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PROTEST LETTER AGAINST THE PROPOSALS OF CABINATE MISSION

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Member, Governor General's

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22, Prithviraj Road,

New Delhi,

Dated, 3rd May 1946.

Dear Lord Wavell,

The omission on the part of the Cabinet Mission to invite a representative of the Scheduled Castes to their Conference in Simla has given rise to many misgivings in the minds of the Scheduled Castes as to how the Cabinet Mission proposes to dispose of their demand for constitutional safeguards. As the situation is critical, I like to acquaint you with the reactions of the Scheduled Castes in this connection.

The omission to invite a representative of the Scheduled Castes to the Simla Conference is capable of many explanations. One explanation that appears to me to be plausible is that the demands of the Scheduled Castes are such that they do not require the consent of other parties inasmuch as they do not trench upon their legitimate rights. This is certainly so at least with regard to three of their demands, namely, (1) separate electorates, (2) proper representation in the Central Executive, and (3) undertaking from parties to accept certain general principles in regard to the safeguarding of the interest of the Scheduled Castes in the future constitution as a condition precedent for an interim Government.

That the demands of the Scheduled Castes do not require the consent of other parties is a view which I had urged very strongly upon the Mission in the course of my interview on the 5th of April 1946.

The demand for Separate Electorates by a Majority Community as is the case of Muslims in the Punjab, N.W.F. Province, Sind and

Bengal, stands on a different footing from the demand for Separate Electorates by a Minority Community such as the Scheduled Castes. A demand for Separate Electorates by a Majority Community must require the consent of the Minority Community. But the demand for Separate Electorates by a Minority Community can never be made dependent upon the wishes of the Majority Community. The Electorate is primarily a mechanism devised for protecting a Minority against the Majority. That being so, whether the Electorate should be joint or separate must be left entirely to Minority to determine on the ground that the Minority knows what is best in its own interest. The Majority can have no say in the matter and must really accept the decision of the Minority. Following this up, the Hindus can have very little to say as to whether the Scheduled Castes should or should not have Separate Electorates.

The demand of the Scheduled Castes for Separate Electorates does not adversely affect any other community, not even the Hindus. That is why this demand is accepted by all other Communities. The contention of the Hindus that the Scheduled Castes are Hindus and therefore cannot have a Separate Electorates is simply purile and misses the essential point that Separate Electorates is really a mechanism for the protection of the minorities and has nothing to do with religion. If any evidence of this is necessary, one could refer to the case of Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians who are all one by religion yet each have a Separate Electorate.

If the Cabinet Mission took these facts and arguments into consideration there would be nothing unnatural if it accepted the contention of the Scheduled Castes that the consent of the Hindus is not necessary and that it was entirely a matter for the Cabinet Mission to decide, particularly when it has been proved that Joint Electorates have made representation of the Scheduled Castes a farce.

The second demand of the Scheduled Castes that their representation in the Interim Government should be 50% of the representation granted to the Muslims is also a demand for which the consent of the Hindus is not necessary before it could be

conceded. It is for the Mission to decide what representation the Scheduled Castes should have in the Central Executive having regard to their numbers and the weight of the disabilities they are suffering from and the lee-way they have to make to bring themselves in line with other advanced communities. You will remember that this question was raised by me at the time of the last Simla Conference and you were prepared to give two seats to the Scheduled Castes which was just a little less than 50 per cent offered to the Muslims.

There is nothing new in the third demand. It is merely a reiteration of your own view which you expressed to Mr. Gandhi in your letter of 15th August 1944. In para 5 of that letter you said :--

“It is clear in these circumstances that no purpose will be served by discussion on the basis which you suggest. If, however, the leaders of the Hindus, the Muslims and the important minorities were willing to co-operate in a transitional Government established and working within the present constitution, I believe good progress might be made. *For such a transitional Government to succeed, there must, before it is formed, be agreement in principle between Hindus and Muslims and all important elements as to the method by which the new constitution should be framed.*”

This principle which you enunciated must be presumed to have been made on behalf of His Majesty's Government and as such it must be binding on the Cabinet Mission. Consent of parties would seem to be quite unnecessary for the Mission to give effect to this principle, which is all that the Scheduled Castes have demanded.

If I may say so, these contentions have sufficient force to lead to the conclusion that Mission does not think that the consent of the Hindus is necessary before it can pronounce upon the demands of the Scheduled Castes and that this is why the Scheduled Castes have not been invited to send their representatives to the Simla Conference.

But unfortunately this is not the only explanation that comes to one's mind. There is another explanation which is possible. It is that the Cabinet Mission regards an agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League enough to give them a clear line to proceed with the formation of the interim Constitution as well as for determining the machinery for shaping the future constitution of India without waiting to consider the case of the Scheduled Castes.

The Scheduled Castes are filled with anxiety as they do not know definitely what the plan of the Mission is. If the Mission has adopted the second plan, which may well be the fact, then I feel that I shall be failing in my duty if I did not lodge my protest against this betrayal of the Scheduled Castes and inform the Mission that they will be wholly responsible for the consequences that might ensue.

This letter is written by me in my capacity as a representative of the Scheduled Castes. It is addressed to you in your capacity as a Member of the Cabinet Mission. I shall be grateful if you will be so good to circulate it to your colleagues.

I am,

Yours Sincerely,
B.R. Ambedkar.

His Excellency Field Marshal
The Right Hon'ble Viscount Wavell of
Cyrenaica and Winchester, SIMLA.
G.C.B., G.M.S.I., G.M.I.E., C.M.G., M.C.,
Viceroy & Governor General of India

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