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DEPRESSED CLASSES INSTITUTE

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had attended the First Round Table Conference at London, in the year 1930. During his stay, he drafted an appeal on behalf of the Depressed Classes Institutes to get the financial assistance from the Head of the Princely States for the upliftment of the Untouchables. As a result of his efforts he got the financial assistance. He did this work vigorously. Similarly at the time of Second Round Table Conference he drafted the appeal in November 1931 and distributed.

This is the text of an appeal.

Appeal
on behalf of
the Depressed Classes Institute
ORGANIZATION

The Depressed Classes Institute is an organization of the Depressed Classes which is conducted by members of the Depressed Classes in the interest of the Depressed Classes. The aim of the Institute is to raise the Depressed Classes from their present-day down-trodden condition to a status of social and political equality in Indian Society and to promote their economic welfare.

The Institute was established in June, 1925, and has been functioning since then. The Institute is intended to be an All Indian Organization with branches all over India. But owing to want of resources the activities of the Institute are confined to the Presidency of Bombay. The Institute functions through the agency of social workers who are pledged to work for the uplift of the Depressed Classes. They are mainly drawn from the Depressed Classes and are scattered over the various districts of the Presidency of Bombay. The activities of these social workers are* directed and co-ordinated by a managing Council of the leading members of the Depressed Classes at the headquarters of the Institute located in the city of Bombay.

Activities of the Institute

During the short period of five years which has elapsed since its establishment the work of the Institute has grown to such enormous proportions that it is impossible to give even a summary of it within the scope of this leaflet. All that can be done is to indicate the lines of activity undertaken by the Institute in pursuance of its aim, namely; the elevation of the Depressed Classes. These activities may be classified under the following heads :

(1) **Propaganda.** The Institute publishes a newspaper called Janata (The People) with the object of enlightening the Depressed Classes on their special problems and also on the general problems of the day in so far as they affect them. It educates them into a realization of their civic rights, ventilates their grievances and creates public opinion in favour of speedy redress. The guiding principle of the paper is equality. Until last month it was a fortnightly paper. It is now converted into a weekly. The Institute also publishes other literature from time to time on various subjects for the education of the Depressed Classes.

(2) **Civic Rights Campaign.** Although there are many cases in which the Law allows civic rights to the Depressed Classes there are a legion in which custom stands in the way of the Depressed Classes benefiting by them. One of the objects of the Institute being to secure to the Depressed Classes the enjoyment of their civic rights, the Institute has had to tackle all those cases in which there is no bar of law but in which the Hindu majority will not allow the Depressed Classes to enjoy those rights on the ground that such an act is an affront to their dignity and a transgression of the social status assigned by custom to the Depressed Classes in Indian Society. The complaints made to the Institute by members of the Depressed Classes regarding infringements of their rights are untold and the volume of work done by the Institute in this connection is beyond description, cases in which Depressed Classes were refused accommodation in a school, in a bus, in a ferry, or in a roadside inn, etc. Besides attending to individual cases of infringement of civic rights the Institute takes up what may be called test cases for ascertaining the exact legal position of the Depressed Classes as to their civic rights in relation to certain matters. Three years ago the Institute took the question of the right of the Depressed Classes to public water Courses and fought

a civil suit at an enormous cost, which was decided by the court of the First Instance in favour of the Depressed Classes. The High Caste Hindus have appealed against this decision and the matter is now pending in the Court of Appeal. The Institute is agitating for securing to the Depressed Classes a right of worship in the Temple and the Institute is also thinking of concluding the question by filing a test case in a Court of Law.

(3) **Redress of grievances.** Many of the grievances of the Depressed Classes arise from administrative action taken by the Departments of the Government. It must be borne in mind that the Public Service of India is overwhelmingly composed of the High Caste Hindus. Their antipathy to the Depressed Classes is notorious and the cases in which the administrative and even judicial officers have abused their powers by siding with the High caste Hindus in disputes between them and the Depressed Classes are by no means few. The Institute has paid special attention to this matter and has maintained a special establishment to make representations to Government on behalf of a member from the Depressed Classes aggrieved by an unjust order of a Department. The Institute has also taken upon itself, in many a case, the burden of an appeal to a higher judicial tribunal or has helped a private party to prosecute an appeal in cases of wrong done by the lower judiciary whenever the case was of general importance to the Depressed Classes and which was beyond the means of a private party.

(4) **Welfare Work.** One of the besetting sins of the Depressed Classes is their poverty. Nine-tenths of their poverty, however, is due to the fact that owing to untouchability, almost all the avocations of life have been closed to them. The Institute since its start has been trying strenuously to improve the economic condition of the Depressed Classes. In this connection it had to struggle hard for securing the enlistment of the Depressed Classes in the department of the State which are now closed to them. The efforts of the Institute have been remarkably successful. Not only have the Depressed Classes secured a larger enlistment in the various departments but they have also been able to get admission in departments which before this were closed to them on account of their Untouchability. Enlistment in the Police department may be cited as an instance in point. Another means by which the Institute has sought to improve the economic condition of the

Depressed Classes is to secure for them land so that they may work as independent farmers. There are many parts of the Bombay Presidency in which there is waste land. Government leases this waste land at a rental for anyone who cares to take it for cultivation. Before the Institute came into existence the whole of this Government waste land used to be given to caste Hindu farmers. Applicants from the Depressed Classes never got a single piece of this waste land from the Revenue Officials who had the power of disposal, the Institute has ever since its establishment, fought for the right of the Depressed Classes to get for cultivation, a fair share of this land and succeeded in getting the policy of the Government in regard to the disposal of such land modified by a favoured treatment proviso applicable to the Depressed Classes. It may now be said to the credit of the Institute that, by its efforts, quite a number of Depressed Classes families, which were earning their living as agricultural labourers, have risen to the status of independent farmers.

Need of the Institute

The principle needs of the Institute are three. *First* is the enlargement of its Printing Establishment. The Institute maintains a Printing Press of its own called the Bharat Bhushan Printing Press. The purpose in having a press of its own has been two-fold. One purpose was to have no difficulty in printing the newspaper 'Janata' which the Institute conducts and other propagnanda literature which the Institute issues from time to time. The other and more important purpose was to make the Printing Press a source of income to finance the activities of the Institute. The Printing Press, however, far from being a source of income has been a burden to the Institute. The Printing Press being very small in its equipment., the Institute is not able to take either book-work or job-work at the competitive rates prevailing in the market, the cost of production on a small machine being relatively high. The Institute must either enlarge the equipment of the Press or do without the Press. The latter alternative is impossible under the present circumstances of India, for there is always the probability of a conspiracy among printers who are mostly caste Hindus to refuse to print a newspaper run by the Depressed Classes. *The second need of the Institute* is for a building of its own for its headquarters in Bombay. The Institute is, at present, not housed

under one roof. Its offices are scattered and are maintained in the private apartments of members in charge of the various activities. Housing the Institute in rented rooms has its own difficulties. The inability of the Institute to bear the expense is, no doubt, one of them. The difficulty of getting accommodation in flats on account of Untouchability and the liability of being asked to vacate at any moment on account of protest made by orthodox tenants are factors which often come in the way of the Institute getting decent accommodation for housing itself. Under the system of scattered offices co-operation and co-ordination of the various activities of the Institute have been difficult and the work of the Institute has been there by rendered inefficient. The *third need* of the Institute is to have whole time workers to carry on its activities. At present the Institute has only part-time workers who have undertaken to devote their spare time to carry on this work of social uplift. To them the work is largely labour of love. This is due to the fact that the Institute is unable to maintain a body of workers on full pay. This is the greatest drawback in the organization of the Institute and the relief value of the work of the Institute to the suffering among the Depressed Classes who stand in need of it is considerably diminished on account of the inevitable discontinuity and laxity arising from the fact that the workers are only spare-time workers. The only way of removing the drawback is the engagement of a body of regularly paid workers who will devote the whole of their time to social work.

Wanted £ 40,000

These three principle needs of the Institute for (1) *Press Fund* (2) *Building Fund*, and (3) *Maintenance Fund* are estimated to require a capital sum of £40,000. As is well known, much larger amounts have been subscribed in support of causes less urgent and perhaps less humane than that of Depressed Classes of India. The Institute, therefore, hopes that with the support of the philanthropic public, it will not be impossible to collect this amount. Like most other causes of humanity it is undoubtedly one which seeks to bring hope and light to a people who are stagnant and destitute and who are struggling against the forces of darkness. But there is something in the cause of the Depressed Classes which gives it a pathos all its own. It is not the cause of humanity which is sung by reason of misuse of opportunities. It is the cause of humanity

which has been held down by the opponents in all stubbornness to a state of degradation and whose efforts to rise have been ruthlessly frustrated all along by orthodox Hinduism. This appeal in the interests of the Depressed Classes is not merely to Hindus or to Indians. It is made to all members of the British Empire whose prime liability the Depressed Classes are. It is also an appeal to Europeans and to Americans as well. It is an appeal to all who look upon it as their duty to befriend and advance the cause of fallen, or what may be more appropriately called, "felled" humanity, and the Institute trust that this appeal will not go in vain. The sum needed is considerable. But it is not beyond the capacity of many if they joined to share the burden.

Last year this appeal succeeded in eliciting, within a very short time, the following donations :

1.	H. H. Sir Tukojirao Holkar ex-Maharaja of Indore	£	360
2.	H. H. the Nawab of Bhopal	 £	200
3.	H. H. the Aga khan	 £	175
4.	H. H. the Maharaja of Baroda	 £	150
5.	H. H. the Maharaja of Bikaner	 £	100
6.	H. H. the Maharaja of Kashmir	 £	100
7.	H. H. the Maharaja of Patiala	 £	100
8.	Sir Cowasji Jehangir	 £	75
9.	Maharajadhiraj of Darbhanga	 £	50
10.	The Chief of Sangli	 £	25

All these donations are gratefully acknowledged and it is hoped that this generous response will be followed up by another more generous than the last.

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President, Depressed Classes Institute.
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