

THE DAILY PROVINCE, VACOUVER,  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, JULY 17, 1908

# **REPTILE PRESS SPREADS SEDITION THROUGH INDIA**

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Government at Last Realizes Necessity of  
Strong Repressive Measures  
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## **MARTYRDOM PROFITABLE**

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Editors Sent to Prison Were on the Highroad  
to Wealth

**London, July 17-** If the Government of India have been slow to take affective measures to deal with incitements in the press and with revolutionary conspiracies, they were swift enough when once they set to work. At Simla stringent bills for the suppression of revolutionary newspapers and for the prevention of the manufacture of explosives for improper purposes were passed into law at a single sitting.

The existence of a seditious press in India is not a recent manifestation of hostility to British rule. During the mutiny the vernacular papers gave little or no anxiety to the Government because they were few and feeble; bit in the early seventies some of the Bengali papers had already developed those tendencies towards affection which have since become so pronounced.

In 1878 Lord Lytton passed a Press Act less vigorous, on the whole, than the measure which has just become law. The Act was only once put into operation,

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the offending journal being a now extinct Bengali newspaper. Four years later it was repeated by Lord Ripon, and ever since the native newspapers of India have enjoyed a freedom which many of them have disgracefully abused.

There were, of course, other powers under which seditious newspapers might be dealt with. Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code provides that a person who by words either spoken or intended to be read endeavours to excite disaffection against the Government may be punished. In 1892 the Government prosecuted the Bangobasi, a Calcutta newspaper, under this section, but failed to secure a conviction. Then came, in 1897, the murders of Mr. Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst, at Poona, which were the real beginning of that active opposition to constituted authority which has since reached such large dimensions. Those murders are a landmark in the history of British India. Their immediate cause was dislike of the plague policy of the Government; but from that date the apostles of revolution began organised work.

## **Editor Fomented Trouble.**

The authorities were convinced that the murders were due to inflammatory articles in the native press. They prosecute MR. Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Poona, the proprietor of the Mahratta, a weekly printed in English, and of the Kesari, another weekly printed in Marathi, for inciting to disaffection. Mr. Tilak was convicted and imprisoned but the prosecution made his name and fortune. The Kesari leaped up to a circulation of 20,000 a week, a high figure for a vernacular paper. Wherever he went in India after his release Mr. Tilak was received with intense enthusiasm. He founded the Extremist Part in the Congress, which has since worked untold mischief; and he inspired Mr. Bepin Chandra Pal and other Extremist leaders in Bengal, the Punjab and elsewhere, who have been so much to develop the National movement in its wilder forms.

After their experience with Mr. Tilak, the Government became very loath to undertake further prosecutions for sedition. In his case imprisonment had

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opened the pathway to fame and influence and comparative wealth. His papers remained almost as violent as ever and the purpose of the authorities was really unfilled.

For years afterwards very few prosecutions were instituted. Large numbers of vernacular journals grew steadily more seditious in tone. Articles were constantly printed beside which that for Mr. Tilak suffered seems ridiculously mild. Incitements to widespread rebellion and wholesale assassination became open and undisguised. In the last eighteen months prosecutions under Section 123A have been more frequent, but have proved largely ineffective. If one conductor of a revolutionary journal found his way to jail another was ready to take his place in his office. The dissemination of sedition remained unchecked. The need for further legislation on the lines now adopted was at last seen to be absolutely imperative.

## **Papers Easily Started.**

People in England perhaps hardly realise how easy it is to start a vernacular newspaper in India. Hardly any capital is required. Very few vernacular newspapers show a profit exceeding £30 a month. Many are happy if they clear £6 a month. More than half the editors of vernacular papers in India are probably in receipt of an income of less than £3 10s a month. In the biggest cities the rates are higher.

Sometimes the vernacular paper has its own plant, consisting of a few cases of battered type and a hand press. The quality of paper used is of the roughest and cheapest kind. A room or two in a squalid tenement building often serve for offices. In many instances the conductor of a paper will contract with a printer to produce his journal, and in that event the financial risk is generally even smaller.

The editors and contributors are usually men of good education who have failed to enter the coveted haven of Government employ. They are seditious from inclination, but also because they find it pays. Until prosecutions became

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recently more numerous, an appearance in the Police Court on a charge of sedition was a certain prelude to prosperity. It was the best advertisement an editor could desire. Notoriety sent up circulation and as sentences were almost invariably light they constituted no great hardship. The paper continued to appear as before, and was soon converted into a good property. Under the new law, this kind of profitable martyrdom will be at once extinguished. There will no longer be a premium on sedition.

## **Sedition Generally Preached.**

Those who are not familiar with Indian conditions may wonder whether those wretched publications are worth serious consideration. No one who has watched the evil wrought by the reptile press of India will have any doubt as to the answer.

Few of the vernacular papers have a widespread circulation. It is their collective influence that tells. Until today one might go into the bazaar of any great Indian city and buy copies of current publications containing articles either openly or covertly inciting to rebellion and violence, and urging the people to drive the English out of India. This is no exaggeration. Papers of this description are openly hawked about. The cries of their vendors fill the air.

Not only the big cities, but most towns of any size, and even important villages, have their own vernacular papers nowadays. Their price is usually extremely low, and though by no means all of them are seditious, the tendency of most is towards disloyalty. The few Indian newspapers which are of good repute, and are moderate and sensible in tone, are usually printed in English.

## **Many Readers to One Paper**

Circulation is by no means a fair test of the average number of readers of an Indian paper. Copies are passed from hand to hand. Even in the case of the great Anglo-Indian dailies the number of their reader is enormously in excess

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of the number of copies printed. The same is true of the vernacular papers. Many organisations exist in India in passing on newspapers from house to house.

The Indian has an extraordinary veneration for the printed word. If he reads in his paper the wildest charges against the Government it does not occur to him to doubt them. It is in print; therefore, it must be true. The effect upon such minds of daily incitements to the shedding of blood may readily be imagined. The reptile jour as well as the towns. Sometimes the schoolmaster is almost the only man in a village who can read. At sunset he may often be found seated beneath a banyan tree, reading and expounding his favourite journal to the village elders. The listeners marvel at the iniquities of the British Raj this revealed to them, but they believe them all the same.

Need there be any wonder that as a result of such an incessant and widespread propagation of direct incitements to violence India has become honeycombed with disaffection? The discovery of bomb factories and the perpetration of murderous outrages came as no surprise to those who have watched the virulent animosity of the vernacular press.