

AGAINST COLONIAL OPPRESSION

MacDonald's Prison Law in Palestine.

By J. B. (Jerusalem).

The death sentences in Haifa, the maltreatment of children in Nablus, the mass arrests, mass trials, police persecutions and the military Terror are — so it appears, — only the modest prelude of the terrorist, reactionary regime, which the socialist of His Majesty intends to introduce in Palestine.

While the imperial commission appointed by him is trying to gull the public with an appearance of impartiality (whereby they are fully assisted by the treacherous "national" leaders of the Jews and Arabs), the MacDonald Government itself is proceeding to eradicate every revolutionary movement in the country and every new advance and before all, to render impossible for the future any movement for freedom. On October 25th there was decreed for Palestine a law which is an absolute prison law directed against the revolutionary Labour movement. This law is to take the place of the Ottoman laws concerning high treason, insurrection, etc., which have obtained up to the present. It is, however, much more cruel and mean than the law of the Sultan.

Whereas in the former laws it was chiefly national and religious agitation that the Turkish Government treated to punish, in the present law the penalties are almost eliminated in that direction. There was only one of the bloodiest Jewish pogroms of recent history and a not less terrible slaughter of Arabs — every door has been left open for a repetition of such a blood-letting. But all the lightning of his legislation is directed by the Labour Colonial Minister against the anti-imperialists; anti-imperialistic propaganda ("preparation for revolution against the mandatory power in word or writing") — life-long imprisonment; — inciting to civil war — the same penalty; agitation among the troops or police — imprisonment for life. And then "lesser" offences, offences against the "social order": membership of an illegal party or organisation which is not registered (the registration of the Red Aid, for instance, in fact even of workers' cultural clubs, has been refused (!) one to

three years; agitation for the class struggle (!) three years; distribution of revolutionary proclamations — five years; insulting the British flag — three years; contributing to an "illegal" organisation — six months (for instance, to the Red Aid). Neither Pilsudski nor Horthy would need to be ashamed of this law; but the fact, nevertheless, is that neither the Lloyd George nor the Baldwin Government — in spite of repeated demands from the Palestine police — dared to issue the prison law. This honour was reserved for the "great man" of Social Democracy.

The law is mentioned openly in the press as the anti-Communist law, and as such it is naturally hailed with joy by the "humane", "pacifist" and "idealistic" Zionists. It is also coming into force immediately: mass raids by the police have commenced for the purpose of putting all those suspected of Communism under lock and key at once. Behind the prison walls, however, the conditions are such that a few weeks, not to speak of months and years, suffice to make imprisonment "lifelong", i. e. completely to ruin the prisoners physically and morally.

The mass hunger-strike of political prisoners, which has broken out within the last few days, throws a vivid light on the conditions in MacDonald's prison infernos. The only answer which the prison administration could make to the requests of the workers for humane treatment, political regime, abolition of disciplinary reprisals, was the carrying out of corporal punishment — the abolition of which was promised by the conservative Colonial Minister — on several political prisoners! Others were beaten until they bled by the brutal warders and put in chains. After eight days of the hunger-strike, the prison officials deprived them even of water in order to hasten their death.

MacDonald's barbarity of the Middle Ages, a reaction more reactionary than that of the Die-Hards, is only equalled by the attitude of the local sections of the Social Fascists. For five days the chief Social-Democratic newspaper published reports of the hunger-strike, which had already been mentioned by the bourgeois press and even by the Fascist paper. When finally, — under the pressure of the indignation of the workers against this treachery in regard to the fight for the political regime, for which the Social Democrats took the responsibility a year ago — an article appeared but was shortly followed by a telegram of provocation against the Communists, designed to incite the workers once more. The Left Wing Poale Zion was even more interested than the police in throttling the hunger strike, for they openly opposed every support of the strikers and spread the most poisonous calumnies against them.

After all this, there can be no doubt that the whole reaction of course with MacDonald at its head, wishes to organise a new wave of such persecutions of the workers and the revolutionary national movement in the country, designed to wipe out the movement as such and destroy its members. Precisely because the revolutionary wave is on the rise, because the radicalisation of the masses is progressing, the sympathy for Communism is growing in spite of the agitation against it, MacDonald's anti-Communist offensive will lead to very stubborn fights. The support of the revolutionary workers in England and the pressure brought to bear by them upon the lackeys of the bloody imperialism may thereby prove to be the deciding factor.