

*** Lord Pethick-Lawrence to Mr. Attlee***L/P & J/10/50 :ff 28-32*India Office, *9th September 1946*

Secretary of State's Minute : Serial No. 51/46

Prime Minister.

Your personal minute No. M. 296/46 of September 4th, @ regarding the representation of the Scheduled Castes on the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly.

2. It certainly was the Mission's intention that the Advisory Committee should contain representation of the Scheduled Castes and I informed Ambedkar of this by a letter # I wrote to him in India. In the third paragraph of your reply to him of 1st August † you explained to Dr. Ambedkar that, while H.M.G. themselves consider the Scheduled Castes an important minority which should be represented on the Minority Advisory Committee, they could not accede to his request for a public declaration to this effect, since any such declaration

(a) would also have to specify all the other elements which H.M.G. consider should be included as minorities in the Advisory Committee; and

(b) would be liable to be interpreted as an attempt to interfere with the Constituent Assembly's freedom of action.

3. The position, however, is that we have left the composition of the Advisory Committee to be decided by the Constituent Assembly and we cannot now prescribe it ourselves. I do not think we can be accused of misleading the House as the position was clearly stated in the President of the Board of Trade's speech on 18th July of which the relevant passage was attached to my Minute to you of 3rd September. ‡

* Transfer of Power, Vol. VIII, No. 288, pp. 466-68.

@ No. 253. (*Refers to S. No. in The Transfer of Power.—Ed.*).

No. 399, Vol. VII. (*See P. 502.—Ed.*).

† No. 105, Vol. VIII. (*See P. 509.—Ed.*).

‡ No. 250. (*See P. 515.—Ed.*).

4. The controversy on the question whether the Scheduled Castes constitute a minority for the purpose of separate political representation or whether they should be classed with the Hindus has of course a long history. Gandhi has spent a large part of his life in propagating the latter view. But when I said, in paragraph 4 of my minute of September 3rd, that Congress did not regard the Scheduled Castes as a minority for the purpose of separate political representation, I had particularly in mind the passage in Azad's letter to the Viceroy of June 25th* (some-weeks after our Statement of May 16th) to which Dr. Ambedkar has referred in both his letters@ to you. In this Azad said that Congress "repudiated the view that the Scheduled Castes are a minority and considered them as integral parts of Hindu society" (second paragraph on page 23 of Cmd. 6861). This statement had reference to the Viceroy's assurance to Mr. Jinnah# that he would consult the main parties before filling any vacancy among the seats in the Interim Government allotted to representatives of minorities. It was not altogether unnatural that Congress should regard the Scheduled Castes as their own responsibility and object to the Muslim League having a say in the appointment of a Scheduled Caste representative.

5. There is no positive reason to think that Congress will not wish to include in the Advisory Committee Scheduled Caste representatives in adequate numbers. They will be concerned to escape criticism both in India and abroad; and they are most anxious to win over to their own ranks, or at least to conciliate, as large a proportion as possible of the Scheduled Castes, if only to prevent them from allying themselves with the Muslim League. The Committee is to deal with the rights of *citizens* as well as with those of minorities, so that inclusion of Scheduled Caste representatives need not prejudice the question whether they are or are not a minority. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that Dr. Ambedkar or any other member of the Scheduled Castes who opposes Congress will secure a place on the Committee.

6. I still feel that we should not volunteer a pronouncement in response to Dr. Ambedkar's request for a public declaration that the Scheduled Castes are a minority within the meaning of paragraph 20 of

* Vo. VII, No. 603. (Transfer of Power).

@ See footnotes to No. 105 and No. 142. (Transfer of Power).

Vo. VII, No. 573. (Transfer of Power).

the Mission's Statement of May 16th. To do so would almost certainly arouse a controversy with Gandhi which might result in Congress opposing their inclusion as a demonstration. Even if we did not say that the Scheduled Castes are a minority but only that they should be included on the Committee, our statement would arouse requests for a similar statement in favour of the Anglo-Indians and others, and would be interpreted as interference with the Constituent Assembly, which is what we are most anxious to avoid. There is no possibility that such a declaration would influence Congress to give the Scheduled Castes better treatment in the Advisory Committee than they would otherwise do, nor would it help Dr. Ambedkar, since it would refer simply to the Scheduled Castes, making no distinction between those who favour Congress and those who do not.*

PETHICK-LAWRENCE

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* Mr. Attlee noted on this Minute: 'No further action.' Attlee Papers, University College, Oxford.

