

**LETTERS BY LORD PETHICK - LAWRENCE
TO MR. ATTLEE, PRIME MINISTER**

India Office,
3rd September 1946.

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

Prime Minister,

You asked for my view on Dr. Ambedkar's letter to you of the 12th August, 1946.

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 Dr. Ambedkar's previous letter. Shortly, the facts are that in the Primary Elections which were contested, Congress polled more votes than Dr. Ambedkar's Organisation, while a still larger proportion were polled by Independent candidates who may or may not be supporters of Dr. 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 Dr. 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. Dr. Ambedkar got five first preference votes. 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 Dr. 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 a Dr. Ambedkar candidate. I do not know whether all the Independents voted for Dr. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly election or whether he got some Anglo-Indian votes.

4. With regard to Dr. 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 Dr. Ambedkar’s organization is represented on the Minorities Advisory Committee.

5. I do not think it is really essential to send a reply to Dr. 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 letter but rather shorter.

PETHICK-LAWRENCE. ¹

* Not printed.

@ Not printed.

¹: The Transfer of Power, Vol. VIII, No. VIII, No. 250, Pp. 441-412.

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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 Dr. 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.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 Castes 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.

* Vol. VII. No. 603. (Transfer of Power).

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

Vol. VII. No. 573. (Transfer of Power).

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 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.