

## PEASANTS AND WORKERS SHOULD THINK OVER THE CAUSES OF THEIR POVERTY

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar lead a march of the peasants to the Council Hall in Bombay on 10th January 1938. Peasants from outlying Districts such as Thana, Kolaba, Ratnagiri, Satara and Nasik came to Bombay in trains and steamers. With torn clothes on, blankets and bundles on their shoulders, and stuffs in their hands, they came to Bombay to voice their grievances. Their sun-burnt faces shone with a certain enthusiasm. They marched on to the Council Hall from three directions in processions ; one from Parel, the other from the Alexandra Docks and the third from Chowpatty. Escorted by the police, they walked slowly along the prescribed routes. Police parties were posted at important junctions. The processionists carried posters bearing slogans such as “Down with the Khoti System”, “Support Dr. Ambedkar’s Bill”. The processionists reached the Esplanade Maidan near the Victoria Terminus at half past one in the afternoon. There the police officers held up the processions and allowed twenty leaders to go to interview the Chief Minister who was then called the Premier. Parulekar, S. C. Joshi, D. W. Raut, Indulal Yagnik and A. V. Chitre headed by Dr. Ambedkar, saw the Premier.

The first demand presented by the deputationists was the enforcement of the minimum standard of wages for agricultural labourers. The second was that all the arrears of rent should be remitted since the revenue arrears had been also remitted. They urged that immediate legislation should be made to provide with or without compensation for the abolition of the Khoti System and the Inamdar System ; and landlordism, which was economically wasteful and sociality tyrannous, must go. The last demand was for reduction of fifty per cent of irrigation rates payable by small holders. The Premier told the deputationlists that every problem was being tackled by the Ministry in their own way.

The leaders returned to the Esplanade Maidan and addressed a mammoth meeting Dr. Ambedkar made a very powerful speech.

“He said that the number of books he had read on Communism exceeded the number of books read by all Communist leaders put together.\* But he was of the opinion that the Communists never looked to the practical side of the question. He observed that there were two classes in the world—the haves and the havenots, the rich and the poor, the exploiters and the exploited ; the third one, the middle-class, was very small. He, therefore, exhorted the peasants and workers to think over the causes of their poverty and told them that they lay in the richness of the exploiters. The way out for them was to organize a labour front without any regard to caste or creed, and to elect to the legislatures those who were their real representatives. If they did so, they would have shelter, clothing, and they who produced the food and wealth of the nation would not die from hunger.”<sup>1</sup>

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\* The Janata, dated 15th January 1938.

<sup>1</sup>: Keer, Pp. 300-301.