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* Lord Pethick-Lawrence to Mr. Attlee

L/P&J/10/50 : ff 38-40

India Office, *3 September 1946*

Secretary of State's Minute : Serial No. 48/46

Prime Minister,

You asked for my views on Ambedkar's letter to you of the 12th August. @

2. As regards his second paragraph you will find an analysis of the election results for the Depressed Classes in the memorandum which my Private Secretary sent to yours on the 26th July† with the draft reply to Ambedkar's previous letter. Shortly, the facts are that in the primary elections which were contested, Congress polled more votes than Ambedkar's Organisation, while a still larger proportion were polled by Independent candidates who may or may not be supporters of Ambedkar. But apart from this, two-thirds of the seats were won by Congress unopposed. The figures are, of course, not conclusive but it is not justifiable to say that the First Lord's statement in the Commons has "no foundation in truth," though I think it was rather too positive.

3. As regards paragraph 3 of Ambedkar's letter, it was not stated in the House of Commons that his influence was confined to Bombay and Central Provinces. He is referring to the President of the Board of Trade's speech, in which the actual words used were "Dr. Ambedkar's Organization is somewhat more local in its character (than the Congress Organization) being mainly centred in Bombay and the Central Provinces". I have made enquiries as to what happened in the Bengal Election to the Constituent Assembly which is, of course, by proportional representation. Ambedkar got five first preference votes.

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* The Transfer of Power, Vol. VIII, No. 250, pp. 411-12.

@ No. 142.

† L/P& J/10/50 :ff 63-9

Sarat Chandra Bose also received five first preference votes. The quota for election in Bengal was four votes. Naturally the Congress would organize their voters to secure as nearly as possible four first preferences for each of their candidates. The phrase "top of the poll" has really no meaning in a proportional election. No-one denies that Ambedkar has influence among some of the depressed classes in Bengal. There are twenty five Scheduled Caste members of the Bengal Assembly, four of whom were returned as Independents and one as an Ambedkar candidate. I do not know whether all the Independents voted for Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly election or whether he got some Anglo-Indian votes.

4. With regard to Ambedkar's paragraph 4. I am convinced that we cannot make a public declaration that we regard the Scheduled Castes as a minority who should be represented in the Minority Advisory Committee. It is correct, of course, that Congress do not regard them as a minority for the purpose of separate political representation, whereas we have always done so. But we are not in a position to secure that Ambedkar's organization is represented on the Minorities Advisory Committee.

5. I do not think it is really essential to send a reply to Ambedkar but should it seem to you more courteous to do so I attach a short draft.* In case you wish to see them, I attach also extracts@ from the speeches by the First Lord and the President of the Board of Trade in the Commons' Debate. My own speech contained a passage similar to the latter but rather shorter.

PETHICK-LAWRENCE.

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* Not printed. Mr. Attlee does not appear to have sent a reply to Dr. Ambedkar.

@ Not printed.