

SECHEDULED CASTES DEMANDS BE REFERRED TO AN IMPARTIAL INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL

On 17th February 1946 at Nare Park, Bombay, the gathering of 70,000 men and women loudly cheered Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, when he rose to inaugurate the election campaign.

In the meeting the gate money amounting Rs. 17,000 was presented to Dr. Ambedkar for the campaign. Mr. G. M. Jadhav, President of the Federation's Bombay Branch, announced that the target aimed at for the campaign was Rs. 50,000 and would be approached by May.

The inauguration ceremony of the campaign was preceded by, the unfurling of the Scheduled Castes flag by Dr. Ambedkar, who was presented with a guard of honour by Scheduled Caste volunteers. Despite the huge attendance there was perfect order throughout the proceedings. Dr. Ambedkar's speech was punctuated by vociferous cheering.

If the Congress felt that the demands of the Scheduled Castes were unjust, let the matter be referred to an impartial international tribunal and he would abide by the decision, said Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, inaugurating the election campaign of the Scheduled Castes Federation at Nare Park, Bombay. In the *Swaraj*, for which the Congress is shouting, he said, the Hindus would take the place of the British in dominating the nation.

In the past few days one heard speeches by Congressmen giving the impression that if a national Government were set up at the centre the food situation would be solved. Surely, said Dr. Ambedkar, the Congressmen would not perform a miracle. All this, talk of solving the food situation was empty-talk.

Dr. Ambedkar, emphasising the need for strengthening the Scheduled Castes movement, said that the Congress had been shouting for *Swaraj*; but the Scheduled Castes could be certain that the *Swaraj* the Congress was asking for would only be domination by the Hindus instead of by the British. The Scheduled Castes must not allow that to happen. They must see that they got all their rights, so that in a free India they also were free.

The Scheduled Castes, he said, were not asking for a territorial division like the Muslims. All that they wanted was a fair deal. For centuries they had been suppressed, but now they refused to be exploited.

All that they wanted was equal political rights and no Patronage. If the Congress felt that their demands were not just, then let the matter be referred to an impartial international tribunal. He was prepared to abide by the verdict of such a tribunal.

Dr. Ambedkar added they were prepared to make every sacrifice in the attainment of their object. Let not the Congress or any other political organisation try to frighten them. During the primary elections to the Legislative Assembly in Bombay a Scheduled Castes voter was killed. Dr. Ambedkar fastened the responsibility for the death on the Congress and condemned the police lathi charges on the funeral procession of the murdered voter.

The Congress, Dr. Ambedkar observed, was out to dominate the entire political field in the country and in that attempt it even stooped to bribery. The Congress patronised individuals and tried to undermine organisations like the Scheduled Castes Federation.

But the Federation was now strong enough to resist such attempts and was gaining more and more strength. They would not have anything to do with the Hindus until their political rights were granted.

Dr. Ambedkar said that in the last few days one heard speeches by Congressmen giving the impression that if a national Government were set up at the Centre, the food situation would be solved. Surely, the Congressmen could not perform a miracle. All this talk of solving the food situation was empty talk, as if the replacement of a few members of the Executive Council by the Hindus was all that was necessary.

The Congress, he said, accused the British Government of pursuing the policy of divide and rule. That was exactly the game the Congress had played, with some success, as far as the Scheduled Castes Federation was concerned at the last general elections. He had no doubt that they would try their tactics again at the forthcoming elections, but the Scheduled Castes would not fall a prey to them.

The Scheduled Castes, he added, could not hope to compete with the Congress, which had the backing of the capitalists, in the matter of organisations at the time of the elections. No cars could be provided to carry voters to the polling booths. Every Scheduled Castes voter would, he felt sure, walk to the booths and exercise his franchise, thus showing to the world that they stood solidly behind the Federation. The strength of the Federation was amply proved at the primary elections at which the supporters of the Federation far outnumbered the Congress supporters. Seeing the results, the Congress ought to have stood out of the contest, if it were true to its professions of democracy.

Referring to the purse presented to him for the election campaign, Dr. Ambedkar said that although the amount was meagre he was not worried in the least as the campaign would be "Clean, honest and straight forward." The Congress leaders were collecting huge sums, for they would try to purchase votes.

Earlier, Mr. B. K. Gaikwad, addressing the gathering said that Mr. Gandhi had not done anything for the Scheduled Castes. He criticised Mr. Gandhi's recent speech at Madras wherein he said that the Scheduled Castes looked to Government because they could become Rao Bahadurs or get good jobs.

Dr. Ambedkar returned from his election tour of Satara and Belgam districts on Sunday morning and will leave Bombay for New Delhi on Monday evening."¹

However, there were additional dimentions in the speech of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on the subject which were reported by 'The Free Press Journal.' The dimentions were :

¹: Jai Bheem : March 5, 1946.

“We have no faith in the Hindus, who have treated us in a most vile and humiliating manner for the last 2,000 years, and now that we have been in a position to organise ourselves. We shall leave no stone unturned to get what has been long over due said Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Labour Member, Government of India, addressing a largely attended meeting of the Scheduled Castes at Nare Park this evening.

Swaraj and National Government, he declared, meant only *Hindu Raj*, which they could no longer brook. Therefore, they demanded distribution of rights before the British quit India.”¹

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¹: Free Press Journal dated 18th February 1946.