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PROPOSAL FOR REPRESENTATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

NEW DELHI, 7 JUNE 1945.

Dear Lord Wavell,

I am grateful to you for asking me in my capacity as the leader of the Scheduled Castes to be a member of the Conference which you propose to call in furtherance of your proposal for the Indianisation of the Executive Council. I told you, for reasons which I need not repeat here, that I am unable to accept your offer. Thereupon you desired me to name a substitute. Though I have expressed my disapproval with your proposals, I do not wish to deny you such help as you may derive from the presence of a Scheduled Castes representative in your Conference. I am, therefore, prepared to suggest a substitute. Judging on the suitability of various names that occur to me, I cannot think of any other name than that of Rao Bahadur N. Sivaraj., B.A., B.L. He is the President of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation and is also a member of the Central Legislative Assembly and of the National Defence Council. If you like, you may invite him to the Conference as a representative of the Scheduled Castes.

2. There is one other matter to which I feel I must draw your attention right now. It relates to the extreme inadequacy of the representation given to the Scheduled Castes in His Majesty's Government's proposals for the reconstitution of the Executive Council. Five seats to 90 millions of Muslims, one seat to 50 millions of Untouchables and 1 seat to 6 millions of Sikhs is a strange and sinister kind of political arithmetic which is revolting to my ideas of justice and common sense. I cannot be a party to it. Measured by their needs, the Untouchables should get as much representation as the Muslims, if not more. Leaving needs aside and taking only numbers the Untouchables should get at least

three. Instead, they are offered just one in a Council of fifteen. This is an intolerable position.

This is a matter to which I drew your attention at the meeting of the Executive Council held on the 5th June when you explained His Majesty's Government's proposals to the Council. At the meeting of the 6th morning you replied to the criticisms offered by Members of Council the previous evening on the merits of the proposals. I naturally expected that you would also deal with the point I had raised. But to my great surprise you completely ignored it and made no reference to it whatever. It could not be that I was not emphatic enough. For I was more than emphatic. The conclusion I draw from your omission to refer to it is that either you did not think the matter to be of sufficient importance to deserve your notice or that you thought that I had no intention beyond lodging a protest. It is to remove this impression and to tell you in quite unmistakable terms that I propose to take definite action if His Majesty's Government fail to redress the wrong. Therefore I feel the necessity of writing this letter.

I would not have felt as hurt as I do if such a proposal had come from the Congress or the Hindu Mahasabha. But it is a decision by His Majesty's Government. Even the general Hindu opinion is in favour of increased representation to the Scheduled Castes both in the Legislature and in the Executive. To take the proposals of the Sapru Committee as an indication of general Hindu opinion, the proposal of His Majesty's Government must be admitted to be retrograde. For this is what the Sapru Committee has said:—

> "the representation given to the Sikhs and Scheduled Castes in the Government of India Act is manifestly inadequate and unjust and should be substantially raised. The quantum of increased representation to be given to them should be left to the Constitution making Body.
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> "Subject to the provisions of clause (b) the executive of the Union shall be a composite cabinet in the sense that the following communities shall be represented on it, *viz.*—

(i) Hindus, other than Scheduled Castes.

(ii) Muslims.

(iii) Scheduled Castes.

(iv) Sikhs.

(v) Indian Christians.

(vi) Anglo-Indians.

"(b) The representation of these communities in the executive shall be, as far as possible, a reflection of their strength in the Legislature."

I may add that two of my Hindu colleagues in the Executive Council have in the memorandum they have presented to you this morning* expressed that the representation given to the Scheduled Castes in His Majesty's Government's proposals is inadequate and unfair. What shocks me (is) that His Majesty's Government with all their profession of being trustees for the Scheduled Castes and contrary to their repeated declarations should have treated their wards in such an ill-liberal, unfair and unjust manner and far worse than enlightened Hindu opinion would have done. I feel it, therefore, my bounden and sacred duty to oppose the proposal by every means at my command. The proposal means a deathknell to the Untouchables and will have the effect of liquidating their efforts over the last 50 years for their emancipation. If His Majesty's Government notwithstanding its many pronouncements wish to hand over the fate of the Untouchables to the tender mercies of Hindu-Muslim combine, His Majesty's Government may well do it. But, I cannot be a party to the suppression of my people. The conclusion to which I have come is to ask His Majesty's Government to redress the wrong and to give to the Untouchables at least 3 seats in the new Executive Council. If His Majesty's Government is not prepare(d) to grant this, then His Majesty's Government should know that I cannot be a member of the newly-constituted Executive Council,

*See No. 482. (Transfer of Power).

even if I was offered a place in it. The Untouchables have been looking forward to a full recognition of their political rights for some time past. I have no doubt that they will be stunned by the decision of His Majesty's Government. And I would not be surprised if the whole of the Scheduled Castes decided as a matter of protest not to have anything to do with the new Government. I am sure their disillusionment will bring about a parting of the ways. This is what I anticipate will be the result of His Majesty's Government's proposals, if they are not revised. So far as I myself am concerned, my decision is made. I may be told that this is not the final shape of things. This is only an interim arrangement. I have been long enough in politics to know concessions and adjustments more (once) made grows into vested rights and how wrong settlements once agreed upon become precedents for future settelement. I cannot, therefore, allow grass to grow under my feet. If I have capacity to judge aright, I visualize that the distribution of seats though it begins as a temporary arrangement will end by becoming permanent. Rather than be left to regret towards the end, I feel I must lodge my protest against it at the very beginning.

It may well be that His Majesty's Government may not mind my eclipse and even the eclipse of the Scheduled Castes from the future Government of India: nor regret the consequent parting of the ways between the British Government in this country and the Scheduled Castes. But I believe it is only fair that His Majesty's Government should know what I have to say about the subject. I have, therefore, to request you to communicate to His Majesty's Government my proposal for increase in the representation of the Scheduled Castes in the Executive Council and the course of action I propose to take if the proposal is rejected by them.

I am,

Yours sincerely,
DR. B.R, AMBEDKAR

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(Wavell Papers, Political Series, April 1944-July 1945 pt. I, Pp. 207-209)