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* Statement of Dr. Ambedkar on the Cripps Proposals

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : M.L.A., Leader of the Depressed Classes in a Statement to the Press, said :—

“The War cabinet’s proposals show a sudden *volte face* on the part of His Majesty’s Government. The putting forth of these proposals, which were denounced by them as an invasion of minority rights, is an indication of their complete surrender of right to win might. This is Munich mentality, the essence of which is to save oneself by sacrificing others, and it is this mentality which is writ large on these proposals. It is reported that the American and English people are annoyed at Indians not welcoming the proposals, of His Majesty’s Government relating to the constitutional advancement of India and thereby allowing the mission of Sir Stafford Cripps to fail. One can forgive the Americans for their attitude, but surely the English people and Sir Stafford Cripps ought to know better. It does not seem to have been sufficiently realised that the proposals of His Majesty’s Government now put forth as the best are the very proposals which have been rejected and condemned by His Majesty’s Government as the worst only a few months previously. Those who realise this cannot but help saying that this is the ugliest part of the whole business of constitutional advance, which His Majesty’s Government is now rushing to undertake. The proposals fall into three parts :—

- (1) There is to be a Constituent Assembly with a right to frame the constitution for India. This Assembly is to have the fullest power to frame such constitution as the majority in the Assembly may choose to decide.

*Report of the Depressed Class Conferences, held on July 18, 19 and 20, 1942, Nagpur Session, pp. 100-06.

- (2) The new constitution is not to include all the present Provinces of India but only such Provinces as may be willing to be bound by it. For this the Provinces have been given a right to decide whether they shall join the new constitution or stay out of it. This is left to be done by a plebiscite in which a bare majority is declared enough to decide the issue.
- (3) The Constituted Assembly shall be required to enter into a treaty with the British Government. The treaty is to contain provisions for the safety and security of racial and religious minorities. After such a treaty is signed the British Government is to withdraw its sovereignty and the constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly is to come into operation.

Such in brief outline is the scheme of His Majesty's Government. The proposal regarding Constituent Assembly is not a new proposal. It was put forth by the Congress when the war broke out and what is important is that this proposal of the Congress was rejected by His Majesty's Government. This is what Mr. Amery said in the House of Commons on August 14, 1940, regarding Constituent Assembly :—

“Congress leaders.....have built up a remarkable organisation the most efficient political machine in India..... If only they had succeeded, if the Congress could, in fact speak, as it professes to speak, for all the main elements in India's national life, then however advanced their demands our problem would have been in many respects far easier than it is today. It is true that they are numerically the largest single party in British India, but their claim in virtue of the fact to speak for India is utterly denied by very important elements in India's complex national life. These others assert their right to be regarded not as mere numerical minorities but as separate constituent factors in any future Indian policy. The foremost among these elements stands the great Muslim community. They will have nothing to do with a constitution framed by a Constituent Assembly elected by a majority vote in geographical constituencies. They claim the right in any constitutional discussions to be regarded as an entity and are determined only to accept a constitution whose actual structure will secure their position as an entity against the operations of a mere numerical majority. The same applies to the

great body of what are known as the Scheduled Castes who feel that in spite of Mr. Gandhi's earnest endeavours on their behalf, that, as a community, they stand outside the main body of the Hindu community which is represented by the Congress." This statement was made by Mr. Amery when he was elucidating the announcement made by the Viceroy on 8th August 1940 in which the following pledge was given to the minorities, on behalf of His Majesty's Government. The Viceroy Said: "There are two main points which have emerged. On these two points His Majesty's Government now desire me to make their position clear. The first is as to the position of the minorities in relation to any future constitutional scheme..... It goes without saying that they (H. M. Government) could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government," Again on the 23rd April 1941, Mr. Amery referred to the demand of the constituent assembly and expressed himself in the following terms: "India's future constitution should be devised by Indians for themselves and not by the British Government. India's future constitution should be essentially an Indian constitution, framed in accordance with the Indian conception of Indian conditions and Indian needs. The only essential condition is that the constitution itself and the body which is to frame it must be the outcome of agreement between principal elements in India's national life."

Such were the views expressed and pledges given by His Majesty's Government regarding Constituent Assembly, which is now conceded. Regarding the demand for Pakistan it was a demand put forward by the Muslim League. This demand was also rejected by His Majesty's Government. This is what Mr. Amery said in regard to it in the House of Commons on August 1, 1940.

"This reaction against the dangers of what is called the Congress Raj or Hindu Raj has gone so far as to lead to a growing demand from Muslim quarters for a complete breaking up of India into separate Hindu and Muslim dominions. I need say nothing to-day of the manifold and to my mind, insuperable objections to such

a scheme, at any rate in its extreme form. I would only note that it merely shifts the problem of permanent minorities to some-what smaller areas, without solving it."

Again on April 23, 1941 he referred to it in his speech in the House of Commons and spoke about it in the following terms :—

"I am not concerned here to discuss the immense practical difficulties in the way of this so called Pakistan project nor need I go back to the dismal record of India's history in the 18th century or to the disastrous experience of the Balkan countries before our eyes today in order to point out the terrible dangers inherent in any break up of the essential unity of India, at any rate in its relation to the outside world. After all, there is no British achievement in India of which we have reason to be proud than the unity.....we have given her."

Such were the views of His Majesty's Government only a year ago regarding Constituent Assembly and Pakistan.

It is quite obvious that the proposal for a Constituent Assembly is intended to win over the Congress, while the proposal for Pakistan is designed to win over the Muslim League. How do the proposals deal with the Depressed Classes? To put it shortly, they are bound hand and foot and handed over to the Caste Hindus. They offer them nothing, stone instead of bread. For the Constituent Assembly is nothing short of a betrayal of the Depressed Classes. There can be no doubt as to what the position of the Depressed Classes will be in the Constituent Assembly nor can there be any doubt regarding the political programme of the Constituent Assembly. In the Constituent Assembly there may be no representatives of the Depressed Classes at all because no communal quotas are fixed by these proposals. If they are there they cannot have a free, independent and decisive vote. In the first place the representatives of the Depressed Classes will be in a hopeless minority. In the second place all decisions of the Constituent Assembly are not required to be by a unanimous vote. A majority vote is enough to decide any question no matter what its constitutional importance is. It is clear that under this system the voice of the Depressed Classes in the Constituent Assembly cannot count. In the third place the present system of proportional representation by which the members to the Constituent Assembly are to be elected

under the terms contained in His Majesty's proposals cannot but result in the caste Hindus having virtually the right to nominate the representatives of the Depressed Classes to the Constituent Assembly. Such representatives of the Depressed Classes will be the tools of the caste Hindus. In the fourth place the Constituent Assembly will be filled with the Congressites who will form the dominant majority party able to carry out its own programme. There is no doubt that Mr. Gandhi, whatever may be said about his endeavours in the matter of the social uplift of the Depressed Classes is totally opposed to giving political recognition to the Depressed Classes in the constitution as a separate and distinct element in the national life of India. That being the case the programme of the majority party in the Constituent Assembly will be to wipe out the political safeguards already granted to the Depressed Classes in the present constitution.

Anyone who realises what is implied in the Constituent Assembly will admit that His Majesty's Government by their proposals have literally thrown the Depressed Classes to the wolves. It may be said that while there is the Constituent Assembly which may deny constitutional safeguards to the Depressed Classes, His Majesty's Government have been careful to include in their proposals in the provisions for a treaty with the Constituent Assembly the object of which is to secure the interests of the Depressed Classes. This proposal of a treaty is evidently borrowed from the plan adopted by His Majesty's Government for the settlement of the Irish dispute. The proposal regarding the treaty does not say what are the safeguards His Majesty's Government will decide to include in the treaty. This is an important point because there may be a difference of opinion between His Majesty's Government and the Depressed Classes on the nature, number and method of the political safeguards that may be necessary to protect the interests of the Depressed Classes under the new constitution.

The second and equally important question about the treaty is what is going to be the sanction behind the treaty. Will the treaty be a part of the constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly, so that any provision in the constitution which is repugnant with the treaty will be *null and void*. Or, will the treaty be just a treaty between the two Governments—the Indian National Government and His Majesty's

Government, as any trade treaty. If the treaty is to be of the former kind it will be the law of the land and will have legal sanction of the Indian Government behind it. If, on the other hand, the treaty is to be of the latter kind it is obvious it will not be the law of the land and will have no legal sanction behind it. Its sanction will be a political sanction. Now a treaty cannot override the constitution framed by the national Government for the obvious reason that such a thing, as was found in the case of Irish Free State, is incompatible with Dominion Status. The only sanction behind such a treaty will be a political sanction. It is obvious that the use of such sanction must depend upon the colour of the Government and the state of public opinion.

Given this fact the questions that arise are two :—(1) What are the means which His Majesty's Government will have at its disposal to enforce the treaty obligations. (2) Secondly, will His Majesty's Government be prepared to use these means to coerce the Indian National Government to abide by the terms of the treaty. With regard to the first question it is obvious that the means for enforcing the treaty are two-fold, use of force and trade war. As to the military force, the Indian army will not be available. It will be entirely transferred to the control of the new Indian National Government. His Majesty's Government will have therefore lost this means of enforcing the treaty. It is impossible to believe that His Majesty's Government will send its own army to compel the National Government to obey the treaty. A trade war is not possible. It is a suicidal policy and the experience of the Irish war with the Irish Free State for the recovery of land annuities shows that a nation of shop-keepers will not sanction it even though it may be for their interest and honour.

The treaty therefore is going to be an empty formula if not a cruel joke upon the Depressed Classes. His Majesty's Government has sent out these proposals to be welcomed by Indians. But neither His Majesty's Government nor Sir Stafford Cripps have offered any explanation as to why they are offering to Indians the very proposals which His Majesty's Government have been condemning in scathing terms only a few months ago. A year ago His Majesty's Government said that they would not grant Constituent Assembly because that would be a coercion of the minorities. His Majesty's Government is now prepared to grant Constituent Assembly and to coerce the

minorities. A year ago His Majesty's Government said that they will not allow Pakistan because that is Balkanization of India. Today they are prepared to allow the partition of India. How the Government of a Great Empire lose all sense of principle ? The only explanation is that His Majesty's Government has, as a result of the course of the war, become panic-stricken. The proposals are the result of loss of nerve. How great is the panic that has overtaken His Majesty's Government can be easily seen if one compared the demands made by the Congress and the Muslim League and the concessions made to them by these proposals. The Congress, while it demanded that the constitution should be framed by a Constituent Assembly, did not demand that the question of safeguards for the minorities should be decided by the Constituent Assembly by a mere majority vote. On the other hand when the Viceroy announced that the British Government will not be a party to the coercion of the minorities involved in the demand by the Congress, the Working Committee of the Congress at its meeting at Wardha held on August 22, 1940 passed the following resolution :—

“The committee regrets that although the Congress has never thought in terms of coercing any minority, much less of asking the British Government to do so, the demand for a settlement of a constitution though through a Constituent Assembly of duly elected representatives has been misrepresented as coercion and the issue of minorities has been made into an insuperable barrier to Indians progress.” The Working Committee added :—“The Congress had proposed that minority rights should be amply protected by agreement with the elected representatives of the minorities concerned.”

This shows that even the Congress did not demand that the decision of minority rights should be included in the purview of the Constituent Assembly. His Majesty's Government has not only given the Congress what it did not ask for but has given them the additional right to decide this minority rights issue by a bare majority vote. With regard to the question of Pakistan, the same attitude is noticeable. The Muslim League did not demand that Pakistan must be conceded immediately. All that the Muslim League had asked for was that at the next revision of the constitution the Musalmans should not be prevented from raising the question of Pakistan. The present proposals have gone a step beyond and distinctly given to the Muslim League the right to create Pakistan.

These are constitutional proposals. They are intended to lead India to wage a total war in which Hindus, Musalmans, Depressed Classes and Sikhs are called upon wholeheartedly to participate. Yet Sir Stafford Cripps, either with the consent or without the consent of His Majesty's Government has been making discrimination between major parties and minor parties. The major parties are those whose consent is necessary. Minor parties are those with whom consultation is believed to be enough. This is a new distinction. Certainly it was never made in the prior pronouncements either of His Majesty's Government or of the Viceroy. The pronouncement spoke of the "consent of the principal elements in the national life of India."

So far as the Depressed Classes are concerned I am not aware of any pronouncement in which the Depressed Classes were placed on a lower plane than the one given to the Mussalmans. I quote the following from the speech of Viceroy made in Bombay on January 10, 1941 from which it will be seen that the Depressed Classes were bracketed with the Mussalmans.

"There are insistent claims of the minorities. I need refer only to two of them; the great Muslim minority and the Scheduled Classes; there are the guarantees that have been given to the minorities in the past, the fact that their position must be safeguarded and that those guarantees must be honoured."

This invidious distinction now sought to be made is a breach of faith with those minorities whose position has been lowered by this discrimination. From a constitutional point of view it is an obnoxious distinction. From the point of view of total war it is bound to cause more disaffection and disloyalty in the country. It is for the British to consider whether in this attempt to win the friendship of those who have probably already decided to choose other friends they should lose those who are their real friends. The proposals show a sudden *volte face* on the part of His Majesty's Government. The putting forth of those proposals which were denounced by them as an invasion of minorities' rights is an indication of their complete surrender of right to might. This is Munich Mentality, the essence of which is to save oneself by sacrificing others. It is this mentality, which is writ large on those proposals. My advice to the British Government is that they should withdraw these proposals. If they cannot fight for right and justice and their plighted word they should better make peace. They can thereby at least save their honour."