

were given—the Hunter Committee. It is well known that the leaders of the country decided to co-operate at all with a Committee constituted as the Hunter Committee is only under protest and from a stern sense of duty. But it has apparently been made impossible for them even to do that. So be it. In our view the people would have done well to boycott the Hunter Committee in any case.

*Extract from the "A. B. Patrika," dated Calcutta, the 15th November 1919.*

#### THE DEADLOCK IN THE PUNJAB.

It is impossible to exaggerate the gravity of the situation created in the Punjab by the prospect of the total exclusion of non-official evidence before the Hunter Committee.

It should be remembered that the committee was appointed by the Government of India, the party which was responsible for the declaration of the martial law in the Punjab and the events, that followed therefrom. The members, with the possible exception of Lord Hunter, were nominated by the Government of India. Some of them again were directly concerned in the administration of the martial law. Some others hold views on political matters at direct variance with those of the majority of the educated Indians. They have preconceived notions regarding certain political activities which are within the scope of enquiry. These facts alone are sufficient to indicate on which side the preponderant advantage lies. The only thing which differentiates enquiry by such a committee from a departmental enquiry is that, within certain limits, the people are allowed the privilege of laying their case before the committee. The Hunter Committee's decision to allow cross-examination only under the narrowest limits has still further limited this privilege. But the decision of the Punjab Government not to allow the leaders of the Punjab, the victims of the martial law administration, to be set at liberty for a temporary period to enable them to say what they know from a position of comparative freedom, completely stultifies the committee. Even the narrowest privilege granted to the people is, by this action, withdrawn.

And is there any justification for the line of action the Punjab Government have chosen to adopt? We are not aware if they have given any reasons, and what their reasons are. The only plausible reason that we can think of is that the Punjab Government wish to treat the leaders in prison as ordinary convicts and are not willing to depart from the rules obtaining in the case of the latter. But we think that even the Government of the Punjab will not deny that the circumstances here are far from ordinary. The Punjab leaders now in prison would not have been there but for the declaration and the operation of martial law. The Hunter Committee are directed to pronounce their verdict on the justifiability or otherwise of the steps taken by the Government. The Government witnesses including the gentlemen who had taken part in the administration of the martial law and on whose initiative presumably martial law was declared are allowed *unfettered freedom* to justify their own conduct and policy by evidence before the Hunter committee. But on the other hand, there are persons who will have to justify their own conduct in reference to the late disturbances and prove that the official view of the disturbance was wholly erroneous and that there was no justification to declare martial law. And who are these persons? The Punjab leaders now in prison, assuredly. But will they not be allowed the unfettered freedom like the officials to prove their own case? And can it be expected that they can have that freedom while their person and liberty are in the keeping of the officials?

It should be remembered that some of these leaders,—men who hold the most respectable position in society—were handcuffed and made to walk from place to place and put to all sorts of indignities when in the custody of the police. Is it pretended that these men can have the unfettered freedom, if necessary to speak against the authorities now when they are in the keeping of the latter as prisoners?

Then, again, the officials with all the powers and influence at their back, are free to collect and marshal evidence in support of their case. Is it pretended that the Punjab leaders now in prison have the same facility? The very officials who are directly or indirectly responsible for the slaughter of hundreds, banishment, imprisonment, flogging and other drastic measures against thousands are as safe and free as anybody. The Indemnity Act has further assured their safety and freedom. Is it unnatural under the circumstances that very few would venture to come forward to depose against the doings of such men? Can it be said that the Congress Sub-Committee has assumed an unreasonable attitude, in view of the circumstances, in asking for a temporary release of the leaders "to hearten those who are afraid to give evidence" and "to inspire confidence in the good faith of the Government"?

Let us consider for one moment what would have happened if the Delhi leaders were in prison and unable to give the evidence they did. *Minus* their evidence what would have been the value of the evidence recorded by the Hunter Committee? Is it not a fact that their evidence has thrown much light on the happenings at Delhi? And is there any reason for doubt that but for their help, co-operation and presence, much of the evidence would not have been forthcoming

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and the counsel for the Delhi Citizen's Committee would have been unable to bring out the many important matters they did? Hakim Azmal Khan, Swami Sraddhamand, Dr. Ansari, Rai Sahib Peary Lal, Rai Bahadur Sultan Singh and other leaders in jail, it would have been all plain sailing for the official witnesses. The Hunter Committee would have been only one side of the shield.

The events in the Punjab were far more serious than those at Delhi. It is in that unfortunate province that the most appalling and tragic incidents took place. It is in that province that the never-to-be-forgotten Jalianwalla Bagh tragedy was enacted. The first witness examined by the Hunter Committee at Lahore, Mr. Irvine, who was the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar during the disturbances, say in the course of his evidence relating to this incident as follows :

"Next morning the crowd at Jalianwalla Bagh was not asked to disperse, but was fired upon straight."

The survivors of this "straight" firing can not be blamed if they fail to muster sufficient courage to present themselves before the Hunter Committee when they find that the leaders who stood by them are still rotting in jail and the "straight firers" are nothing the worse for what they did. The Congress sub-committee utter only a truism when they say that to "inspire confidence in the good faith of the Government" it is absolutely necessary that the leaders should be released on security, if necessary, for the period during which the committee will hold the enquiry. No precedent is necessary for such an elementary proposition. Yet the committee have been able to cite the action of the South African Government which unconditionally released prisoners to enable them to give evidence before the Solomon Committee on the recommendation of the latter. We trust the Hunter Committee will follow the precedent and remove the unhappy deadlock.

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*Extract from the "A. B. Patrika," Calcutta, dated the 17th November 1919.*

#### HUNTER COMMITTEE AT DELHI.

##### SOME DAMAGING OFFICIAL ADMISSIONS.

The ugliest and most important incident at Delhi was the firing upon an unarmed mob at the local railway station on the 30th of March. Why was this done? Could it be justified? That is no doubt the crucial point. When this shooting took place the whole of India was thrilled with horror and protested. The Government however sought to justify it on the ground that it was absolutely necessary in the interests of peace and order. The official version was so cleverly and authoritatively put that it misled even such a shrewd and wide-awake Indian Nationalist as Mrs. Besant to support it? The official evidence before the Committee has, however, made it quite clear that the firing on the mob was a needless piece of outrage which might have been easily avoided if the local authorities had kept their senses about them.

Mr. Currie, Additional District Magistrate of Delhi, at the time of the disturbance, was responsible for the firing. Before taking up his evidence we shall deal with that of Mr. Yule, the Railway Police Superintendent, which throws considerable light on the subject. He arrived at the station at about noon and the firing took place at about 2 o'clock. The crowd was at first 300 or 400. At the time of firing it was about 800 to 1,000. There were 250 Manipuri soldiers besides a number of British soldiers and policemen. He said that with the assistance of these men they could have dispersed the crowd of 1,000 without firing. "This could have been done at the moment Mr. Currie arrived. Asked why was then firing resorted to? His reply was "I don't know."

Another Railway Official, Mr. Lawrie, was also examined on this subject. His estimate of the crowd was "at no time it was more than 800. I actually measured the spot and have allowed 2 square feet per each man." He further said that if "his suggestion to push down the crowd towards the fort had been accepted, there would have been no necessity of firing." The witness informed the Committee that there was a considerable number of boys among the crowd.

Mr. Currie seems to have cut a sorry figure in the witness box. Many of the questions he sought to dispose of by saying "I do not recollect," "I don't know that," "I don't know," "That I don't know," "I can't tell that," etc. Though Messrs. Yule and Lawrie were positive that the crowd at the station did not on any account exceed 800 to 1,000—the latter had based his statement on actual measurement—Mr. Currie assured the Committee that it was about 2,000! Yet he had to make some admissions. He said he was at first reluctant to give the order to fire. But when a Police Sergeant, Mr. Marshall "came to me and said that he will have to fire, I said, 'very well,' and I told him to give order to fire." A highly responsible officer was thus led by the nose by a subordinate to commit an act which resulted in the killing and wounding of several innocent men.