

MOBILISE AGAINST FEDERATION TURNING POINT IN HISTORY OF NATION

Bombay, July 20, 1938.

“Federation is an issue on which all the progressive elements in the country should concentrate their strength, irrespective of party differences, so that the future of the country may not be endangered”

“This is a crucial moment and it demands the highest sacrifice from all,” observed Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Leader of the Independent Labour Party of Bombay, in the course of a statement to the “United Press,” on the present controversy relating to Federation and the attitude of his party to it.

Congress and Federation

“At the present moment” continued Dr. Ambedkar, “the political issue of the highest national importance in this country is the acceptance or nonacceptance of the Federal Plan as embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935. The representatives of the British Government are straining every nerve to introduce Federation at the earliest possible date. Apparently the whole country is opposed to that part of the Government of India Act which relates to Federation. There are, however, different shades in the opposition and even the Congress Party which is committed to the rejection of the Federal Plan seems to be divided as regards the attitude the Congress should adopt in practice towards Federation. There are reasons to believe that most of the older leaders are not after all so uncompromising in their opposition as the wording of the resolutions passed on the subject from the Congress platform may lead some people to suppose and that to a few of them the introduction of Federation would be positively welcome.

“Further, on the strength of the past experience in such matters the fear may rightly be entertained that the older leaders of the party

will eventually succeed in silencing the opposition of the younger leaders either on the ground of accepting it for what it is worth or on the usual ground of accepting it for wrecking it. There is also circumstantial evidence to believe that in spite of all camouflage there have been recently secret negotiations in India as well as in England. It is, therefore, just likely that as the result of these negotiations the constitution will be subjected to some tinkering processs and then it will be declared as worthy of acceptance.”

Turning Point

Referring to the policy of the Independent Labour Party Dr. Ambedkar said: “The Independent Labour Party feels that this is a turning point in the nation’s life and that it is the duty of every party in the country to look at the question not from a party point of view but from a standpoint of the country. The reactionary nature of the Federal scheme in the Government of India Act is not properly and fully realised in many quarters. Most of the Indian politicians seem to be dissatisfied with the new constitution merely because it is halting and withholds full powers of self-government. Its dangers are not sufficiently realised by them. And in the case of these leaders the threat not to work the Constitution may be regarded as only bluff. I am afraid the majority of the Congressmen, or the majority of the leaders, for that matter belong to this category.

“The Independent Labour Party will never be a party to bartering away the country’s freedom to grow to full nationhood, for the sake of a mess of pottage, by howsoever a big name it may be called. In the process of evolution, Federation may be inevitable, but certainly it is not the Federation which is envisaged in the new Constitution.”

Defects in Federation

Referring to the grounds of criticisms against Federation by his party Dr. Ambedkar said : “The grounds of criticism may be divided into two groups (1) imperfections, and (2) inherent defects. The former include the preponderating representation given to the States, the representation of the States through

nominations, the unequal distribution of financial burden between British India and the States, indirect elections to the Federal Assembly and the special responsibilities of the Governor-General. Under the latter the following may be mentioned: (1) treating Paramountcy as a reserved subject, (2) impossibility of securing full control over the army and (3) the impossibility of securing full control over finances. Although the imperfections are serious, they may disappear or be removed or mitigated in the course of time. Such is not the case with the inherent defects. These defects cannot be removed unless the whole Federal constitution is scrapped. Nobody need quarrel with a constitution because it has certain imperfections in it. These imperfections can be removed in practice by mutual understanding and experience shows that it is not impossible. If they are such that they cannot be removed in practice, they can be made good when the time for revision comes. But the case is totally different when the constitution is based upon principles which are defective and which cannot allow it to grow. The Federal Constitution is wrong in its conception and wrong in its basis.”

“Deadly Poison”

Concluding Dr. Ambedkar said: “The introduction of the Federal Scheme in the Government of India Act deserves, in the opinion of the Independent Labour Party, to be resisted by every possible means. The Federal part of the new constitution must be shunned as a deadly poison. Should the Congress decided by a majority to fight the new constitution it shall have the full support of the Independent Labour Party. In case, however, the majority in the Congress be swayed by the reactionary element and Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose decides to stick to his guns, the Independent Labour Party will join hands with his party. Our party will co-operate with the party or the combination of parties undertaking to fight the Federal part of the new constitution in every possible way.”

United Press.” ¹



1. : The Bombay Chronicle, dated 21st July 1938.