

The Bombay Textile Strike.

Press Statement of the League Against Imperialism.

The Times has once again attacked the League against Imperialism and has found support for its arguments in the article published in the Industrial News of the 7th of March by the General Council of the Trade Union Congress.

This article on the New Textile Strike in Bombay states—

“So far as can be judged, the main cause of the present outburst — for that is what it really is — was a lightning strike by some members of the “Girni Kamgar” Union to which the millowners replied by turning them down. So tens of thousands are brought out to force the reinstatement of the few in circumstances which a little judgement could have avoided.”

The General Council has been seriously misinformed, both as to the cause of the dispute and the strength of the organisations. The Girni Kamgar (Millworkers’) Union has a membership of over 60,000, not, as stated a few hundreds obtained during the past year, while the old union, the Bombay Textile Workers’ Union has, according to the statement of the General Council 8,000 only.

The present strike of 150,000 mill workers in Bombay was called by the Millworkers’ Union against victimisation in the Wadia group of mills. On the arrest of the leaders of the Millworkers’ Union, together with other Indian leaders a lightning strike took place as a protest against this oppression. The Wadia group victimised members of the Union as a result. The reply of the Girni Kamgar (Millworkers’) Trade Union, following the example of the British Trade Union under similar circumstances was to call the men out. Their response was magnificent. Their leaders arrested, their fellow workers victimised, the textile workers in Bombay are fighting for their rights as Trade Unionists and deserve the support of their fellow trade unionists in Britain.

This strike is not an “outburst”, it is the consequence of the events of the past year. The Bombay textile workers went on strike for six months, which was so united, that after two months, the Bombay Textile Workers’ Union, led by N. M. Joshi came into the strike, although on April 19th, Joshi stated that “his union was prepared to look on”. This strike was against speeding up and in favour of increase of wages and better conditions. The demands of the employers were for reduction of wages — to the extent of 40% for the weavers — speeding up and no alterations in conditions, although before the end of the strike, these demands were considerably modified.

At the end of six months, the strike ended. The workers went back to work on the same basis as before the strike and the Fawcett Committee of Enquiry was set up, to report on the dispute and give recommendations on the points at issue. This Committee reported on the 23rd of March. On the 20th of March all the militant leaders of the cotton unions were arrested together with many others.

The report of this Committee of Enquiry states “that the millowners demand for 7½% reduction in wages was justified but was not prudent, because the successful working of the proposed standardisation scheme might be endangered through lack of co-operation on the part of the Labour leaders”. (Daily Herald, 25/3/29.)

Here is seen the reason for the arrests of the militant leaders of the Indian working class. In order to have “peace in industry” to put through wage reductions and rationalisation.

We emphatically state that this present strike is no “outburst”, “engineered” from outside, but the reply of the workers to the attacks by the employers and the Government of India on their organisations and standard of life.

We are confident that British Trade Unionists, who have behind them a century long struggle for the right to organise and for the betterment of their working conditions will stand by their fellow workers in India in this struggle.