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"NOW OR NEVER" IS THE QUESTION BEFORE SCHEDULED CASTES

"The question for the Scheduled Castes was "now or never" said Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, replying to address of welcome presented by a number of Scheduled Castes organisations at Calcutta last night, the August 26th, 1944.

Dr. Ambedkar explained that the Indian Constitution would make India a Dominion. One of the fundamental implications of a Dominion was that His Majesty's Government has no right to interfere with the making of an Indian constitution thereafter. Therefore whatever deficiency the Scheduled Castes might have if that deficiency was not made up now, they would never get chance of putting forward any political demands successfully in India. The question, therefore, was "now or never." He felt that their victory was near and all that he wanted from was unity.

Dr. Ambedkar said that the whole life of Mr. Gandhi, his political activities and political strategy were directed to by-passing the demands of minorities. The Civil Disobedience Movement, the breaking of the Salt Law and all these "*tamashas*" that Mr. Gandhi had been performing had no other purpose. Mr. Gandhi had now come to realise that it was not possible to by-pass the political demands of minorities and that he must make a treaty with Mussalmans and with Sikhs. But he had no desire to recognise the demands of the Scheduled Castes community, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said. The Scheduled Castes were a weak people, but Providence had always been helping them. "You can well imagine what calamity would have happened to us if the Cripps Mission had succeeded. I thank God everyday that it failed."

Dr. Ambedkar said that the Viceroy in his recent correspondence with Mr. Gandhi had laid down on fundamental condition that for the transference of power from the British to Indian hands, a mere agreement between Hindus and Muslims would not do. There must be a tripartite agreement, and an agreement with the Scheduled Castes community had been made a condition precedent to such a transference of political power. They should be very grateful for a declaration of that kind.

Dr. Ambedkar said that if the *Hindu Mahasabha* was prepared to accept the just demands of the Scheduled Castes, he would certainly join the *Mahasabha*. If the Congress was prepared to accept their just demands, he would have no hesitation in joining Congress.

But the question was whether these organisations were friends or enemies of the Scheduled Castes."[1]

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1 : The Bombay Chronicle : dated 28th August 1944.