

**LETTER BY MR. ATTLEE TO
DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR**

Paris, 1st August 1946

My dear Ambedkar,

I have carefully considered your letter of July 1st and the papers enclosed.@

I am afraid that I cannot accept the view that the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy were unjust to the Scheduled Castes. The reason why they have revised the policy followed at the Simla Conference of 1945 is, as you suggest, the result of the elections to the Provincial Legislatures, which were held last spring. The Mission made a careful study of the voting figures and I have examined them myself. We appreciate that there are grounds for the view that the present electoral system does not do justice to those Scheduled Caste candidates who are opposed to Congress. On the other hand, I do not find that the figures substantiate what you say about the achievements of candidates belonging to your Federation at the primary elections.* While I do not propose to go into the matter in detail here the facts are that Primary Elections were held in only 43 of the 151 seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes. Of these 43 Primary Elections, the Scheduled Castes Federation contested 22 and topped the poll in only 13.

@ On 1st July Dr. Ambedkar sent Mr. Attlee a lengthy letter with which he enclosed copies of recent correspondence, a memorandum, a speech and some other items. Dr. Ambedkar's letter was in continuation of a telegram he had sent to Mr. Attlee on 17th June and covered similar ground. For the telegram see page : 224

* Transfer of Power, Vol. VIII, No. 105, pp. 170-72.

* In his letter of 1st July Dr. Ambedkar wrote that : 'That results of the Primary Elections—herever they took place in India—proved that the candidates put up by the Federation came to the top and those put up by the Congress went down to the bottom.' L/P&J/10/50 ; f 81.

In your letter you make three specific requests.@ As regards the first, His Majesty's Government is anxious that the Constituent Assembly should have the fullest possible freedom of action consistent with the terms of the Cabinet Mission's Statements of May 16th and May 25th. We ourselves of course consider the Scheduled Castes to be an important minority which should be represented on the Minority Advisory Committee. But the declaration for which you ask could not be confined to the Scheduled Castes and would have to be a statement of all the elements who we consider should be included as Minorities in the Advisory Committee. Even though it would be only an expression of opinion on the part of His Majesty's Government, it would inevitably be interpreted as an attempt to interfere with the Assembly's freedom and as such would be likely to cause serious resentment. In these circumstances I cannot believe that such a declaration would be of value to the cause of the Scheduled Castes.

Turning to your second request, I do not find that my speech in the House of Commons on March 15th last contained the words which you attribute to me.† What I said was "We are very mindful of the rights of minorities and minorities should be able to live free from fear." This remains the view of His Majesty's

@ These were :

- (1) To state openly that His Majesty's Government holds that the Scheduled Castes are a minority within the meaning of paragraph 20 of the Cabinet Mission's Statement.
- (2) That His Majesty's Government will see that satisfactory safeguards which will enable them to live free from the fear of the Majority are provided for the Scheduled Castes before it agree to sign the Treaty for cessation of sovereignty.
- (3) That in the Interim Government the Scheduled Castes should have at least two representatives which should be the nominees of the Scheduled Castes Federation.

Ibid., : f 82.

†Dr. Ambedkar had noted that the Cabinet Mission had already made the point that there must be adequate provision for the protection of the minorities. His second request would be met if there were added to this statement the words : 'safeguards which will enable the Scheduled Castes to live free from the fear of the Majority.' These were words, Dr. Ambedkar claimed, which Mr. Attlee himself had used in his speech on 15th March. *Ibid.*

Government, which found expression in paragraph 4 of the Cabinet Missions's Statement of May 25th. I do not consider that His Majesty's Government would be wise to make at this stage any further pronouncement elaborating what was said in that paragraph.

Your final request is that in the Interim Government the Scheduled Castes should have at least 2 representatives who should be nominees of the Scheduled Castes Federation. I regret that, I cannot hold out any hope of this being possible.

I was very glad to see that you had been elected to the Constituent Assembly.

C. R. A.

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