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***NOTE BY Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR TO
THE INDIAN FRANCHISE COMMITTEE
(LOTHIAN COMMITTEE)
ON THE DEPRESSED CLASSES
SUBMITTED ON 1st MAY 1932**

I. General

1. I have agreed to confine the term depressed classes to untouchables only. In fact, I have myself sought to exclude from the untouchables all those in whom there cannot be the same consciousness of kind as is shared by those who suffer from the social discrimination that is inherent in the system of untouchability and who are therefore likely to exploit the untouchables for their own purposes. I have also raised no objection to the utilisation of tests 7 and 8 referred to in the Committee's report for the ascertainment of the untouchable classes. But as I find that different persons seek to apply them in different ways, or put different constructions on them I feel it necessary to explain my point of view in regard to this matter.

2. In the first place it is urged in some quarters that whatever tests are applied for ascertaining the untouchable classes they must be applied uniformly all over India. In this connection, I desire to point out that in a matter of this sort it would hardly be appropriate to apply the same test or tests all over India. India is not a single homogeneous country. It is a continent. The various Provinces are marked by extreme diversity of conditions and there is no tie of race or language. Owing to absence of communication each Province has evolved along its own lines with its own peculiar manners and modes of social life. In such circumstances the degree of uniformity with which most of the tests of untouchability are found to apply all over India is indeed remarkable. For instance, bar against temple entry exists everywhere in India. Even the tests of well-water and pollution

* Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, Vol. I, Second Edition, pp. 202-11, The Indian Franchise Committee was constituted on the recommendations by the Franchise Sub-Committee of the Round Table Conference in December 1931. The Committee consisted of 18 members including Dr. Ambedkar. The Marquess of Lothian, C. H., Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for India, was the Chairman of this Committee.

by touch apply in every Province, although not with the same rigidity everywhere. But to insist on absolute uniformity in a system like that of untouchability which after all is a matter of social behaviour and which must therefore vary with the circumstances of each Province and also of each individual is simply to trifle with the problem. The Statutory Commission was quite alive to this possible line of argument and after careful consideration rejected it by recognizing the principle of diversity in the application of tests of untouchability. On page 67 of Vol. II which contains its recommendations it observed : "It will plainly be necessary, after the main principles of the new system of representation have been settled, to entrust to some specially appointed body (like the former Franchise Committee) the task of drawing up fresh electoral rules to carry these principles into effect, and one of the tasks of such a body will be to frame for each province a definition of 'depressed classes' (which may well vary, sometimes even between parts of the same province), and to determine their numbers as so defined." Another point which I wish to emphasize is the futility of insisting upon the application of uniform tests of untouchability all over India. It is a fundamental mistake to suppose that differences in tests of untouchability indicate differences in the conditions of the untouchables. On a correct analysis of the mental attitude they indicate, it will be found that whether the test is causing pollution by touch or refusal to use common well, the notion underlying both is one and the same. Both are outward registers of the same inward feeling of defilement, odium, aversion and contempt. Why will not a Hindu touch an untouchable ? Why will not a Hindu allow an untouchable to enter the temple or use the village well ? Why will not a Hindu admit an untouchable in the inn ? The answer to each one of these questions is the same. It is that the untouchable is an unclean person not fit for social intercourse. Again, why will not a Brahmin priest officiate at religious ceremonies performed by an untouchable ? Why will not a barber serve an untouchable ? In these cases also the answer is the same. It is that it is below dignity to do so. If our aim is to demarcate the class of people who suffer from social odium then it matters very little which test we apply. For as I have pointed out each of these tests is indicative of the same social attitude on the part of the touchables towards the untouchables.

3. In the second place the view is put forth that in applying the test of "causing pollution by touch" for ascertaining the untouchable classes effect must be given to it in its literal sense—and not in its notional sense. In the literal sense untouchables are only those persons whose touch not only causes pollution and is therefore avoided, or if not avoided is washed off by purification. In the notional sense an untouchable is a person who is deemed to belong to a class which is commonly held to cause pollution by touch, although contact with such a person may for local circumstances not be avoided or may not necessitate ceremonial purification. According to those who seek to apply the test in its literal sense the conclusion would be

the so-called untouchables should cease to be reckoned as untouchables wherever conditions have so changed that people do not avoid the touch of an untouchable, or do not trouble to purify themselves of the pollution caused by their touch. I cannot accept this view which, in my opinion is based on a misconception. An individual may not be treated as an untouchable in the literal sense of the term on account of various circumstances. None the less outside the scope of such compelling circumstances he does continue to be regarded as an impure person by reason of his belonging to the untouchable class. This distinction is well brought out by the Census Superintendent of Bihar and Orissa in his Census Report of 1921 from which the following is an extract. Speaking of the relaxation of caste rules he says : "Such incidents however which we have only noticed amongst the upper and more educated castes that are aspiring to the upper ranks, are to be regarded not as sign portending the collapse of the caste system, but of its adjustment to modern conditions. The same may be said with regard to modifications of the rules about personal contact or the touching of what is eaten or drunk..... In places like Jamshedpur where work is done under modern conditions men of all castes and races work side by side in the mill without any misgivings regarding the caste of their neighbours. But, because the facts of everyday life make it impossible to follow the same practical rules as were followed a hundred years ago, it is not to be supposed that the distinctions of pure and impure, touchable and untouchable are no longer observed. A high caste Hindu will not allow an 'untouchable' to sit on the same seat, to smoke the same hookah or to touch his person, his seat, his food or the water that he drinks." If this is a correct statement of the facts of life then the difference between untouchability in its literal and notional sense is a distinction which makes no difference to the ultimate situation ; for as the extract shows untouchability in its notional sense persists even where untouchability in its literal sense has ceased to obtain. This is why I insist that the test of untouchability must be applied in its notional sense.

4. In the third place the idea is broadcast that untouchability is rapidly vanishing. I wish to utter a word of caution against the acceptance of this view, and to point out the necessity of distinguishing facts from propaganda. In my opinion what is important to be borne in mind in drawing inference from instances showing the occasional conuningling of Brahmins and non-Brahmins, touchables and untouchables is that the system of caste and the system of untouchability form really the steel frame of Hindu society. This division cannot easily be wiped out for the simple reason that it is not based upon rational, economic or racial grounds. On the other hand, the chances are that untouchability will endure far longer into the future than the optimist reformer is likely to admit on account of the fact that it is based on religious dogma. What makes it so difficult, to break the system of untouchability is the religious sanction which it has behind it. At any rate the ordinary Hindu looks upon it as part of his religion and there is no doubt that in adopting

towards untouchables in what is deemed to be an inhuman way of behaviour he does so more from the sense of observing his religion than from any motive of deliberate cruelty. Based on religion the ordinary Hindu only relaxes the rules of untouchability where he cannot observe them. He never abandons them. For abandonment of untouchability to him involves a total abandonment of the basic religious tenets of Hinduism as understood by him and the mass of Hindus. Based on religion untouchability will persist as all religious notions have done. Indian history records the attempts of many a Mahatma to uproot untouchability from the Indian soil. They include such great men as Buddha, Ramanuja and the Vaishnava saints of modern times. It would be hazardous to assume that a system which has withstood all this onslaught will collapse. The Hindu looks upon the observance of untouchability as an act of religious merit, and non-observance of it as sin. My view therefore is that so long as this notion prevails untouchability will prevail.

Having explained my views on general questions regarding interpretations and connotations of the system of untouchability, I proceed to offer some remarks on the question of the population of depressed classes in the three Provinces in which there is no unanimity of opinion.

II. Depressed Classes in United Provinces

5. Regarding the population of the depressed classes in the United Provinces five different estimates have been given to the Committee—

- (1) estimate of the United Provinces Provincial Franchise Committee ;
- (2) estimate given by Mr. Blunt in his note ;
- (3) estimate given by the Census Commissioner;
- (4) two estimates given by the Government of the United Provinces.

I make the following observations on these estimates :

6. I agree that Mr. Blunt's note carries great authority with it. It is based on the facts which came into his possession as a Census Superintendent for United Provinces in 1911. It has the added weight of the opinion of an informal Committee of non-official Hindus which I am told was appointed by the United Provinces Government to examine the correctness of the lists of untouchable castes in United Provinces drawn up by Mr. Blunt in his first draft. All the same I differ from Mr. Blunt in the following particulars :

- (i) One is that Mr. Blunt has divided the three following single communities into two dichotomous sections, one touchable and the other untouchable :

		Touchable	Untouchable
(1)	Bhoksa group	.. 30,000	19,028
(2)	Kori group	.. 154,867	775,839
(3)	Chamar group	.. 2,000,000	4,187,770

- (ii) The second point of difference is that he treats the Arakh group whose population is 110,032 as touchable when as a matter of fact that group forms a part of the Pasi community which is undoubtedly an untouchable community.

My contention is that the procedure adopted by Mr. Blunt is not in accordance with facts and is not warranted by the fundamental theory of Hindu social life. That the Kori group is simply a part of the Chamar group and as such is wholly an untouchable group is borne out by the views of Mr. Blunt himself as expressed by him in the report of the United Provinces Census of 1911 of which he was the Superintendent. I rely on the remarks made by him in paragraph 347 of the Census Report of 1911 where he has discussed the connection of the Kori to the Chamar. On the same Report he makes the following observations :

“The relation between Kori and Chamar has already been referred to above. In Gorakhpur it appears to be closer still and it is said that there are no Koris there save Kori Chamars. The Kori Chamar however drops the Chamar and tries to pass himself off as a Kori pure and simple, or even by slurring the word to make it sound like Koiri. A Khalasi in Gorakhpur district was severely beaten by the rest of his Hindu fellow servants for playing this trick and making them take water from his hands.”

Regarding the Arakh group Mr. Blunt himself admits in his note that “as a whole these castes appear to be off-shoots of the important Pasi tribe” which he has treated as untouchable. Coming to the Chamar group Mr. Blunt’s reasons for excluding 2 million Chamars from the category of untouchables are given by him on page 17 of his note. He says : “On the other hand many Chamars have taken to cleaner occupations such as those of saddler (zingar), cobbler (mochi), groom (syce) while the extension of the leather trade at Cawnpore and elsewhere has enabled many Chamars to become wealthy when they aim at social status much higher than that of their village brethren. Such Chamars are generally regarded as touchables and many change the caste name for something less ill-sounding, for instance, Koril, Aharwar, Jatiya, Dhushiya and especially Jaiswar.” In my opinion to exclude, as Mr. Blunt has done, such Chamars as have taken to cleaner occupations or have become wealthy from the category of untouchables is a totally erroneous view. One of the characteristics of the system of untouchability and also of the caste system is that the social status of the individual rises or falls with that of the community to which he belongs. Once an untouchable always an untouchable has been the rule of Hindu social life. This is its cardinal feature and it is this which distinguishes it from the class system in which the social status of the individual rises or falls not with that of the community to which he belongs but with his own personal merits and demerits. Having regard to this fundamental and basic principle of Hindu social life, the division made by Mr. Blunt that some members of an admittedly untouchable caste are touchable must be discarded. Indeed it is a contradiction in terms and does not seem to be in accord with the facts. It is not true that sections of the Chamar caste mentioned by Mr. Blunt have been
ted as touchable or allowed to enter temples or draw water from public wells. On the contrary, they have invented, according to Mr. Blunt’s own

statement, new names for themselves to avoid being treated as untouchables. Mr. Blunt himself gives instances of this in his Census Report for the United Provinces for 1911. I quote the following extract from Part I :

“A Jaiswar Chamar in the same way will never admit he is a Chamar but tries to pass his caste off as Jaiswar alone, a sub-caste of so many castes including Rajput. A syce once tried the trick on me and in Tundla in Agra district. I found a whole colony of Jaiswars who on enquiry proved to be descendants of Chamar regimental syces who had settled there.”

If my contentions are accepted and if that part of the population of the untouchable communities which Mr. Blunt has treated as touchable is added to the total of untouchables then Mr. Blum's figures for untouchables in the United Provinces come to 11,476,214.

7. The Census Commissioner's estimate of the population of the depressed classes is 12.6 millions, and even if a stricter computation was followed and only 'list A' which includes untouchables only was accepted the population of depressed classes so understood would come up to a little over 11 millions—a figure which very nearly agrees with that of Mr. Blunt.

8. The Government of the United Provinces has given two sets of estimates. In its first report it gave the figure of 6,773,814. In its final report it agreed with the Provincial Committee that the population of castes which fell within the definition of causing pollution by touch came to only 459,000. Regarding the estimate of 6,773,814 given in its first report it is necessary to point out that this estimate is not an estimate of the population of untouchables in the United Provinces. So far as that point is concerned the Government of the United Provinces seem tacitly to accept the figures given by Mr. Blunt in his Note. The estimate of 6,773,814 given by the U. P. Government is an estimate of people who in its opinion require to be recognised for political protection. The merits of this procedure I have discussed below. All that I wish to do here is to repeat that this estimate of the U. P. Government is not an estimate of the total population of untouchables as such. The only comment I wish to make on the estimate given by the United Provinces Government in its final report is to place beside it the estimate which it gave to the Simon Commission. In their note on the position of the depressed classes which is printed as an addendum at the end of their memorandum to the Statutory Commission they said : “Of the total Hindu population of the province nearly one-third, that is almost thirteen millions are regarded by orthodox Hindus as untouchables. A list of castes classed as untouchable, extracted from the U. P. Census Report of 1901, with the population of each is appended to this note..... *The social impurity attaching to the untouchable castes merely implies that a man of high caste will not take food or water from an untouchable, and if he touches or comes in close contact with such a person he must wash before eating or even before mixing with persons of higher castes.*” It is clear from this that on the 16th of May 1928, on which the memorandum was

submitted, the population of persons who on the basis of untouchability as meaning causing pollution of touch was 13 millions. It is obvious that the definition given by the Chairman of our Committee is not different from the definition which obtained in U.P. and which is followed by the Government in 1928 in computing this total of 13 millions. I must therefore leave the United Provinces Government to explain the vast difference between the two estimates. I am, however, constrained to remark that these changes in the estimates of the untouchables in the United Provinces by the United Provinces Government are equalled by the changes in the views of the United Provinces Government regarding the method of representation of the depressed classes. In their despatch on the report of the Statutory Commission written on 23rd August 1930 the Government of the United Provinces was the staunchest supporter of separate electorates for the depressed classes. In their first report to our Committee the Government came down to nomination from a panel while in their final report it recommended reservation of seats. It would be a disaster to the cause of the depressed classes if the views of a Government were to undergo such strange oscillations in regard to two such momentous issues as the population and representation of the depressed classes.

9. Coming to the estimate given by the United Provinces Provincial Franchise Committee I wish to draw attention to the following facts :

- (i) The figures of the Census Commissioner, of Mr. Blunt and of the Government in 1928 all agree that the depressed class population meaning thereby those who cause pollution by touch is approximately between $11\frac{1}{2}$ and 13 millions. It is therefore for the Committee to justify its surprisingly low estimate.
- (ii) I am not at all certain that when the Committee says that the two depressed class members agree in its view and the majority of the Committee were ad-idem in respect of all the implications of the agreement. At any rate, I am bound to point out that the opinion of Babu Ram Charan on this issue has no value. He belongs to the depressed class in the sense of the economically poor and educationally backward classes and not to the untouchable classes in the strict sense of the term.
- (iii) The Indian Franchise Committee has adopted two tests for the classification of untouchables, temple entry and pollution by touch. The U. P. Provincial Franchise Committee has proceeded on the basis of only one test namely causing pollution by touch and that too in its literal sense and not in its notional sense.
- (iv) In adopting our Chairman's definition of untouchability, which I must say he gave on his own responsibility, the Provincial Franchise Committee does not seem to have adverted to the clause "as it exists in the United Provinces".

10. There is another question of great importance which arises in connection with the method adopted both by Mr. Blunt and the U. P. Government in estimating the population of the depressed classes. The Indian

Franchise Committee has proceeded on the hypothesis that all those who fall under the two tests accepted by it must be treated as untouchables and must be reckoned as such for purposes of special representation. In the course of its investigation the Indian Franchise Committee found that as things stood in India, all depressed classes were not untouchables, and to include all untouchables irrespective of their economic and educational condition. Mr. Blunt and the Government of the United Provinces seem to make a distinction between "untouchables" and "depressed classes" out of quite a different sort. According to them all depressed classes are untouchables. All untouchables, however, do not belong to the category of depressed classes. This is just the reverse of the prevalent practice and the conclusions of the Indian Franchise Committee. The question is not one of mere nomenclature. It has far reaching consequences which go to affect the degree of representation. The United Provinces Government and Mr. Blunt do not take into their calculation all untouchables for the purposes of representation. They take into account only those untouchables who can be called depressed. The Indian Franchise Committee proceeds on the hypothesis that once the class of untouchables is ascertained by the application of the two tests it has accepted for the purpose the whole of the class of untouchables so ascertained must be taken into account for the purpose of representation without any further distinction between rich and poor, advanced and backward, educated and uneducated, which in my opinion is the correct procedure.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that I do not agree with the procedure adopted by Mr. Blunt and the Government of the United Provinces.

III. Depressed Classes in the Punjab

11. In connection with the population figure for the depressed classes given in the census of 1931 I wish to draw attention to two facts :

- (1) The population of those who caused pollution by touch was according to the census of 1911, 2.8 millions while in the census of 1931 the population of untouchables is given as amounting to 1.3 millions.
- (2) The census of 1911 gives a list of 23 castes which are deemed to cause pollution by touch. The census of 1931 mentions only castes as forming the untouchable population in the Punjab.

12. Why the total population of the untouchables and the list of castes included in that category should have shrunk so much between 1911 and 1931 I am not able to ascertain. It is however necessary to state that among the untouchables of Punjab there has been going on for some years past a strong movement called the Ad-Dharm movement the object of which is to separate from the Hindu fold and form themselves into a distinct community under the new name of Ad-Dharmis. Such has been the strength of the movement that the untouchables decided to return themselves as Ad-Dharmis instead of Hindus in the census of 1931, and the Government gave recognition to this feeling and allowed the Census Superintendent of Punjab to open a new category, of Ad-Dharmis. This, led in some parts of the

Punjab to riots between the Hindus and the untouchables. As a result the untouchables in some parts returned themselves simply as Ad-Dharmis without mentioning their respective castes, and in other parts where they were prevented from doing so returned themselves as Hindus under their caste names. I am mentioning these facts to show that the difficulties created in the enumeration of the untouchables and which are admitted by the Government of Punjab may be responsible for this shrinkage in the number and list of untouchables in the Punjab. The matter therefore requires to be carefully looked into.

IV. Depressed Classes in Bengal

13. In regard to the depressed classes of Bengal there is an important piece of evidence to which I should like to call attention and which goes to show that the list given in the Bengal Census of 1911 is a correct enumeration of caste which have been traditionally treated as untouchable castes in Bengal. I refer to Section 7 of Regulation IV of 1809 (A regulation for rescinding Regulations IV and V of 1806 ; and for substituting rules in lieu of those enacted in the said regulations for levying duties from the pilgrims resorting to Jagannath, and for the superintendence and management of the affairs of the temple; passed by the Governor-General in Council, on the 28th of April 1809) which gives the following list of castes which were debarred from entering the temple of Jagannath at Puri : (1) Loli or Kashi, (2) Kalal or Sunri, (3) Machhua, (4) Namasudra or Chandal, (5) Ghuski, (6) Gazur, (7) Bagdi, (8) Jogi or Nurbaf, (9) Kahar-Bauri and Dulia, (10) Rajbansi, (11) Pirali, (12) Chamar, (13) Dom, (14) Pan, (15) Tiyar, (16) Bhuinnali, and (17) Hari.

The enumeration agrees with the list of 1911 Census and thus lends support to its correctness. Incidentally it shows that a period of 100 years made no change in the social status of the untouchables of Bengal.

II. In connection with the three provinces, United Provinces, Bengal and Punjab, where there is disagreement on the question of the population of the Depressed Classes I desire to draw attention to the fact that the Indian Franchise Committee has proceeded upon two distinct tests for the ascertainment of the untouchable population, while the Provincial Governments and Provincial Committees have apparently followed one single test, namely, causing pollution by touch.

V. Nomenclature

14. The revision of the electoral rolls consequent upon the proposed changes in the constitution is a very good occasion for considering the question of having a proper and appropriate nomenclature for the depressed classes. I therefore propose to express my opinion on this question. There is considerable objection on the part of the communities which are now called "depressed classes" to the use of that term in describing them. Several witnesses who have appeared before the Committee have given

expression to this sentiment. Besides the term 'depressed classes' has led to a great deal of confusion in the census because it includes others who are not strictly untouchables. Secondly, it gives the impression that the depressed classes are a low and helpless community when as a matter of fact in every Province numbers of them are both well-to-do and well-educated, and the whole community is acquiring consciousness of its needs, is charged with ambition for securing a respectable status in Indian society and is making Stupendous efforts to achieve it On all these grounds the term 'depressed classes' is inappropriate and unsuitable. Mr. Mullan, the Census Superintendent of Assam, has brought into use a new term called 'exterior castes' to cover the untouchables. This designation has many advantages. It defines exactly the position of the untouchables who are within the Hindu religion but outside the Hindu society and distinguishes it from Hindus who are economically and educationally depressed but who are both within the pale of Hindu religion and Hindu society. The term has two other advantages. It avoids all the confusion that is now caused by use of the vague term depressed classes and at the same time is not offensive. Our Committee did not feel competent to make recommendation in this behalf. But as a representative of the depressed classes I have no hesitation in saying that until better nomenclature is found the untouchable classes should hereafter be described by the more expressive term 'Exterior Castes' or 'Excluded Castes' and not as depressed classes.

VI. Reservations

15. Before concluding this note I would like on my part to make the same reservation which my Muslim colleagues on the Committee have made namely that the allocation of seats to labour women, and other special interests must not affect the proportion of seats which the depressed classes have claimed in the Minorities Pact submitted to the Round Table Conference.

The 1st May 1932.

B. R. AMBEDKAR



**Dr. Ambedkar with Mr. Muhammad Zafrulla Khan arriving at the
House of Lords for the Third R. T. C. in 1932**

Courtesy; India Office Library and Records, London

PART III

Dr. Ambedkar at the Round Table Conferences

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IN THE PLENARY SESSION

Fifth Sitting—20th November 1930

NEED FOR POLITICAL POWER FOR DEPRESSED CLASSES

**Dr. B. R. Ambedkar:* Mr. Chairman, my purpose in rising to address this conference is principally to place before it the point of view of the depressed classes, whom I and my colleague, Rao Bahadur Srinivasan, have the honour to represent, regarding the question of constitutional reform. It is a point of view of 43,000,000 people, or one-fifth of the total population of British India. The depressed classes form a group by themselves which is distinct and separate from the Muhammadans and, although they are included among the Hindus, they in no sense form an integral part of that community. Not only have they a separate existence, but they have also assigned to them a statute which is invidiously distinct from the status occupied by any other community in India. There are communities in India which occupy a lower and subordinate position; but the position assigned to the depressed classes is totally different. It is one which is midway between that of the serf and the slave, and which may, for convenience, be called servile with this difference, that the serf and the slave were permitted to have physical contact, from which the Depressed Classes are debarred. What is worse that this enforced servility and bar to human intercourse, due to their untouchability, involves, not merely the possibility of discrimination in public life, but actually works out as a positive denial of all equality of opportunity and the denial of those most elementary of civic rights on which all human existence depends. I am sure that the point of view of such a community, as large as the population of England or of France, and so heavily handicapped in the struggle for existence, cannot but have some bearing on the right sort of solution of the political problem, and I am anxious that this Conference should be placed in possession of that point of view at the very start.

The point of view I will try to put as briefly as I can. It is this that the bureaucratic form of Government in India should be replaced by

* Proceedings of the Round Table Conference (hereinafter referred to as R.T.C.) (First Session), Government of India, Central Publication Branch, Calcutta, 1931, pp. 123-29.

a Government which will be a Government of the people, by the people and for the people. This statement of the view of the depressed classes I am sure will be received with some surprise in certain quarters. The tie that bounds the Depressed Classes to the British has been of a unique character. The Depressed Classes welcomed the British as their deliverers from age long tyranny and oppression by the orthodox Hindus. They fought their battles against the Hindus, the Mussalmans and the Sikhs and won for them this great Empire of India. The British, on their side, assumed the role of trustees for the depressed classes. In view of such an intimate relationship between the parties, this change in the attitude of the depressed classes towards British Rule in India is undoubtedly a most momentous phenomenon. But the reasons for this change of attitude are not far to seek. We have not taken this decision simply because we wish to throw in our lot with the majority. Indeed, as you know, there is not much love lost between the majority and the particular minority I represent. Ours is an independent decision. We have judged of the existing administration solely in the light of our own circumstances and we have found it wanting in some of the most essential elements of a good Government. When we compare our present position with the one which it was our lot to bear in Indian society of the pre-British days, we find that, instead of marching on, we are only marking time. Before the British, we were in the loathsome condition due to our untouchability. Has the British Government done anything to remove it? Before the British, we could not enter the temple. Can we enter now? Before the British, we were denied entry into the Police Force. Does the British Government admit us in the Force? Before the British, we were not allowed to serve in the Military. Is that career now open to us? To none of these questions can we give an affirmative answer. That the British, who have held so large a sway over us for such a long time, have done some good we cheerfully acknowledge. But there is certainly no fundamental change in our position. Indeed, so far as we were concerned, the British Government has accepted the social arrangements as it found them, and has preserved them faithfully in the manner of the Chinese tailor who, when given an old coat as a pattern, produced with pride an exact replica, rents, patches and all. Our wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted, although 150 years of British rule have rolled away.

We do not accuse the British of indifference or want of sympathy. What we do find is that they are quite incompetent to tackle our problems. If the case was one of indifference only it would have been a matter of small moment, and it would not have made such a profound change in our attitude. But what we have come to realise on a deeper analysis of the situation is that it is not merely a case of indifference, rather it is a case of sheer incompetence to undertake the task. The depressed classes find that the British Government in India suffers from two very serious

limitations. There is first of all an internal limitation which arises from the character, motives and interests of those who are in power. It is not because they cannot help us in these things but because it is against their character, motives and interests to do so. The second consideration that limits its authority is the mortal fear it has of external resistance. The Government of India does realise the necessity of removing the social evils which are eating into the vitals of Indian society and which have blighted the lives of the downtrodden classes for so many years. The Government of India does realise that the landlords are squeezing the masses dry, and the capitalists are not giving the labourers a living wage and decent conditions of work. Yet it is most painful thing that it has not dared to touch any of these evils. Why? Is it because it has no legal powers to remove them? No. The reason why it does not intervene is because it is afraid that its intervention to amend the existing code of social and economic life, will give rise to resistance. Of what good is such a Government to anybody? Under a Government, paralysed between two such limitations, much that goes to make life good must remain held up. We must have a Government in which the men in power will give their undivided allegiance to the best interest of the country. *We must have a Government in which men in power, knowing where obedience will end and resistance will begin, will not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently call for. This ROLE the British Government will never be able to play.* It is only a Government which is of the people, for the people and by the people that will make this possible.

These are some of the questions raised by the Depressed Classes and the answers which in their view these questions seem to carry. This is therefore the inevitable conclusion which the Depressed Classes have come to: namely, that the bureaucratic Government of India, with the best of motives, will remain powerless to effect any change so far as our particular grievances are concerned. We feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our own hands. No share of this political power can evidently come to us so long as the British Government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power into our own hands, without which we cannot bring salvation to our people.

There is one thing, Sir, to which I wish to draw your particular attention. It is this. I have not used the expression Dominion Status in placing before you the point of view of the Depressed Classes. I have avoided using it, not because I do not understand its implications nor does the omission mean that the depressed classes object to India's attaining Dominion Status. My chief ground for not using it is that it does not convey the full content of what the Depressed Classes stand for. The Depressed Classes, while they stand for Dominion Status with safeguards, wish to lay all the emphasis

they can on one question and one question alone. And that question is, how will Dominion India function ? Where will the centre of political power be ? Who will have it ? Will the Depressed Classes be heirs to it ? These are the questions that form their chief concern. The Depressed Classes feel that they will get no shred of the political power unless the political machinery for the new constitution is of a special make. In the construction of that machine certain hard facts of Indian social life must not be lost sight of. It must be recognised that Indian Society is a gradation of Castes forming an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt—a system which gives no scope for the growth of that sentiment of equality and fraternity so essential for a democratic form of Government. It must also be recognized that while the intelligentsia is a very important part of Indian society, it is drawn from its upper strata and although it speaks in the name of the country and leads the political movement, it has not shed the narrow particularism of the class from which it is drawn. In other words what the Depressed Classes wish to urge is that the political mechanism must take account of and must have a definite relation to the psychology of the society for which it is devised. Otherwise you are likely to produce a constitution which, however symmetrical, will be truncated one and a total misfit to the society for which it is designed.

There is one point with which I should like to deal before I close this matter. We are often reminded that the problem of the Depressed Classes is a social problem and that its solution lies elsewhere than in politics. We take strong exception to this view. We hold that the problem of the Depressed Classes will never be solved unless they get political power in their own hands. If this is true, and I do not think that the contrary can be maintained, then problem of Depressed Classes is I submit eminently a political problem and must be treated as such. We know that political power is passing from the British into the hands of those who wield such tremendous economic, social and religious sway over our existence. We are willing that it may happen, though the idea of Swaraj recalls to the mind of many of us the tyrannies, oppressions and injustices practised upon us in the past and fear of their recurrence under Swaraj. We are prepared to take the inevitable risk of the situation in the hope that we shall be installed, in adequate proportion, as the political sovereigns of the country along with our fellow countrymen. But we will consent to that on one condition and that is that the settlement of our problems is not left to time. I am afraid the Depressed Classes have waited too long for time to work its miracle. At every successive step taken by the British Government to widen the scope of representative Government the Depressed Classes have been systematically left out. No thought has been given to their claim for political power. I protest with all the emphasis I can that we will not stand this any longer. The settlement of our problem must be a part of the general political settlement and must not be left over to the

shifting sands of the sympathy and goodwill of the rulers of the future. The reasons why the Depressed Classes insist upon it are obvious. Every one of us knows that the man in possession is more powerful than the man who is out of possession. Everyone of us also knows that those in possession of power seldom abdicate in favour of those who are out of it. We cannot therefore hope for the effectuation of the settlement of our social problem. If we allow power to slip into the hands of those who stand to lose by settlement unless we are to have another revolution to dethrone those, whom we today help to ascend the throne of power and prestige. We prefer being despised for too anxious apprehensions, than ruined by too confident a security, and I think it would be just and proper for us to insist that the best guarantee for the settlement of our problem is the adjustment of the political machine itself so as to give us a hold on it, and not the will of those who are contriving to be left in unfettered control of that machine.

What adjustments of the political machine the Depressed Classes want for their safety and protection I will place before the Conference at the proper time. All I will say at the present moment is that, although we want responsible Government, we do not want a Government that will only mean a change of masters. Let the Legislature be fully and really representative if your Executive is going to be fully responsible.

I am sorry Mr. President. I had to speak in such plain words. But I saw no help. The Depressed Classes have had no friend. The Government has all along used them only as an excuse for its continued existence. The Hindus claim them only to deny them or, better still, to appropriate rights. The Muhammadans refuse to recognize their separate existence, because they fear that their privileges may be curtailed by the admission of a rival. Depressed by the Government, suppressed by the Hindu and disregarded by the Muslim, we are left in a most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention.

Regarding the other question which is set down for discussion I am sorry it was decided to tag it on to a general debate. Its importance deserved a session for itself. No justice can be done to it in a passing reference. The subject is one in which the Depressed Classes are deeply concerned and they regard it as a very vital question. As members of a minority, we look to the Central Government to act as a powerful curb on the provincial majority to save the minorities from the misrule of the majority. As an Indian, interested in the growth of Indian nationalism, I must make it plain that I am a strong believer in the Unitary form of Government and the thought of disturbing it I must confess does not please me very much. This Unitary Government has been the most potent influence in the building up of the Indian nation. That process of unification which has been the result of a unified system of Government has not been completed and

I should be loathed to withdraw this most powerful stimulus in the formative period and before it has worked out its end.

However, the question in the form in which it is placed is only an academic question and I shall be prepared to consider a federal form, if it can be shown that in it local autonomy is not inconsistent with central unity.

Sir, all that I, as a representative of the depressed classes, need say on their behalf I have said. May I crave your indulgence to permit me as an Indian to say a word or two generally on the situation which we have to meet. So much has been said regarding its gravity that I shall not venture to add a word more to it, although I am no silent spectator of the movement. What I am anxious about is to feel whether we are proceeding on right lines in evolving our solution. What that solution should be rests entirely upon the view that British delegates choose to take. Addressing myself to them I will say, whether you will meet the situation by conciliation or by applying the iron heel must be a matter for your judgment for the responsibility is entirely yours. To such of you as are particular to the use of force and believe that a regime of *LETTERS DE CACHET* and the Bastille will ease the situation, let me recall the memorable words of the greatest teacher of political philosophy, Edmund Burke. This is what he said to the British nation when it was faced with the problem of dealing with the American colonies :

“The use of force alone is but temporary. It may endure for a moment, but it does not remove the necessity of subduing again ; a nation is not governed which is perpetually to be conquered. The next objection to force is its uncertainty. Terror is not always the effect of force, and an armament is not a victory. If you do not succeed, you are without resource ; for conciliation failing, force remains, but force failing, no further hope of reconciliation is left. Power and authority are sometimes bought by kindness, but they can never be begged as alms by an impoverished and defeated violence. A further objection to force is, that you impair the object by your very endeavours to preserve it. The thing you fought for (to wit the loyalty of the people) is not the thing you recover but depreciated, sunk, wasted and consumed in the contest.”

The worth and efficacy of this advice you all knew. You did not listen to it and you lost the great continent of America. You followed it to the lasting good of yourself and the rest of the Dominions that are with you. To such of you as are willing to adopt a policy of conciliation I should like to say one thing. There seems to be prevalent an impression that the Delegates are called here to argue for and against a case for Dominion Status and that the grant of Dominion Status will be dependent upon which side is the victor in this battle of wits. With due deference to all who are sharpening their wits, I submit that there can be no greater mistake than to make the formula of logic govern so live an issue. I have no

quarrel with logic and logicians. But I warn them against the disaster that is bound to follow if they are not careful in the selection of the premises they choose to adopt for their deductions. It is all a matter of temper whether you will abide by the fall of your logic, or whether you will refute it, as Dr. Johnson did the paradoxes of Berkeley by trampling them under his feet. I am afraid it is not sufficiently realised that in the present temper of the country, no constitution will be workable which is not acceptable to the majority of the people. The time when you were to choose and India was to accept is gone, never to return. Let the consent of the people and not the accident of logic be the touchstone of your new constitution, if you desire that it should be worked.

2

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE CONFERENCE

†Comments on the Interim Report of Sub-Committee No. I (Federal Structure)—16th December 1930

‡*Dr. Ambedkar*: I should like to raise the point which my friend Mr. Joshi made before we adjourned. The Lord Chancellor, as the Chairman of this Sub-Committee, invited some of the delegates to submit any views they might have on these particular matters, and a few delegates including myself submitted a letter to the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, and expressed our wish that that letter should be submitted to the Sub-Committee for consideration. I do not find in the Report any reference to that letter, and I was informed by Lord Sankey that that letter was not placed before the Sub-Committee, but was sent to you, Sir, as Prime Minister. I do not think that that was quite a proper way of dealing with it. The letter was submitted to the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, for the Sub-Committee's use and it expressed certain definite views we held on the question of Federation. I am bound to make this comment because, speaking for myself, the Report as drawn up is so much at variance with the principles expressed in the letter that I find we shall have at some stage to raise a debate on this question, and I should like to know what steps the Lord Chancellor proposes to take.

Lord Sankey: I am very much obliged to Dr. Ambedkar for raising the point he has done, because I should have liked to have raised it myself, and it gives me the opportunity of saying a few words which I should have said at the beginning.....This is not a complete picture.....soon you are going to be presented with the complete picture, and Dr. Ambedkar, I shall want your assistance,.....Now with regard to the letter, Dr. Ambedkar, that you were good enough to send to me, I have considered it very carefully, and it will be vital to discuss it when we come to No. 6.§

† Proceedings of the R.T.C., pp. 193-95.

‡ Dr. Ambedkar was not the member of this Sub-Committee. He was nowever included as member of the Federal Structure Committee in the 2nd R.T.C.

§ Head No. 6 dealt with the constitution, character, powers and responsibilities of the Federal Executive.

Dr. Ambedkar : All I should like to know, if I may say so, is whether you will place that letter before the Committee. At what stage you may do so is a matter which I must leave to you.

Lord Sankey : One moment, Dr. Ambedkar. I am going to do a good deal more than that; I am not only going to place your letter before the Committee. I am going to draw the Committee's attention to it myself.

Dr. Ambedkar : I am obliged. That is enough for me.

Lord Sankey : One moment. I have not finished. When you are as old as I am, you will not be in such a hurry. Instead of having to do the job myself, I personally should very much take the gentlemen who presented the letter to come and do the job. If I have to do it myself, I shall not do it as well as you gentlemen would. But I will do this : not a word of the letter shall be left out; but it is not quite the time to consider it yet, because it must be considered at that important time when we come to No. 6.

Comments on paragraph 16 of the Report which dealt with Governor-General's special power

†*Dr. Ambedkar*: Sir, before you proceed, I should like to make it plain that the power given to the Governor-General to intervene to avoid serious prejudice to the interests of any section of the population must remain. The power must be embodied in the constitution in the same form as under section 93 of the Canadian Constitution.

Lt. Col. Gidney: Sir, I agree with and support everything that Dr. Ambedkar has said about the Governor-General having reserved power in such matters as he has mentioned.

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‡*Chairman*: Paragraph 34. I call on Col. Gidney.

Lt. Col. Gidney: I have one observation to make on this paragraph and I do so in conjunction with paragraph 29. Whereas in paragraph 29 a population ratio is to be adopted in estimating the representation of various communities in the upper chamber, in this paragraph 34, you use the word "possibly" which still further closes the door to minorities and special interests even to get a single representative in the upper chamber. I would suggest that that word "possibly" be deleted from this paragraph and the other words following, "and certainly in the Lower Chamber" be also deleted, as that the reconstructed paragraph will read :

"Provision should be made for the representation in both chambers, however small this representation be"

I think all the minority communities have every entitlement to representation in the upper house, however small it be.

Dr. Ambedkar: I associate myself with what Col. Gidney has said.

(Paragraph 34 dealt with representation of special interests and of the Crown in Federal Legislature.)

† Proceedings of the R.T.C., p. 261.

‡ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.