

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF INDIA'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION ?

Dr. Ambedkar Condemns Federation

“Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Independent Labour Party, Bombay, made a studied exposition of the Federal Scheme in the course of a three-hour long speech at the Gokhale School of Economics in *Poona on sunday night* the 29th January 1939.

First, the Federal Scheme far from leading the Country to Independence would block the way permanently even to Dominion Status.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted that they should have only a Federation of the British Indian Provinces.

As regards the States he wanted that the rulers of the smaller States should be pensioned off and those of the bigger States should be allowed to function under certain conditions.

The Federal Scheme, according to him, completely forgot the freeman and the poor who constituted the most important factor of national polity.

The following is the summary of the address delivered by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:

In order to present a clear idea of the real character of the Federation, Dr. Ambedkar undertook a comparison of the Federation with other Federations and he instituted the comparison with reference to three vital questions viz. (i) What are the units of the Federations, (ii) What is the relationship of these units to the Federation, (iii) What is the relationship of the people who are brought under the sovereignty of the Federation.

In this connection he observed “ Federation is not one common whole with a common citizenship. The Federation is a collection of which in law are foreign States. The Federation is really a Con-federation. The peculiarities and the characteristics which it bears are those of a Confederation. If

people insist upon calling it a Federation then it is not only a monster among Federations, but it is also a monstrosity among Federations.”

Dr. Ambedkar next proceeded to examine the grounds which had been urged in favour of the acceptance of the scheme. viz. that—

(i) it helps to unite India.

(ii) that it enables British India to influence Indian India and to gradually transform the autocracy prevalent in Indian India into democracy existing in British India.

(iii) that the scheme embodies what it is called responsible government.

In connection with (i) he pointed out that not all that is comprised under the term Indian India was brought under the Federation. Reading S. 6 (i) with Schedule 1 of the Act it was not open to every State to join the Federation with the result that 498 States still remain outside the Federation and can never become part of the Federation. Why are these States excluded from the Federation, what is their position and destiny, asked Dr. Ambedkar.

Dealing with (ii) Dr. Ambedkar came to the conclusion that the States were placed by law in a position to control the affairs of British India and by the same law British India was disabled from exercising any influence over the States. In his opinion the Federal scheme did not help, indeed it hindered British India from setting up in motion processes which would result in the democratization of the Indian States.

On the other hand it helped the Indian States to destroy democracy in British India.

As regards the (iii) he observed that the responsibility did not extend to Defence and Foreign Affairs and that the scheme of responsibility in the Federation as compared with the system of Dyarchy in the Provinces was designed to yield less

responsibility. "Whichever way you look at the Federal Scheme and analyse as you may the provisions relating to responsibility you will see that the real responsibility there is none." said Dr. Ambedkar.

Referring to "the Bane of the Federal Scheme" Dr. Ambedkar proceeded to expose what he considered the greatest deficiency in the constitution. There is no one, he said, who did not recognise that the scheme was full of defects.

He proceeded, "The difference of opinion arises only when the question is asked, what shall we do about it, the answer to the question might be postponed but it cannot be avoided. The question is, in what respects we should require the constitution to be amended?" Dr. Ambedkar took as the starting point the statement issued by Mr. Satyamurti setting forth the minimum changes which Parliament must make forthwith in the Federal Constitution if it is to be acceptable to the Congress. "Should these changes suffice to alter the present attitude of rejection into one of acceptance of the Federal Scheme?" asked Dr. Ambedkar.

In his view the objections to the Federal Scheme will not be removed in the least even if British Parliament were ready to grant every one of the demands made by Mr. Satyamurti. To him the fundamental question was whether this Federal Scheme was capable of so evolving that in the end India will reach her goal. It was from this point of view, he pointed out that the scheme must be examined. "What is the goal of India's political evolution?" Dr. Ambedkar asked.

According to Dr. Ambedkar Dominion status was impossible under the Federal Constitution because the constitution is fixed and rigid and even the parliament had no power to alter the Federal Constitution without destroying the Federal Scheme altogether.

Referring to the argument that constitution created autonomous provinces and therefore some binding force must be provided, he agreed that the establishment of a Central Government was imperative and that without it autonomy would result in

anarchy. But he thought the argument went beyond its scope if it sought to justify the establishment of Central Government for All-India. In his opinion the creation of autonomous provinces did not require the creation of Central Government for the whole of India; all that was necessary was that Central Government for British India shall be federal in form. Why was it necessary to bring in the States he asked? Government of India Act, 1935, he pointed out, established two distinct Federations—a Federation of British India Provinces along with an All-India Federation. There was no difference between their legislative and financial powers or in their individual organisation. There was only one vital difference.

While there was British India Federation only there was no responsibility at the center—there is to be no responsibility at the centre so long as there was no All-India Federation. That meant that the entry of the States was a condition precedent for the grant of responsibility to British India why was the entry of the States so essential? he asked. His answer was, “To put it bluntly, the motive is to use the Princes to support Imperial Interests and curb the rising tide of the Democracy in British India.” He saw no other explanation, Dr. Ambedkar remarked. “What a price has been paid for the entry of the Federation?”

Not only British India has not been able to secure responsibility at the center commensurate with the sacrifice it has made for making Federation easy for the Princes, but it has lost its claim for Dominion Status in its own right and independently of the Princes.

Of the two parts of the Federation, British India is the progressive part and the States form the unprogressive part. That the progressive part should be tied up to the chariot of the unprogressive and the path and destiny should be made dependent on the unprogressive part constitutes the most tragic side of Federation.

Dr. Ambedkar lastly considered Federation from different points of view, from the point of view of the Princes, the Hindus and the Muslims. The interest of the Princes. according to the Doctor were two-fold. They wanted to escape Paramountcy and they did not want to subject. themselves too much to the authority of the Federation.

In looking at the Federation the Princes kept two questions before them. How far would this Federation enable them to escape the tyranny of Paramountcy, and secondly, how far did the scheme take away their sovereignty of their powers of internal Government? "They want to draw more under the former and to give less under the latter" said Dr. Ambedkar.

In this connection Dr. Ambedkar asserted that there were other points of view besides those mentioned which must have their say. He pointed out that there was the point of view of the freeman, and of the poor man. The Federation did not seem to take any account of them and yet they were people who were most concerned.

Dr. Ambedkar asserted, "This Federation if it comes into being will be a standing menace to freeman and an obstacle in the way of the poor man."

Concluding Dr. Ambedkar said the vastness of the subject was the reason for the length of his address. He was also persuaded not to cut matters short being reminded of the days when people of India were led by men like Ranade, Tilak, Agarkar, Gokhale, Dadabhoy, Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Bannerji. If notable figures in Indian Political firmament. a group of well-clad and well-read politicians who relied on study and experience.

Today their places were taken by. voice."¹

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¹: The Bombay Chronicle, dated 31st January 1939.