

## CHAPTER VIII.

### Attacks on Communications.

1. The interruptions of the telegraph and railway systems were persistent and widespread. This was one of the earliest manifestations of violence in Amritsar on the 10th April and the earliest date at which we can put its cessation in the Punjab is the 22nd April.

In the foregoing narrative, many of these outrages have been referred to in connection with the outbreak at particular places, but the risk of a general breakdown of communications was throughout one of the gravest anxieties of the Punjab Government and is an element of cardinal importance in considering the measures which it adopted. We think it advisable accordingly to present with this Report material for a consideration of the railway situation as a whole. This will be found in the list of "offences reported on the railway," which was put in by Mr. V. H. Boalth, Traffic Manager of the North-Western railway, when giving evidence before us. The list forms part of the Appendix to this Report. With the aid of the maps an estimate may be formed of the seriousness and extent of the threat to communications.

2. A summary of the numbers of the outrages upon Telegraphs prepared and submitted to us by Mr. J. M. Coope, Director, Telegraph Engineering, Northern Circle, is given below :—

"Statement showing number of separate outrages committed on the Telegraph lines, etc., on each date during the recent disturbances in the Punjab. The number given is only approximate as it is not now (29th August) possible to quote accurate figures :—

Date.	No. of outrages.
10th April 1919 . . . . .	9
12th April 1919 . . . . .	4
13th April 1919 . . . . .	4
14th April 1919 . . . . .	12
15th April 1919 . . . . .	7
16th April 1919 . . . . .	7
17th April 1919 . . . . .	3
18th April 1919 . . . . .	2
19th April 1919 . . . . .	4
20th April 1919 . . . . .	1
21st April 1919 . . . . .	1
TOTAL . . . . .	54

3. The attacks on communications were in many cases motivated by sheer *anti-Government* feeling. The railway is considered, quite rightly, a Government institution and railway damage is in these cases simply a part of the destruction of Government property upon which the mobs were bent. There is, however, an additional motive present apparently in a large number of cases in the desire, if possible, to prevent the arrival of troops and to make calls for assistance impossible. In the country districts the railway afforded almost the only opportunity for destruction of property other than Indian-owned private property, and the easiest and most tempting opportunity for loot. At night it was also the most difficult, of all the forms of violence, to discover or prevent; at the approach of an armoured train, the mobs could hide in the crops and return when the train had left.

4. The general unrest had its effect upon railway employees, but in addition there were special causes of anxiety as regards them. There seems to be no doubt that at the time when the Amritsar outbreak occurred a strike was in prospect among some classes at least of railway workers. With the continuous rise in prices dissatisfaction with the rates of pay was inevitable. These had been revised early in 1918, but by February and March 1919 memorials for further increase had been submitted from all over the line: except for one class of men who had received an increment, these memorials were still under consideration when the disorders broke out. The signallers, who have special facilities for communication with one another, and the assistant stationmasters seemed to be the classes most agitated and disturbed. The signalling staff at Lahore Railway Telegraph Office, which controls the main circuits of the system, appear to have been free from any sort of disaffection, and "practice" messages intercepted in this office from all over the lines showed that on the 12th April telegraph operators over a wide area were only awaiting a lead before going on strike.

5. After the 10th April the railway staff in all its various classes were interfered with by people inciting them to stay away from their work and molesting them on the way to their duties. On the 12th, a large proportion of the men in the Locomotive shops failed to present themselves. At Shakurpur the locomotive, carriage, wagon and traffic staff struck work on the 13th. At Bahawalnagar there was a strike on the 14th, and the strikers, helped by people in the city, refused to allow an engine to pass and sat on the line saying that they would be cut if the engine went over them. This strike spread to Delhi-Kishanganj just outside the Punjab. On the 15th at Kundian there was an attempted strike. At Amballa there was a short strike of the traffic staff, but this was not very serious. These facts are sufficient to illustrate the reality of the apprehension that disorders arising among the general public would combine, with special grievances on the part of railway employees, to precipitate a strike not in one department only, but in

many, which might for a time paralyse the railway system. We were informed by Mr. Thompson, Chief Secretary to the Punjab Government, that the premature, and as it turned out mistaken, announcement made on the 16th April by a general telegram, sent over the whole of the North-Western railway system by the Agent, to the effect that martial law was declared on the whole of the North-Western system, did much to allay trouble on the railways.

6. During the period of acute unrest, passenger trains were in general got through, though very late. The goods traffic suffered more, and in the disturbed areas, the railway as a commercial system was practically paralysed between the 10th and 21st April. Derailment of trains was resorted to by the rioters in several cases. In one case an armoured train was itself derailed by a mob having removed the joints and opened out the rails. A rail was removed at Kala, just north of Jhelum, on the 15th April and a passenger train was derailed. A troop train was expected about that time and it is inferred that this was the train which the rioters intended to upset. As already mentioned, at Chheharta on the 13th an engine and goods-train were derailed and some looting took place on the train. Also at Malakwal, in Gujrat District, as we have seen, a train was wrecked by derailment: a fireman and a passenger were killed: two engines and a wagon overturned.

7. Speaking generally, though subject to some important exceptions, the acts of destruction on the railway were not taken part in by railway employees. Some complaints have been made before us that, on particular occasions when attack on railway property was being made by outsiders, the railway employees seemed to be unaccountably inactive to prevent destruction or to assist the authorities after the event to bring offenders to book. There are some signs of this attitude having been adopted in particular cases, but we are not prepared to express an opinion to the effect that they show any widespread willingness on the part of the railway staff to see railway plant destroyed.

8. In view of the difficulties in running the traffic and also for reasons of policy which weighed with both the military and the civil authorities, passenger traffic was severely restricted for a time, especially after the 14th April. After martial law was imposed, a system of martial law permits was introduced.

9. The facts which we have mentioned as regards the railway situation have some importance upon the question of continuance of martial law after the 5th May when the Field Army received orders for mobilisation in view of the war with Afghanistan which was then breaking out.