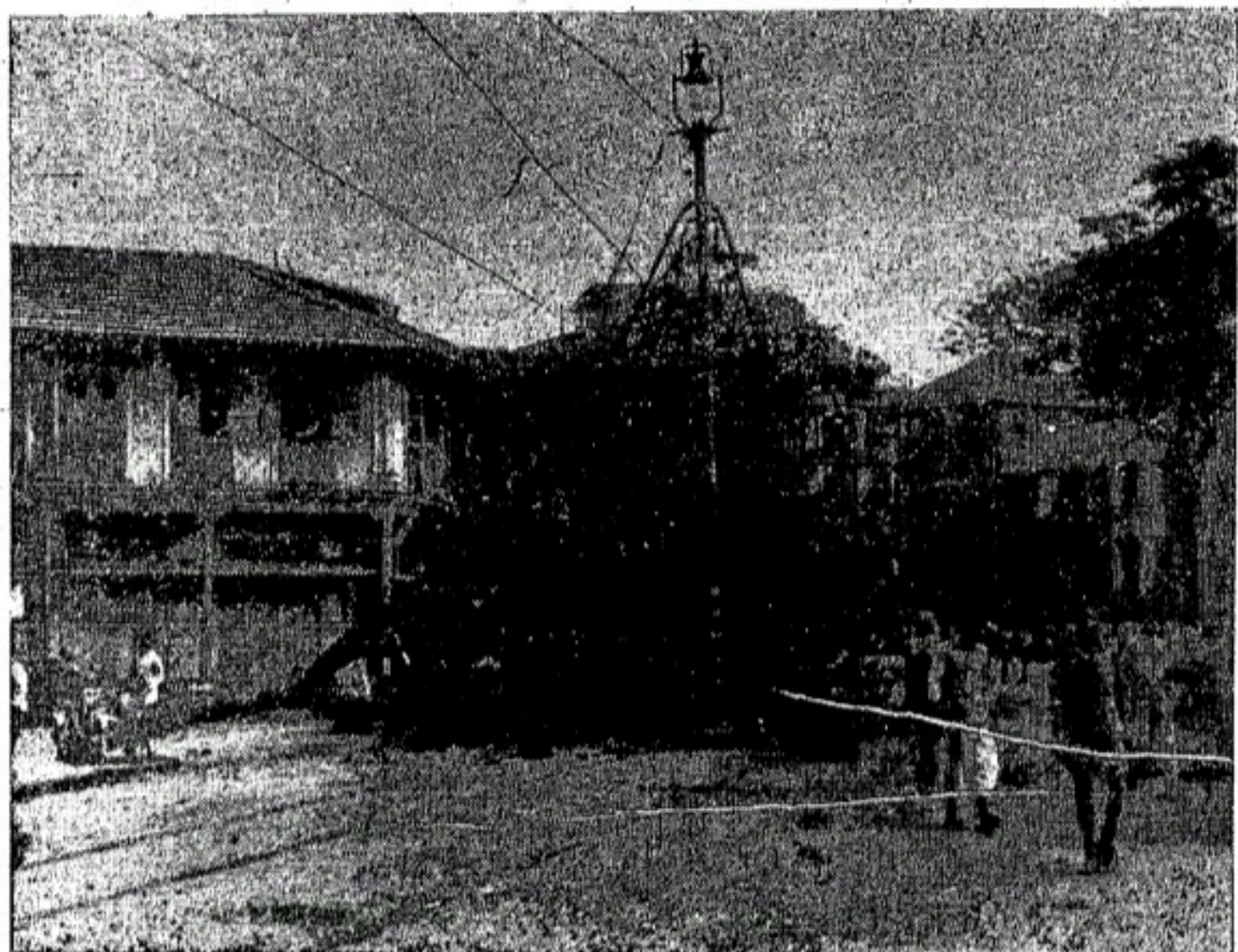
R.I.N. ships in Bombay Harbour in line during the Naval Strike.



RIN Ratings' Strike-Demonstration passing down a thoroughfare.



Congress-League flags across roads—symbol of people's unity in the city backing the R.I.N. strike.



A barricade on one of the main roads to block the entry of Military lorries.

**END THE COLONIAL SYSTEM
Moscow Broadcast On RIN Strike**

THE MOSCOW RADIO broadcast the news of the RIN Ratings' strikes in India on Feb. 24. The following is an extract from it:

"The world press is suddenly full of news of the uprising of sailors in India and the strange situation in Egypt. Latest reports say that the uprising has been crushed. But the very fact that it took place at all is eloquent, especially if you look at it in connection with the general situation in India.

"You do not have to be a philosopher or a profound student of Colonial policy to see that the people of India do not want to return to the old way of things. They want a new way of life. But they are coming into conflict with stubborn attempts to turn everything into the old channels. . . . There is fighting in Indonesia. There is a strained atmosphere in Greece, and there are disturbances in India, Egypt, the Celebes and Jamaica."

"On reading the great documents (the United Nations' Charter, etc.) drawn up during the war, the average man will say to himself:

"These historic declarations clearly define the principles which, if put into practice, would avert the present disturbances and satisfy the aspirations of nations, including those who dwell under the Colonial yoke."

In Trichy: Support For RIN Ratings

ONE LAC WORKERS' STRIKE AND RALLY

By Wire from BHANU

Trichinopoly, 26-2-46.

FEBRUARY 25th was a great day for Trichinopoly (Tamilnad) when the entire working-class here demonstrated its protest against the repression let loose on the R.I.N. men and the people of Bombay.

In the South Indian Railway colony of Golden Rock, 5,000 workers, 500 clerks and 200 sweepers struck work on the call of the Communist Party.

In the morning the four gates of the Railway workshop were picketed. About thirty worker-women stood with Red Flags before each gate and not a single honest worker went in. A mile and a half long procession, 5,000 strong, started from the S. I. Railway Workers' Union grounds for Trichy town, with huge flags of all parties.

All shops and hotels were closed in Golden Rock.

Trichinopoly has never seen such a day in its history. The entire working class downed tools. No shop was open. Transport in Trichy and Srirangam area, was at a standstill. Streams of workers' processions came from all ends of the town.

Railway workers from Golden Rock, cigar and beedi workers, scavengers, bus workers, shop assistants, students, etc., struck work and marched through the

town and through the main bazaar, through which processions are generally not allowed.

They shouted slogans in sympathy with the Navy men. Thousands of people witnessed from both sides of the road and joined the procession. The Police never showed themselves anywhere in the town throughout.

In front of the Communist Party Office, at 12 noon, a mammoth rally was held. Nearly one lac people participated, mostly workers. It was one of the biggest meetings the town has ever had.

KALYANASUNDARAM, Communist leader of the Railway workers, presided. He condemned the Police outrages in Bombay and warned that not a single man of the R.I.N. should be touched. A resolution condemning the Police firing and demanding fair treatment for the R.I.N. men was passed.

Workers returned to work on the 26th morning.

Railway general office-clerks in Trichy station were disappointed at not having been called to join the procession. In the evening, they therefore held a separate 3,000-strong protest meeting.