

KERALA SATYAGRAHA.

SUSPENDED FOR TWO DAYS.

CASTE-HINDU OPPOSITION.

(FROM A CORRESPONDENT.)

TRICHUR, April 2.

A sudden change has taken place at Vaikom. A circumstance that was hitherto lurking has developed after two days of successful Satyagrah. Caste Hindus who from the outset appeared to be sympathetic have now adopted a distinctly hostile attitude. The Congress is certainly not prepared to carry the fight in the teeth of popular opposition which is sure to strengthen the position of Government. On the representation of the leaders of the opposite camp the Committee met and promptly decided to suspend the campaign for a couple of days. Meanwhile Congressmen are carrying on an equally intensive campaign of educating the public opinion. They have arranged the holding of a series of informal conferences while caste Hindus have themselves suggested a public meeting on April 3rd. to finally focus and gauge the local opinion. The courage and wisdom with which leaders have met the new development has evidently impressed the public and surely eased the situation.

BENGAL HINDU SABHA.

TELEGRAM TO MAHARAJAH.

ASSOCIATED PRESS OF INDIA

CALCUTTA, April 2.

The Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha has sent a telegram to the Maharajah of Travancore condemning the action of the state-authorities in arresting Satyagrahis of the Depressed classes at Vaikom and requesting His Highness to release them and grant them rights and privileges not only of roads but also of temples and wells as enjoined by the All-India Hindu Mahasabha of Benares.

EARLIER NEWS.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

Cochin, March 31.—All India has been looking forward eagerly to the developments at Vaikom as a result of the activities of the Congress Untouchability Committee in securing for certain sections of the Hindu community the freedom to walk along all public roads maintained from the public revenues of the State. Vaikom is an important centre of orthodox Hinduism and the Committee, as your readers are aware, had selected this as their scene of activities. The campaign was to commence yesterday, but the arrangements have been in full swing for over two months now. Signs were not wanting to show that as a result of the propaganda carried on by the Congress Committee there was an awakening among the people particularly among the non-caste Hindus that their rights were denied to them for several decades and that they could not put up with the existing condition of things any longer. Messrs. K.P. Kesava Menon, A.K. Pillai, K. Velayutha Menon, T.K. Mathavan, T.K. Krishnaswamy Iyer and other prominent Congress workers were at Vaikom in advance to enlist the volunteers and to give them the necessary training. The volunteers recruited so far number about sixty and special mention has to be made of the fact that these men were enlisted under the personal supervision of Mr. K.P. Kesava Menon who has made it clear to them that they have to be non-violent throughout, and that they should be prepared to go to jail, to put up with physical torture if required, and even give up their life in the struggle without resorting to violence in any form. I was at the Congress camp yesterday and found the volunteers taking a delight in the struggle for social justice. Several people from the depressed classes are coming forward to join the movement.

THE PROHIBITION ORDER.

Ever since the movement was inaugurated the authorities have had a very anxious time. It must be admitted that a section of the caste Hindus are still opposed to the new movement. It would appear that these people had in meeting assembled resolved to obstruct the volunteers from entering the prohibited area, but thanks to the good sense that prevailed among them, everything went off peacefully. The original proposal of the Committee was to have a triumphal procession along the prohibited roads, but this was given up in deference to the wishes of the authorities. There was yet another proposal to defer the march of the volunteers till such time as the leaders of the Nair and Tiya communities came to a decision on the question at the Joint-Session of the Nair Samajam and the S.N.D.P. Yogam. Mr. Kesava Menon could not accept this suggestion and it was eventually decided to begin the march yesterday, three volunteers an Ezhava, a Pulaya and a Nair going forward every day and courting arrest.

As the day was nearing, the anxiety of the authorities as to what might or might not happen knew no bounds. So early as the 26th instant Mr. M.V. Subramania Iyer, the District Magistrate had served an order on Messrs. K. P. Kesava Menon, K. Velayutha Menon, A.K. Pillai and T.K. Mathavan prohibiting them under section 127 of the Criminal Procedure Code from inducing non-caste Hindus to enter the prohibited area. The order further stated that it had come to the knowledge of the Magistrate that these Congress workers had been encouraging the Ezhavas and Pulayas to walk along the roads leading to the temple, and that this move on their part was strongly resented by several of the caste-Hindus. These caste Hindus it would appear, held that the entry contemplated is contrary to

established custom and usage and that the roads in question should not be considered as public roads, as they were leading to the Hindu temple, and their approach was likely to bring about a breach of the peace. In spite of the order the Congress workers carried on their work peacefully. Meetings were held at Vaikom both for and against the movement, and two deputations have proceeded to Trivandrum one praying for the interference of His Highness the Maharajah to see that no deviation is made from the existing order of things, and the other praying for the issue of an edict throwing open the roads in question to the use of non-caste Hindus as well. From all accounts, it looks as though the party in favour of reform is larger than the conservative group who want to perpetuate the injustice done to the caste Hindus for several decades.

ARREST OF VOLUNTEERS

Sunday was the first day of the march, and at day break Police Officers were in evidence everywhere within and without the prohibited area. There were a large number of them posted near the places where the pollution boards were put up to meet all eventualities. Large crowds of people had gathered everywhere in anxious suspense waiting eagerly to see what was going to happen. Precisely at 7-30 A.M. a party made ready to start at the Congress camp headed by the volunteers and Messrs. K.P. Kesava Menon, T.R. Krishnaswamy Iyer, A.K. Pillai, T.K. Mathavan and K. Velayutha Menon among others. Before leaving the camp, the message of Mahatma Gandhi was read out to the large gathering present there. The party quietly proceeded and stopped at a distance of 50 yards away from the place where one of the Boards was put up. The three volunteers who had offered to disobey the order and court arrest for the day were dressed in khaddar uniforms and wore their distinctive khaddar caps. These three young men were Messrs. Govinda Panikkar, a Nair Bahulayan an Ezhava and Kunjappu, a Pulaya; and they were garlanded. The three volunteers alone advanced, the large crowd stopping behind. The Police had mustered strong in a line across the road just at the place where the Board was put up. The volunteers were stopped when they reached the place. They were asked to say to which castes they belonged, and they answered giving the castes which they represented. They were then told that they (the Police) had orders to prevent the 'Theendal' or pollution castes from going further and that they would not let them advance. The volunteers replied courteously that they had the right to pass along the road and insisted in going on. The police again prevented them from proceeding further whereupon the volunteers sat down on the road, with the Police arranged in front of them. There was a suspense everywhere and the District Magistrate and the District Superintendent of Police were in the meanwhile considering as to what they had to do next. The volunteers were then arrested and taken to the Police Station. The Congress workers and party and the people who had gathered in the neighbourhood dispersed soon after.

POLICE CONDUCT EXEMPLARY.

By the time the gathering broke up, it was 10 A.M. The Police and District authorities deserve a word of praise for the exemplary manner in which they behaved throughout, but for which the programme of the day would not have ended in such a quiet and peaceful way. They were uniformly courteous and in an interview the writer had with Mr. K.P. Kesava Menon, he said he had nothing to complain regarding the conduct of the Police or the other local officials who, he said, were only doing their duty in carrying out orders from their superiors.

In the afternoon, several volunteers who had come from far and near had offered their services to the Committee. It has been decided to carry on the campaign from day to day by sending forward three volunteers everyday. Mr. George Joseph was there yesterday and left for Trivandrum last night. As I write, news comes to the effect that the prominent leaders are likely to be arrested by the authorities in order to cripple the movement. There was an emergency meeting of the Committee to do the needful in securing other workers to replace the leaders, in the event of their arrest.

NEED FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT.

Mr. T. Narayanan, Nambiar, B. A. B.L., writes:—

The campaign against untouchability in Kerala has reached a stage which is at once anxious and interesting. It would have been better if the Congress leaders had postponed the direct action for a few months and it is just probable that some of those who have been working for social reform in Kerala disapprove of the haste with which a most momentous step has been taken by the Congressmen in the matter. Anyhow, well-advised or ill-advised, the step has been taken and I believe that it is the duty of all workers on behalf of social reform in Kerala to make common cause with the Congressmen in this question. The cause in which the Congressmen has joined battle with the Travancore Government is sacred to all the religious and social bodies now working in Kerala and, therefore it behoves all of them to see that the cause does not suffer for want of support. If the movement were to flag for lack of public support the orthodoxy which it is the desire of all reformers to crush out of existence will emerge from the struggle all the more strengthened and its victims would experience a subjection worse than death. The Moplah rebellion has killed the political life of Malabar, and it would be a calamitous tragedy if Vaikom Satyagraha were to give a set-back to the social reform movement in Kerala.

I make an earnest appeal to the various social and religious bodies in Kerala to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Congressmen in this fight. We might be of opinion that the fight ought not to have been begun just now, but

all of us agree that the battle will have to be fought one day or other. Now that the battle has begun let us not stand back in a cowering spirit. Let us go forward and join hands with our brave comrades of the Congress, and if we fall let us fall together; we cannot afford to allow them fall alone, for with their fall the cause also will fall. The Arya Samaj and the Brahma Samaj, the Siddha Samaj and the Atma Vidya Sangam, these bodies must come forward to take up the struggle begun so valiantly by the Congress. They can make the movement more religious than political and once the religious men enter the field the Travancore Government would be compelled to make amends honourable.

I found a note of warning to the Government of Travancore. It is probable that the Government will be tempted to arrest the leaders of the movement on the hope that thus they would be able to stop the movement altogether. I want to tell the Government that if they touch the leaders of the movement instead of giving a set back to the 'cause' they will be throwing a challenge to the reformers in Kerala and I know it will be taken up by them. Fight has begun and I hope it will be fought to the finish.