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UNTOUCHABLES MUST HAVE POLITICAL POWER

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar decided to hold the second session of the All-India Depressed Classes Congress at Kamptee. Hardas L. N., President Reception Committee issued following circular showing importance of the session.—Editors.

"As you are aware, the second session of the All-India Depressed Classes Congress will be held on the 24th and 25th of April next at Kamptee.

The importance of this session is immense. The session will concern itself with the two following issues :—

1. The Minorities pact presented to the Round Table Conference and to which the representatives of Depressed Classes were a party.

2. The foundation of a new Central Organization to work and speak in the name of the Depressed Classes of India.

The Minorities Pact embodies the political rights of the Depressed Classes under the new constitution. It was not accepted by the representative of the Majority community at the Round Table Conference. The Depressed Classes however had given the Minorities pact their full support. Of late however certain Associations presuming to speak on the name of the Depressed Classes of India have been won-over by the Hindu Maha Sabha and have therefore repudiated the Minorities pact. It is, therefore, absolutely essential that the representatives of the Depressed Classes should meet and apply their best mind to the provision contained in the Minorities Pact and give their considered opinion on the same. The delegates who represented the Depressed Classes at the Round Table Conference-Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur R. Srinivasan-will attend the session and explain the circumstances and the provisions regarding the Minorities Pact.

It is also proposed to invite Rao Bahadur, M. C. Rajah and Mr. G. A. Gavai to attend the session so that they may also have an opportunity of being heard before any resolution regarding the Minorities Pact is passed.

The second purpose for which this session is called, is equally important. There is no necessity to dilate upon it, for as you know what attempts are being made to misrepresent the public opinion of the Depressed Classes in political matters. It is not possible to put a stop to these machination unless a Central Organization is brought into being and made principal organ of the Depressed Classes.

The necessity of holding this session has been emphasized by the tactics adopted by the so-called All-India Depressed Classes Association. It was published in the newspapers that a meeting of the working committee of this Association was held at Delhi on the 21st and 22nd of February last to consider the question of Joint or Separate Electorates and the number of seats proposed for the Depressed Classes under the new constitution and as no decision was arrived at, it was agreed by the Working Committee of this Association that the conference of the leading members of the Depressed Classes should be held at Nagpur to consider the question. It was hoped that a leader's conference would be called before any definite step was taken, but for reasons known to themselves, the All-India Depressed classes Association has abandoned the idea of calling such a conference. Under these circumstances it has been mere necessity to mobilize the public opinion of the Depressed Classes so that not only such tactics may be defeated before they do the mischief they are intended to cause and secondly to allow public opinions of their own on these vital issues.

I, therefore, hope that in view of the importance of this session, you will make it convenient to attend the same.

Yours faithfully,
Hardas L. N.
President, Reception Committee." [1]

[1] : Janata, dated 9th April 1932.

" Dr. B. R. Ambedkar returned from Simla to Bombay on 4th May 1932. Immediately, on 6th May 1932, he left Bombay by Calcutta Mail to attend the All-India Depressed Classes Congress at Kamptee near Nagpur. The Congress had been postponed to this date to suit Dr. Ambedkar's convenience. On his way he was greeted throughout that night by enthusiastic crowds of Untouchables at all the railway stations from Kasara to Nagpur.

The train steamed in at nine in the morning, on 7th May 1932, and Nagpur station echoed with cries of 'Long Live Dr. Ambedkar'. A rousing reception was accorded to Dr. Ambedkar on the platform by a vast crowd of 5,000 people. Tularam Sakhare M. L. C. received Dr. Ambedkar and other leaders on the platform. The City Magistrate and the Police Superintendent were present at the station for the maintenance of peace and order.

The Congress pandal was decorated and was huge enough to accommodate 15,000 persons. The dais was a very big rostrum. As most of the Depressed Class leaders from the four corners of India had gathered to take a vital decision, the atmosphere was charged with tense feeling and excitement. It was very surprising that such a vast gathering of the Depressed Class delegates should assemble despite their poverty. Another significant fact about the Depressed Classes Congress was that it was held at a place which was supposed to be the stronghold of Dr. Moonje, and the supporters of the Rajah-Moonje Pact. In order to have a complete picture of the situation, it may be recalled here that immediately after the announcement of the Rajah-Moonje Pact in one of his letters to Gavai who was the General Secretary of the All-India Depressed Classes Association, Dr. Ambedkar had, under great provocation given him a threat of "breach between us and war amongst ourselves" if his organization advocated the system of joint electorates and reserved seats. It was reported then that Gavai had made a protest to Lord Lothian against this intimidation !

On the evening of 7th May the proceedings of the Congress commenced. About two hundred messages, supporting the demand for separate electorates as adumbrated in the Minorities Pact, repudiating the Rajah-Moonje Pact and wishing this

Congress success, were read out. The General Secretary of the Buddha Mahasabha sent a message of good wishes and asked the Depressed Classes to embrace Buddhism. Dr. Ambedkar's Party was then well organized and it maintained rigid discipline. Poor Rajbhoj and his supporters had no such organised backing.

Hardas L. N., the Chairman, then traced the history of the Depressed Classes Congress and, emphasizing the need for unity among the Depressed Classes, remarked : "With separate electorate we will swim or sink." In a two-hour address Muniswami Pillay, defining the aspirations of the Depressed Classes, expressed dissatisfaction at the conduct of the Government, especially for not taking a sufficient number of delegates and asked Government to invite at least two more delegates from the Depressed Classes.

The next day the open session commenced. The Depressed Classes Congress adopted twelve resolutions. It declared that its considered opinion was that the Minorities Pact contained the irreducible minimum demands of the Depressed Classes. It repudiated the Rajah-Moonje Pact as, according to its delegates, it was detrimental to the interests of the Depressed Classes; and it appreciated the magnificent services of Dr. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan they had rendered at the Round Table Conference." [1]

While addressing the Conference Dr. Ambedkar said,

"It is very necessary that the political reins should come in the hands of Untouchables. For that, all of us should unite and secure a political status. Untouchability in India will not be eradicated so long as the Untouchables do not control the political strings." [2]

"The Congress of the Depressed Classes thus concluded by declaring that it stood by Dr. Ambedkar and the Minorities Pact." [3]

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[1] : Keer, Pp. 199-200.

[2] : Janata, dated 14th May 1932.

[3] : Keer, P. 200.