

EGYPT.

CALUMNIATING BRITISH SOLDIERS.

Mr. J. F. GREEN (*by Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister whether the attention of the Government has been called to a publication called "The Egyptian Circular," which has been widely circulated among Members of the House, containing gravely seditious matter, and stated to be edited by Kyriakos Mikhail, and bearing the imprint of the National Labour Press, Limited.; and whether the Government intend to take steps to prevent the further circulation of this seditious publication?

The SECRETARY of STATE for the HOME DEPARTMENT (Mr. Shortt): My right hon. Friend has asked me to reply to this question. I have seen the publication referred to. It contains allegations as to atrocities by British soldiers in Egypt which are certainly untrue, but are so framed as to make a prosecution difficult if not impossible. No charges are made against any specified persons, so that proceedings for libel are not available; and it would be difficult to prosecute under Defence of the Realm Regulation No. 27 when the witnesses who could refute the statements are in Egypt or by this time scattered over the world. I am considering, however, what other action may be possible.

Captain LOSEBY: Is it not sufficient that this paper has received money from foreign sources obviously for the purpose of calumniating in a vile manner the soldiering of this country?

Lord H. CECIL: Is it not a seditious libel to use language bringing the Army into hatred?

Mr. SPOOR: Is it not correct that this publication consists of quotations from American newspapers, in hundreds of which these horrible allegations have been made; and may I ask whether, having regard to that fact and the real danger to our interests in America as a result of it, he will not consider the advisability of arresting the individual who has published

this "Egyptian Circular," and giving him an open trial, so that the Government will have an opportunity of giving a specific denial to all the charges therein contained?

Mr. SHORTT: I have already given a denial, and, so far as the quotations in America are concerned, this document is not a quotation from America, but the quotations in America are from documents such as this. I am, of course, bound to be guided by my legal advisers as to whether a prosecution would lie or not, but I can assure the House the matter is not dropped, and we are taking all the steps we can.

Mr. N. MACLEAN: Is it not the case that the allegations in this circular are stated to be summaries taken from the American papers? The summaries and the headlines of the paper are given. Will the right hon. Gentleman not be prepared to institute an inquiry, seeing that these charges or allegations have been made on affidavit, and are backed up by a previous Minister of Education and Justice in the Egyptian Legislative Assembly, so that the fairness of British rule in Egypt may be vindicated?

Mr. SHORTT: I have already said that the matter is under consideration.

Captain ORMSBY-GORE: May I ask whether identical copies of this document did not reach this country from America, where it was originally produced, and whether the copy of the circular to members is not a reprint of Anti-British propaganda in the United States, worked up by anti-British agents throughout the United States, merely using the Egyptians as one of their tools to try to smash the League of Nations and to do everything against this country and President Wilson?

Mr. SHORTT: I am afraid I cannot answer that question without notice.

Mr. G. TERRELL: May I ask whether the Independent Labour Party are not responsible for the issue of this document?

Mr. J. JONES: And responsible for the bad weather too!