

*** Note of Meeting between Cabinet
delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell
and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Friday,
5th April 1946 at 12 noon**

[L/P&J/5/337 : PP. 83-5]

Secret

Dr. Ambedkar said that he had little to add to the memorandum,† of which copies had been supplied to the Delegation, giving the text of the resolution passed by the Working Committee of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation at its meeting on April 2nd. Paragraph 5 of this memorandum contained a list of safeguards which were largely designed to secure to the Scheduled Castes adequate representation in Government and the Public Services. The Federation would never accept any constitution in which these were not included.

On the question of Pakistan Dr. Ambedkar doubted whether Muslims as a whole would really be benefited by the new State. So many of them would have to remain in Hindustan and would be unwilling or unable to migrate.

He wondered whether Pakistan was a permanent or a passing mood on the part of the Muslims. Quite probably it would pass. But it was impossible to wait and see and the Muslim demand had grown so strong that it had become necessary to meet it somehow. In his book on the subject‡ he had proposed that this dilemma should be resolved by an adaptation of the solution which Mr. Asquith had propounded in 1920 for the Irish problem. Mr. Asquith had suggested that Ulster should be separated from the rest of Ireland for six years ; but that a council consisting of representatives of both parts of the country should be established to deal with matters of common concern during this period. At the end of the six years Ulster would have had to choose whether to remain separate or to re-unite with Southern Ireland. Similarly,

* The Transfer of Power, Vol. VII, No. 58, pp. 144-47.

†L/P&J/10/50.

‡B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (Thacker & Co., Bombay, 1946).

Dr. Ambedkar had proposed that Pakistan should be given independence for ten years, at the end of which it would be known whether it was an economic proposition. He admitted that if the people of Pakistan then wished to join up with Hindustan they would be in a weak position to negotiate and all the bargaining counters would be on the other side. During the ten-year period there might be a common council, but it would be purely consultative and would have no executive power. Any All-India Central Government to which the Muslims could, in their present mood, be brought to agree would be so weak as to be useless. There were many other fissiparous tendencies besides the Muslim demand for Pakistan, and the only Central Government worth having would be a strong one which could hold the country together.

In reply to an enquiry on the method of representation of the Scheduled Castes in the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Ambedkar said that he did not want a Constituent Assembly at all. It would be dominated by the caste Hindus, and the Scheduled Caste members would be no more than a small minority which would always be outvoted even if a three-quarters or a two-thirds majority were required for the Assembly's decisions. All the assurances of protection which His Majesty's Government had given to the minorities would go by the board. Moreover there would be an immense amount of corruption in the Assembly—members would be bought over to vote against the interests of their communities.

His own proposal was that the tasks envisaged for the Constituent Assembly should be divided into two glasses, viz :—

- (a) Constitutional questions properly so-called, e.g. the relations between the Legislature and the Executive and their respective composition and functions. There was no great controversy about these matters which did not excite the emotions. To deal with them was beyond the mental capacity of the type of man whom Provincial Assemblies might be expected to send up, and was a job for experts.
- (b) Communal questions.

Questions under the first of these headings should be referred to a commission presided over by an eminent constitutional lawyer from Great Britain or the U.S.A. The other members should be two Indian

experts and one representative each of the Hindu and Muslim communities. The terms of reference of the Commission should be the Government of India Act of 1935 and they should be required to recommend what changes should be made in the Act as it stood.

Questions under (b) should be referred to a conference of the leaders of the different communities. If the conference failed to arrive at an agreed solution, His Majesty's Government would have to make an award. This would no doubt be accepted if it were reasonable.

Dr. Ambedkar then described the position of the Scheduled Castes today. It was estimated that they numbered sixty million, though this figure was probably inaccurate, firstly, because there were no reliable statistics for the States and, secondly, because the census had become mixed up with politics. All these people were subject to very serious disabilities. In the villages they were without land and were virtually the slaves of the Caste Hindus. As an instance of the power of the latter, he said that when some Untouchables had escaped from their villages to take up well-paid work under the Military authorities, the Caste Hindus had managed to force them back to work for them. Owing to the preponderance of Caste Hindus in the Subordinate Police and Revenue Services the Government was already, from the point of view of the Untouchables, not a British but a Hindu one. An example had been the recent arrest of 100 of their boys in Bombay for throwing stones at Mr. Gandhi, when the police had also taken the opportunity to do considerable damage in the Scheduled Caste area of the city.

Politically, although the Scheduled Castes like the other communities, had been granted separate electorates in 1932, they had virtually been deprived of them by the Poona Pact.* Instead, they had got the system of double elections which meant that in the second election, in which all the Hindus voted, the Caste Hindus could nullify the result of the first election in which Untouchables were the only voters. He referred to the figures appended to the Working Committee's resolution of April 2nd which showed, firstly, that in many cases the Congress Scheduled Caste candidates, though outvoted by the Federation candidates in the primary elections, had beaten them in the final elections : and, secondly, how small was the number of Scheduled

*See No. 45, note 3.

Caste voters in comparison with the total of general voters. Even so, Congress had resorted to loot and arson to ensure the success of their candidates ; he produced a volume of photographs to show what they had done.

The Central Legislature had been in existence since 1919, yet no questions were ever asked, resolutions moved or anything else done with the object of helping the Scheduled Castes.

In the Indian States the position of the Scheduled Castes was especially bad. There were even certain foods which they were not allowed to eat. In the representative institutions which were now being established in certain States no community had been given separate representation except the Muslims. The Political Department should have taken greater interest in these constitutional experiments, and should have seen to it that the Scheduled Castes were given separate electorates. The Delegation should see the President of the All-India Scheduled Castes States Conference.

The Scheduled Castes had been the earliest source of manpower for the East India Company's army, and so it was with their help that the British had conquered India. They had been the friends of the British ever since. Yet the British had never consciously and deliberately helped them, though since 1892 they had given enormous help to the Muslims.

He thought that if India became independent it would be one of the greatest disasters that could happen. Before they left, the British must ensure that the new constitution guaranteed to the Scheduled Castes the elementary human rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that it restored their separate electorates and gave them the other safeguards which they demanded. At present disillusionment was driving his followers towards terrorism and communism. He was on trial with them for the efficacy of constitutional methods.

Lord Pethick-Lawrence said that up to now Indian politics had been dominated by two issues, the question of winning independence from British rule and the Hindu-Muslim problem. Once these were out of the way party divisions would probably be on economic issues. Surely the Scheduled Castes would have a better chance of getting their rights by allaying themselves with the left wing than by relying on the British who were about to hand over power. In reply Dr. Ambedkar reiterated

that so long as there were joint electorates, Scheduled Caste voters would be so few that Hindu candidates could safely ignore their wishes. Caste Hindus would never support Scheduled Caste candidates. Admittedly under the present system they had to vote for Untouchables in the final elections ; but their object in doing so was never to favour their own candidate but merely to outvote the candidate put up by his own Federation. Separate electorates were fundamental, since without them the Scheduled Castes would never have their own representatives.

••