

Twenty-fifth Sitting—18th September 1931

HEAD 2

(Questions connected with the Election of Members of the Federal Legislature)

†*Dr. Ambedkar*: I would like to ask Mr. Gandhi this question : The Congress has not considered at all the question regarding the nature of the Federal Legislature or the Federal Executive. The only question that the Congress has considered is whether it will be part of the British Empire or whether it will be independent. Consequently, what Mr. Gandhi said yesterday might be his own personal view. I should like to ask whether he was expressing his own personal view, or whether he claimed in that respect to represent the views of the Congress. Then I should like to ask him a second question. In so far as we know of the proceedings of the Congress which are open to the public, this question was not considered by the Congress to my knowledge. It may have been considered in secret by the Congress. Therefore, I ask the question. The next question is whether the question of indirect election to which, I think, he gave his support yesterday, was not put forward by Mrs. Annie Besant in the Home Rule Bill which was formulated, and whether that method of constituting the Federal Legislature was not definitely rejected by the Congress.

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II

‡*Lord Chancellor*, another point of view has been pressed (and very strongly) by *Dr. Ambedkar*; and as that may have some weight with some of the members on this side, I should like to refer to that as well. It has been suggested that, if the principle of election of State subjects were not guaranteed, there might be created a bloc which, in essence, will not differ very much from the official bloc; and. it was suggested that the Political Department in particular will play a great part in constituting that bloc. Sir, I have no hesitation in stating that the great body of public servants who constitute the Political Department are as conscientious and as fair as any other body of public servants anywhere in India or outside.

Dr. Ambedkar: Why do you want responsible government at all. if that is so ?

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IV

§*Dr. Ambedkar*: Why are you not similarly kind to Sir Samuel Hoare, and let him take his own time for introducing popular institutions in British India ? He will be grateful to you, I am sure.

†*Proceedings of the Federal Structure Committee and Minorities Committee*, Vol. I, p. 175.

‡*Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.

§*Ibid.*, pp. 192-95.

Chairman: I do not think that we need discuss Sir Samuel Hoare's gratitude. That is a matter which is not before the Committee.

Pandit M. M. Malaviya: My friend, Dr. Ambedkar, forgets what I have said. I have repeated twice that I desire that the representative principle should be introduced into the States at once. I do not yield even to my friend, Dr. Ambedkar, in that desire; but I recognise a difference between my desire and Dr. Ambedkar's desire and the right of the Ruling Princes to take time to consider when and how the representative principle may be introduced in their States.....

.....Now, My Lord, I want also to say that those of us who are impatient—and none can be more impatient, I will repeat, than myself—to see the principle of representative institutions introduced into the States, should remember.....

Dr. Ambedkar: May I point out, My Lord Chancellor, that we on this side have never said that representative institutions should be introduced into the States. All that we say is that there should be constituencies in the Indian States, similar to the constituencies in British India, for the election of the representatives to the Federal Assembly. I have never said that there should be popular Assemblies in the Native States to control the Native States as a condition precedent to the entry of the Princes into the Federation.

Pandit M. M. Malaviya: If Dr. Ambedkar thinks that he has not asked for representative institutions, I leave him to have that satisfaction. We should not think that, if members who will come to the Federal Assembly from the States will not be elected by some popular method, they will not be useful.....even if the representatives of Indian States do not come by popular election—which, I again repeat, I desire that they should—even then we may have some excellent representatives whose co-operation will be very valuable in our work.

Chairman: Summing it up quite briefly, you say that “rotten boroughs” do not always return rotten members.

Pandit M. M. Malaviya: I think Your Lordship. I wish I could imitate Your Lordship's epigrammatic way of putting things.

[Pandit Malaviya further suggested that the introduction of principle of representation should be left at the mercy of the India Princes. If they do it voluntarily, he is delighted] ‘but’ he concludes,

“then my recommendation to my British Indian friends would be, let us show patience and courtesy, let us hope that such institutions will be established in proper time, but let us not do anything to create unnecessary obstacles in the way of the establishment of that All-India Federation upon which now, as matters stand, our hopes so much depend.”

Dr. Ambedkar: That is the same advice that is given to the Depressed Classes—that their salvation will also come in time.

Pandit M. M. Malaviya: My Lord, my friend, Dr. Ambedkar, is entirely mistaken and, I am sorry to say, not so well informed as I thought he would be.

Dr. Ambedkar: I should like to be enlightened.

Pandit M. M. Malaviya: I am not saying that the Depressed Classes should wait. In a criticism of the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals which I had the honour to publish when the proposed Reforms were first announced in 1918, I urged that, so far as the Depressed Classes were concerned, it is particularly a question of education, and I pleaded—and I still plead and the Congress has pleaded—for universal primary education. It has pleaded all the years of its existence ; and if the Government of India, which commanded all the resources of the country, had spent sufficient money on promoting primary education among the people, I am sure the words “Depressed Classes” would have been a matter of history by this time—long before this time. We have desired that they should receive elementary, primary education, that they should receive secondary education, that they should receive higher education. I have the honour to be the Vice-Chancellor of a University, the Benares Hindu University, and there a student of the Depressed Classes gets a seat exactly as a student of any other class does ; there is absolutely no distinction. And those who have received education give an excellent account of themselves, even, if I may say so, as my esteemed friend Dr. Ambedkar has given.

Dr. Ambedkar: I am still an “Untouchable” in society, although I am educated. Education has not raised me out of that.

Pandit M. M. Malaviya: I beg your pardon ; you are not an Untouchable ; you are a dear friend and colleague—a brother with whom your most orthodox friends have the pleasure to meet and work, and you know that they work together with you. Today there are more Brahmins working in the cause of the Depressed Classes than the representatives of any other class. I think that is a fact which my friend, Dr. Ambedkar, will admit.

Pandit M. M. Malaviya:will admit.

Now, the second point. My Lord, which I should like to touch upon is the question of direct and indirect election. I fear that the remarks which Mahatma Gandhi made yesterday in this connection were somewhat misunderstood..... When yesterday he spoke approvingly of Lord Peel’s suggestion, the object, as I understood it, was to show that, it was felt that there were practical difficulties in the way of extending the franchise to all the adults in the country..... It was most certainly to introduce the principle of adult suffrage that Mr. Gandhi suggested that plan. He has not approved the idea that an indirect method of election should be adopted whereby the people should feel that they were kept out of the right to vote.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru: I listened with great attention and interest to Mahatma Gandhi’s exposition of the principle of adult suffrage, but I am very much of the view that it is much lower than that recommended in the Nehru report. If I am wrong, will you please correct me ?

Sir Samuel Hoare: Pandit Malaviya, it would still be direct election. You are now making an argument in favour of adult suffrage. That was not the subject to which the Committee was addressing itself yesterday, so