

**Pandit M. M. Malaviya's
Statement on Repression
in India upto April 20,
1932.**

April, 1932

PANDIT M. M. MALAVIYA'S STATEMENT ON REPRESSION IN INDIA UP TO APRIL 20, 1932.

The cable which I tried to send to London on the 28th February, 1932, briefly portrayed the Indian situation and some typical incidents which had taken place up to that date under the repressive policy which the Government of India have been carrying on in all parts of the country with the object of suppressing the Civil Disobedience movement and crushing the Indian National Congress. That policy has continued unabated. The following is a brief summary of the happenings up to the 20th April, 1932, collected and compiled from reports published in the most prominent newspapers of the country which are being published under a rigid censorship of news and the restrictions imposed by the present Ordinance regime in India and such happenings about which we have personal information. It does not include the news and information, of even more serious character, which we are in possession of through the agency of the network of our Congress organisation in the country. With a few exceptions, it also avoids generally comments or criticism on the happenings. This statement, therefore, presents the picture as it has been appearing in the public press with the tacit permission of the Government. In the very nature of things it cannot be exhaustive nor can it convey to the reader a full idea of the brutality, the meanness and the revolting nature of the acts of repression which Government agencies and officials are inflicting upon the men and women of my country under the unholy protection of the Ordinances now in force in India. But on the other hand the fact of this summary having been compiled almost exclusively from first class newspapers of the country will lend it an unquestionable weight. Wherever any figure or news involved any doubt or uncertainty it has been omitted, and, on the whole, my estimates will prove to be quite conservative. I need not say anything more. This summary which

represents the happenings and figures from the 1st of January to the 20th of April, 1932 will speak for itself.

Total Arrests.

During this period, according to reports published in newspapers, arrests made all over the country in connection with the Civil Disobedience movement total 66,646 which includes 5,325 women and many children. But, as these reports could not possibly include large numbers of arrests taking place in the far off interior villages of India, which are seldom, if ever, reached by a newspaper correspondent, anybody familiar with the conditions in India today will readily agree that arrests all over the country may safely be assumed to be over 80,000. These arrests were made on different occasions and for different offences but all in connection with the Civil Disobedience movement.

Parole Orders.

372 persons including editors, lawyers, doctors, professors, merchants and respectable wealthy citizens were arrested and then released on parole with orders asking them to submit to humiliating conditions which generally required them to report themselves at the police station every day. In one case some congressmen were ordered to be present at the Police Station for several hours in the morning and several hours in the evening every day. As was to be expected, these orders have been disregarded, resulting in the conviction for long terms and heavy fines of those upon whom they were served. These orders brought ridicule upon and disgust against the Government in the public mind and for sometime now this method seems to have been abandoned.

Flag Satyagraha.

There have been 496 reported cases of flag satyagraha in different parts of the country where people were arrested merely because

they wanted to hoist, display or honour the National Flag. On many such occasions the police have made lathi-charges injuring several persons. An innocent thing like the tri-colour Indian National Flag has become to the Government officials what a red rag appears to a bull and they have gone about suppressing it with the stupid tenacity of the same animal. In spite of this, the flag is flying in numberless places in the country.

Arrests for Picketing.

There have been at least 2,496 cases in which it was reported that the arrests made were for picketing. In actual fact the number of cases of arrests for this offence must be much larger than this figure. Yet peaceful picketing is being continued openly wherever it is found necessary and desirable.

Jails Packed.

In spite of all these arrests, every type of activity under the Civil Disobedience movement is continuing and people in an endless stream are offering themselves for arrests. The jails in India are packed full; many of them being overcrowded with a population 50 per cent or even more in excess of their normal capacity. The Government have started releasing numbers of ordinary criminal convicts long before the expiry of their sentences with a view to making room for the Civil Disobedience prisoners in the jails. Temporary camp jails have been set up. But all this has not sufficed to cope with the rush of incoming political prisoners.

Treatment in Jails.

Probably with a view to deter them, these political prisoners are in many places being cruelly ill-treated inside the prison-houses where they are confined. The condition of prisoners in the jails of India, and their scandalous ill-treatment, has been a matter of serious complaint for a long time past. Repeated protests on

their part, culminating in the well known heroic 64 days' fatal hunger strike in the Lahore Central Prison of Jatindra Nath Das, roused such a strong indignation all over the country that the Government felt compelled to move in the matter and introduced a set of jail rules including a system of classification under which prisoners of higher status and habits were to be placed in A and B Classes and to receive comparatively better treatment than the ordinary convicted felons who were termed as C Class prisoners. Among them only those who were convicted for offences involving violence or moral turpitude were to be placed in "B" class, while the rest were to go to "A". When these rules were framed, an assurance was given by the then Home Member of the Government of India to some of us then members of the Central Indian Legislature, that all political prisoners would be placed in A or B class thereafter. That assurance is today most remembered for its breach. Out of the total of these 66,646 arrested (80,000 according to our estimate) not more than a few hundred have been put in the A or the B class. Widely respected persons, well-to-do citizens habituated all their lives to ease and luxury have been put in the C class like ordinary felons. As instances might be quoted the cases of Shrimati Kasturbai, wife of Mahatma Gandhi (she was subsequently put into A class), Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, a merchant prince who has dedicated himself to the country's cause, is the honorary treasurer of the All-India Congress and is held in affectionate esteem all over the country, Shrimati Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya a prominent worker of All-India fame and a host of other well-to-do men and women who have been convicted in connection with the Civil Disobedience movement. But even in the case of the comparatively small number of A and B class prisoners, the treatment meted out to them should be a blot upon any civilised government. The condition of the remaining thousands of patriots, who, according to their light, have gone to jails for the freedom of their motherland, is nothing short of scandalous. Besides the quality of food and the clothing and the many other hardships which even criminals are not subjected to in civilised

countries of the world, some of these political sufferers in India are often maltreated inside prison bars as few outside this country can conceive.

In these hot months they are huddled up inside barracks practically open from all sides and in some cases covered merely with corrugated iron sheets which convert the barracks into something like the neighbourhood of an oven. Yet, there have been cases where sufficient water was not given them to drink during the day. Boys have been flogged inside jails merely for shouting Vande Mataram or for other petty offences. In some places for want of accommodation C class political prisoners are left in the open inside the jails and they are secured by an iron chain being passed through iron rings which are put on one of their legs and rivetted so that they cannot be taken out until they are cut. Not one prisoner under such circumstances can move without disturbing all the others. A person believed to be suffering from Tuberculosis has been confined for day and night in a small closed cell practically amounting to solitary confinement. But the worst treatment has been given to the women prisoners. They are ill-treated and harassed. In one case a group of twelve of them in a lock up was severely beaten with lathis, kicks and fists and some of them were stripped naked.

In spite of all this, however, the number of people courting arrests is not dwindling. The Government evidently are non-plussed, and the over flow in the jails, the cost of maintaining this army of political prisoners, and the ineffectiveness of imprisonment for suppressing the spirit of resistance among the people seem to have led them during the last few days to adopt a policy of avoiding arrests as far as possible. There has been a noticeable tendency on the part of the police almost every where to inflict humiliations or hardships upon picketers and other Congress workers and to arrest only a few out of the many who make themselves

liable for arrest. But for this, the total number of arrests would have been considerably larger than the number indicated in this summary.

Lathi Charges.

During the period under review, according to reports in the Press, the Police made Lathi charges on unarmed crowds at 375 places. While a Congress report from a single province says that there have been more than 300 lathi-charges in that province alone. The severity and painfulness of these lathi charges can be imagined from the fact that a single hard blow of a lathi can prove fatal. Almost in every lathi charge, there are many casualties, some of which are almost always serious.

Firing.

Besides these lathi charges there have been at least 29 cases in different parts of the country where fire was opened upon unarmed and unresisting people. If an impartial enquiry were to be made, I believe that in almost every one of these cases it would be proved that the firing was unjustifiable and uncalled for, and was the outcome of a vindictive desire to punish the people for their defiance of authority and to strike terror in their hearts. But these again have failed to have much effect. It has been reported that after police firing, people have collected in large numbers and have carried on their programme even more defiantly.

House Searches.

633 cases are reported where houses of individuals have been searched, in many cases on the flimsiest grounds, and the inmates have been harassed. Congress reports indicate a very much larger number of such searches.

Confiscations.

There have been 102 cases where properties have been attached for participation in the Civil Disobedience movement.

Properties of relatives have been attached to realise the fines of their relations.

Fines.

It appears to be the general policy of the Government to impose heavy fines on persons who are convicted in connexion with the movement. After the convictions the Police generally attach their goods and property to an extent far in excess of what is necessary for realising the amounts of the fines. In some cases fines of Rs. 10,000/- were inflicted. In a recent case a fine of Rs. 20,000/- has been imposed.

Press-gags.

On the top of all this, the public press has been gagged as it had never been gagged before. 163 cases have been reported where newspapers and public presses have been interfered with by orders for confiscations, demands for securities and consequent closing down of the presses, warnings, searches, and arrests of editors, printers or keepers. Mahatma Gandhi's Young India and Navajivan published from Ahmedabad and Pandit Malaviya's Abhyudaya published from Allahabad and several other papers have been closed down. Besides, there is a strict censorship imposed on all news coming to any newspaper, and the officials have so thoroughly frightened newspapers and press correspondents about the consequences of intruding the all comprehensive provisions of the Press and other Ordinances as to ensure that very little real news of what is happening in the country should find a place in the public press.

Acts of Repression.

Apart from the large numbers of men, women and children who have been imprisoned, the innumerable public meetings and processions of non-violent men and women which have been dispersed by lathi-charges and sometimes by firing, the officials

have indulged in a variety of acts of repression to crush the spirit of the people and terrorize them into submission. A few specimens of these repressive acts are mentioned here in order to indicate official activity in this direction. The list is by no means complete. There was a lathi-charge inside the jail at Cannanore in Madras and another in the Bellary jail. An editor of a journal in Bengal who was in police custody was handcuffed and beaten by a police officer and had his glasses broken. A meeting of merchants at Bombay was prohibited by the Police Commissioner who passed orders on a number of them restricting their movements. Villagers have been bombed in the Frontier. Political prisoners including young boys have been flogged inside the jails. Students have been expelled from educational institutions and magistrates have awarded stripes to boys of tender years for participating in the political movement. Punitive police has been located and punitive taxes and fines have been imposed to an extensive extent. Forced apologies have been extracted from prisoners. Three processions of the "Buy Indian League" at Narasapur and one at Madras were lathi charged. Funds belonging to non-Congress organisations suspected of national sympathy have been freely confiscated. Fathers have been fined, imprisoned and otherwise punished for the political activities of their sons and daughters. Women pickets have been caned, and, as a milder measure, drenched with dirty water. Political prisoners have been kept chained in groups. Men pickets have been rendered unconscious by beating. In Madras, the dry clothes of lady volunteers were taken away by the police while they were bathing and for three days they were chased by the Police continually who prevented people from giving any food to the volunteers. The volunteers made a statement that they practically starved for three days and were prevented even from making water when they wanted to do so. In one case a citizen going about in Khaddar (homespun) was laid upon by the Police and severely beaten. His clothes were torn to shreds and he was forcibly taken to the market where he was forced to buy and put on garments made of foreign cloth. In

Mirzapore a young boy was arrested and beaten merely for shouting "Use Indian Goods" in the main bazar. In another case a tender lad of twelve years has been sentenced to four years, imprisonment, and confined with ordinary criminal convicts. Recently he has been ordered to receive fifteen stripes. Women prisoners, including those in "B" class in the Benares Female Jail, have been ordered not to put on vermilion marks on their forehead which according to universal Indian custom is given up only on the death of a husband. It transpires that otherwise too, the treatment meted out to them was so bad that the prisoners had in many cases to resort to hunger strike in protest. It is practically impossible to get information as to what may be going on in the numerous jails in the country. All kinds of orders have been passed under section 114 restricting the exercise of the elementary rights of citizens and associations. Motor-cars have been detained by the police merely because they were flying national colours on their bonnets. In several parts of the country hotel proprietors have been warned not to supply food to Congressmen. Recently, in Nagpur, a citizen was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment and Rs. 1000/- fine for giving food to some Congress Volunteers. In Bombay one person was arrested merely because he garlanded his brother-in-law when he was being taken away by the police after being arrested in connection with the movement. At one place the police blackened the faces of volunteers and took them in a procession through the town. The property of a Charkha (spinning wheel) school was seized. An individual was warned not to collect funds for Swadeshi. In Sholapur, the District Magistrate ordered the Khadi Bhandar not to sell national flags and badges or even orange coloured cloth. In Salem the wearing of Gandhi caps was prohibited. Boys were expelled from a Sylhet School for hoisting the national flag. In the District Board Schools of Allahabad the singing of national songs has been prohibited. Questions were put in the Madras Legislative Council regarding toddy being forced into the mouths of the

volunteers who were picketing the shops after they had fallen unconscious owing to police beating, and regarding lady pickets being drenched with toddy and then powdered with charred husk. Khadi Bhandars have been freely confiscated and houses have been ordered to be vacated for police use.

Boycott.

These details are by no means complete or comprehensive. They only give a general idea of the kind of repression to which the entire country has been subjected. In spite of all this the congress movement has been going on vigorously. A special week for the boycott of foreign cloth and British goods was held during the later half of March during which Congress organisations all over the country concentrated on these two items and achieved noteworthy success through peaceful picketing and other demonstrations. The National week from the 6th. to the 13th April was the occasion for the country-wide observance of a varied programme laid down by the Congress. The government agencies were most active in endeavouring to frustrate it but they utterly failed and the country buzzed with enthusiasm. In Bombay the continued closing up of one of the main foreign cloth markets viz., the Moolji Jetha Market was presenting some difficulty owing to the presence in that market of several cloth dealers who were selling Indian made cloth only. This has now been overcome by the Acting Congress President having opened a new section of the Moolji Jetha market which will contain such of its shops and merchant houses as deal in Swadeshi goods only. This is bound to have considerable effect upon the progress of boycott in that cosmopolitan town which is the nerve-centre of the trade for the whole of the western and north-western parts of the country. Otherwise too, the boycott movement is so deeply affecting the country that it is a common experience to find people who are still using foreign cloth or British goods, trying to conceal or deny that fact and feeling ashamed of it.

Part played by Women.

Women have been playing a most important part in the movement this time. As has been stated before over 5,000 of them have been arrested so far, according to reports published in the newspapers. But a most remarkable feature has been the leading position which women have occupied in a large number of towns and cities in India in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement. Almost every important centre has had women presidents or dictators of local Congress Committees. The present Acting President of the All-India Working Congress Committee is a lady. Women have been conducting the movement almost everywhere and have borne the brunt of it with magnificent courage and fortitude. Young girls and old ladies who had never before come out of their houses to join any cause however important or sacred, have thrown off their veils in large numbers and have walked into the active ranks of the workers of the Civil Disobedience Movement. They have exposed and are exposing themselves to inconveniences, indignities and suffering with a cheerfulness which extorts admiration.

Muslim Participation.

The propaganda that Musalmans as a whole have kept aloof from the movement is not to be accepted without qualification. During these three months, the All-India Congress Working Committee has had two Musalmans as Acting Presidents. More than one Province have had Musalmans as their Provincial dictators, while many towns and villages have had Musalmans as local dictators. The total number of arrests mentioned above includes several thousand Musalmans, and while it is true that they have largely kept away from the movement, a considerable section of them have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Congress.

Sympathy of Non-Congressmen.

A very important feature of the movement has been the

sympathy expressed directly or indirectly towards it, or a disapproval or condemnation of or suggestion for an improvement in the Government policy and attitude by non-congressmen and bodies. There are 123 such cases reported, and the list includes persons like Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyer, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Mr M. R. Jayakar, Sir Abdul Rahim, Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas, Sir Pheroze Sethna, Pandit Hirday Nath Kunzru, Dr. Muthu Laxmi Reddy, Dr. Subbarayan and others. The Associations include the Servants of India Society, various Liberal Associations, Legislative Councils, Municipalities, Bar Associations, Women's Associations, Chambers of Commerce, Provincial and All-India Social Organisations, Educational Institutions and others both in and outside India,

Sympathy of the General Public.

But much more than these individuals and associations with a distinct non-Congress party colouring, the mass of the people of India have stood solidly by this great movement. It would not be far from accurate to say that there is not a home in the country today which is not deeply affected by these happenings and does not wish to help in this great struggle. Despite the threats of magisterial authority and the Police, hartals are held all over the country on the days proclaimed for them by the Congress. With a knowledge of the consequences of their actions, thousands of men and women have joined every important procession or public meeting banned by the Government wherever it could be held. An increasing number of people are showing their readiness to bear the consequences of defying other Government orders. Unauthorised Congress bulletins and other news sheets are appearing almost every where in spite of vigorous efforts of the Police to suppress them. Beside the women who have brought themselves in unprecedented numbers into the movement, numbers of children are taking part in it. Groups of them are to be found carrying out the programme of the Congress as if they were having their usual play.

Determination of the People.

The people seem to be determined that whatever may be the sacrifice required of them the movement shall be carried on to a successful issue. All the repressive policy of the Government has not succeeded in cowing them down. It has failed in its avowed object of crushing the Congress. If anything, it has proved the unshakable strength of the Congress organisation and the unquestionable hold it has on the people of India. If proof were needed, these three months have furnished it that it is the Congress alone which can speak in the name of the country and that no settlement or reform can have any chance of success in India unless it is accepted by the Congress.

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