

I do not think that I am doing any violence to etiquette by stating in this Committee that when I had the pleasure of meeting Mahatma Gandhi a week ago and discussing the question of the Depressed Classes with him, and when we, as members of the other minorities, had the chance of talking with him yesterday in his office, he told us in quite plain terms that the attitude that he had taken in the Federal Structure Committee was a firm and well considered attitude. What I would like to say is that unless at the outset I know that the Depressed Classes are going to be recognised as a community entitled to political recognition in the future Constitution of India, I do not know whether it will serve any purpose for me to join the committee that is proposed by Mahatma Gandhi to be constituted to go into this matter. Unless, therefore, I have an assurance that this Committee will start with the assumption that all those communities which the Minorities Sub-Committee last year recommended as fit for recognition in the future constitution of India will be included, I do not know that I can whole-heartedly support the proposition for adjournment, or that I can whole heartedly co-operate with the Committee that is going to be nominated. That is what I wish to be clear about.

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“Dr. Ambedkar: I should like to make my position further clear. It seems that there has been a certain misunderstanding regarding what I said. It is not that I object to adjournment; it is not that I object to serving on any Committee that might be appointed to consider the question. What I would like to know before I enter upon this committee, if they give me the privilege of serving on it, is : What is the thing that this Committee is going to consider ? Is it only going to consider the question of the Muhammadans *vis-a-vis* the Hindus ? Is it going to consider the question of the Muhammadans *vis-a-vis* the Sikhs in the Punjab ? Or is it going to consider the question of the Christians, the Anglo-Indians and the Depressed Classes ?

“If we understand perfectly well before we start that this committee will not merely concern itself with the question of the Hindus and the Muhammadans, of the Hindus and the Sikhs, but will also take upon itself the responsibility of considering the case of the Depressed Classes, the Anglo-Indians and the Christians, I am perfectly willing to allow this adjournment resolution to be passed without any objection. But I do want to say this, that if I am to be left out in the cold and if this interval is going to be utilised for the purposes of solving the Hindu-Muslim question, I would press that the Minorities

Committee should itself grapple with the question and consider it, rather than allow the question to be dealt with by some other informal Committee for arriving at a solution of the communal question in respect of some minorities only.

“Mr. Gandhi: Prime Minister and friends, I see that there is some kind of misunderstanding with reference to the scope of the work that some of us have set before ourselves. I fear that Dr. Ambedkar, Colonel Gidney and other friends are unnecessarily nervous about what is going to happen. Who am I to deny political status to any single interest or class or even individual in India ? As a representative of the Congress I should be unworthy of the trust that has been reposed in me by the Congress if I were guilty of sacrificing a single national interest. I have undoubtedly given expression to my own views on these points. I must confess that I hold to those views also. But there are ways and ways of guaranteeing protection to every single interest. It will be for those of us who will be putting our heads together to try to evolve a scheme. Nobody would be hampered in pressing his own views on the members of this very informal conference or meeting.

“I do not think, therefore, that anybody need be afraid as to being able to express his opinion or carrying his opinion also. Mine will be there equal to that of every one of us ; it will carry no greater weight; I have no authority behind me to carry my opinion against the opinion of anybody. I have simply given expression to my views in the national interest, and I shall give expression to these views whenever they are opportune. It will be for you, it is for you to reject or accept these opinions. Therefore please disburse your minds, to everyone of us, of the idea that there is going to be any steam-rolling in the Conference and the informal meetings that I have adumbrated. But if you think that this is one way of coming closer together than by sitting stiffly at this table, you will not carry this adjournment motion but give your whole-hearted co-operation to the proposal that I have made in connection with these informal meetings.

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“Chairman : Then I shall proceed to put it. I put it on the clear understanding, my friends, that the time is not going to be wasted and that these conferences—as Mr. Gandhi has said, informal conferences, but nevertheless I hope very valuable and fruitful conferences—will take place between now and our next meeting. I hope you will all pledge yourselves to use the time in that way.”

It is unnecessary for me to recite what happened at the informal meeting held after the adjournment. It was a complete failure if not a fiasco. The meeting was presided over by Mr. Gandhi. Mr. Gandhi began with the most difficult part of the Communal question namely the dispute between the Sikhs and the Muslims in the Punjab. This problem at one stage appeared to be nearer solution when the parties agreed to abide by the decision of an Arbitrator. The Sikhs, however, refused to proceed further in the matter until they knew who the Arbitrator was. As the Musalmans were not prepared to have the name of the Arbitrator disclosed the matter fell through. Mr. Gandhi was not interested in the problem of the other minorities, such as the Untouchables although he enacted the farce of calling upon the representatives of the other minorities to present a catalogue of their demands. He heard them but took no notice of them much. Did he place them before the meeting for its consideration? As soon as the Sikh-Muslim settlement broke up, Mr. Gandhi dissolved the meeting. The Minorities Committee met on 8th October 1931. The Prime Minister having called upon Mr. Gandhi to speak first, the latter said :—

“Prime Minister and friends, it is with deep sorrow and deeper humiliation that I have to announce utter failure on my part to secure an agreed solution of the communal question through informal conversations among and with the representatives of different groups. I apologise to you, Mr. Prime Minister, and the other colleagues for the waste of a precious week. My only consolation lies in the fact that when I accepted the burden of carrying on these talks I knew that there was much hope of success and still more in the fact that I am not aware of having spared any effort to reach a solution.

“But to say that the conversations have to our utter shame failed is not to say the whole truth. Causes of failure were inherent in the composition of the Indian Delegation. We are almost all not elected representatives of the parties or groups whom we are presumed to represent; we are here by nomination of the Government. Nor are those whose presence was absolutely necessary for an agreed solution to be found here. Further, you will allow me to say that this was hardly the time to summon the Minorities Committee. It lacks the sense of reality in that we do not know what it is that we are going to get. If we knew in a definite manner that we were going to get the thing we want, we should hesitate fifty times before we

threw it away in a sinful wrangle as it would be if we are told that the getting of it would depend upon the ability of the present Delegation to produce an agreed solution of the communal tangle. The solution can be the crown of the Swaraj constitution, not its foundation—if only because our differences have hardened, if they have not arisen, by reason of the foreign domination. I have not a shadow of a doubt that the icebag of communal differences will melt under the warmth of the sun of freedom.

“I, therefore, venture to suggest that the Minorities Committee be adjourned *sine die* and that the fundamentals of the constitution be hammered into shape as quickly as may be. Meanwhile, the informal work of discovering a true solution of the communal problem will and must continue; only it must not baulk or be allowed to block the progress of constitution-building. Attention must be diverted from it and concentrated on the main part of the structure.

“I hardly need point out to the Committee that my failure does not mean the end of all hope of arriving at an agreed solution. My failure does not even mean my utter defeat; there is no such word in the dictionary. My confession merely means failure of special effort for which I presumed to ask for a week’s indulgence, which you so generously gave.

“I propose to use the failure as a stepping-stone to success, and I invite you all to do likewise; but, should all effort at agreement fail, even when the Round Table Conference reaches the end of its labours, I would suggest the addition of a clause to the expected constitution appointing a judicial tribunal that would examine all claims and give its final decision on all the points that may be left unsettled.”

In the discussion that followed everybody refuted Mr. Gandhi’s allegation that the delegates were nominated by Government and did not represent the people. Getting up to make my position clear, I said :—

“Mr. Prime Minister, last night when we parted at the conclusion of the meeting of the informal Committee, we parted, although with a sense of failure, at least with one common understanding, and that was that when we met here today none of us should make any speech or any comment that would cause exasperation. I am sorry to see that Mr. Gandhi should have been guilty of a breach of this understanding. Excuse me, I must have the opportunity to speak. He started by giving what were, according to him, the causes of the failure of the informal Committee. Now, I have my own view of the causes

which I think were responsible for the failure of the informal Committee to reach an agreement, but I do not propose to discuss them now. What disturbs me after hearing Mr. Gandhi is that instead of confining himself to his proposition, namely, that the Minorities Committee should adjourn *sine die*, he started casting certain reflections upon the representatives of the different communities who are sitting round this table. He said that the Delegates were nominees of the Government, and that they did not represent the views of their respective communities for whom they stood. We cannot deny the allegation that we are nominees of the Government, but, speaking for myself, I have not the slightest doubt that even if the Depressed Classes of India were given the chance of electing their representatives to this Conference, I would, all the same, find a place here. I say therefore that whether I am a nominee or not, I fully represent the claims of my community. Let no man be under the mistaken impression as regards that.

“The Mahatma has been always claiming that the Congress stands for the Depressed Classes, and that the Congress represents the Depressed Classes more than I or my colleague can do. To that claim I can only say that it is one of the many false claims which irresponsible people keep on making, although the persons concerned with regard to those claims have been invariably denying them.

“I have here a telegram which I have just received from a place which I have never visited and from a man whom I have never seen—from the President of the Depressed Classes Union, Kumaun, Almora, which I believe is in the United Provinces, and which contains the following resolution :

“This Meeting declares its non-confidence in the Congress movement which has been carried on in and outside the country, and condemns the methods adopted by the Congress workers.”

I do not care to read further, but I can say this (and I think if Mr. Gandhi will examine his position he will find out the truth), that although there may be people in the Congress who may be showing sympathy towards the Depressed Classes, the Depressed Classes are not in the Congress. That is a proposition which I propose to substantiate. I do not wish to enter into these points of controversy. They seem to be somewhat outside the main proposition. The main proposition which Mr. Gandhi has made is that this Committee should be adjourned *sine die*. With regard to that proposition, I entirely agree with the attitude taken up by Sir Muhammad Shafi. I, for one, cannot

consent to this proposition. It seems to me that there are only two alternatives—either that this Minorities Committee should go on tackling the problem and trying to arrive at some satisfactory solution, if that is possible, and then, if that is not possible, the British Government should undertake the solution of that problem. We cannot consent to leave this to the arbitration of third parties whose sense of responsibility may not be the same as must be the sense of responsibility of the British Government.

“Prime Minister, permit me to make one thing clear. The Depressed Classes are not anxious, they are not clamorous, they have not started any movement for claiming that there shall be an immediate transfer of power from the British to the Indian people. They have their particular grievances against the British people and I think I have voiced them sufficiently to make it clear that we feel those grievances most acutely. But, to be true to facts, the position is that the Depressed Classes are not clamouring for transfer of political power. Their position, to put it plainly, is that we are not anxious for the transfer of power ; but if the British Government is unable to resist the forces that have been set up in the country which do clamour for transference of political power—and we know the Depressed Classes in their present circumstances are not in a position to resist that—then our submission is that if you make that transfer, that transfer will be accompanied by such conditions and by such provisions that the power shall not fall into the hands of a clique, into the hands of an oligarchy, or into the hands of a group of people, whether Muhammadans or Hindus ; but that that solution shall be such that the power shall be shared by all communities in their respective proportions. Taking that view, I do not see how I, for one, can take any serious part in the deliberation of the Federal Structure Committee unless I know where I and my community stand.”

The Prime Minister in his concluding observations said:—

“Let us adjourn, and I will call you together again. In the meantime what I would like would be if those of you are sitting opposite me, the representatives of the small minorities, would also try your hands.

“If there are any common agreements among yourselves, I would suggest that you circulate them.....It is not the British Government that is going to stand in the way of any agreement .. .Therefore what I would like you to have in your minds after the rather depressing statements to which we have listened, is this: That the British Government wants to go on; the

British Government wants you to go on. The British Government will take its action if you cannot go on to an end, because we are determined to make such improvements in the Government of India as will make the Government of India consistent with our own ideas, as will make the Government of India something that is capable of greater and greater expansion towards liberty. That is what we want. I appeal to the Delegates here today—Delegates representing all communities—Do not stand in our way ; because that is what is happening.”

IV

Acting on the suggestion of the Prime Minister the minorities met to consider if they could produce a settlement. They tried and produced a settlement which was submitted to the Prime Minister in the evening before the next meeting of the Minorities Committee which took place on 13th November 1931. In his opening remarks the Prime Minister said :—

“The work of this Committee, therefore, was from the very beginning of supreme importance, and I am sorry that you have been unable to present to us an agreed plan.

“Last night, however, I received a deputation representing the Muhammadans, the Depressed Classes, at any rate a section of the Indian Christians, the Anglo-Indians and the British Community. I think that is the complete range. They came and saw me in my room in the House of Commons last night with a document which embodied an agreement that they had come to amongst themselves. They informed me, in presenting the document to me, that it covered something in the region of 46 per cent. of the population of British India.

“I think the best thing would be, as we have had no time to consider this, to treat this document as a document which is official to the records of this Committee and in order that that may be done I shall ask His Highness The Aga Khan formally to present it here, so that it may be entered in our official record.”

His Highness The Aga Khan then got up and said :-

“Mr. Prime Minister, on behalf of the Muhammadans, the Depressed Classes, the Anglo-Indians, the Europeans and a considerable section of the Indian Christian groups, I present the document embodying the agreement which has been arrived at between them with regard to the intercommunal problem with which the Round Table Conference in general and the Minorities Committee in particular are concerned. We desire

to make it clear that this agreement has been arrived at after careful and anxious consideration of this difficult and complicated problem and must be taken as a whole. All parts of the agreement are interdependent and agreements stand or fall as a whole.”

This document was known as the Minorities Pact.¹ In the general discussion that followed Mr. Gandhi’s speech no doubt attracted the greatest attention. Mr. Gandhi was furious. He attacked everybody who had taken part in producing the Minorities Pact. He was particularly furious for the recognition given to the Untouchables as a separate political entity. This is what Mr. Gandhi said :—

“I would like to repeat what I have said before, that, while the Congress will always accept any solution that may be acceptable to the Hindus, the Muhammadans and the Sikhs, Congress will be no party to the special electorates for any other minorities.....One word more as to the so-called Untouchables. I can understand the claims advanced by other minorities, but the claims advanced on behalf of the Untouchables, that time is the ‘unkindest cut of all.’ It means the perpetual bar-sinister. I would not sell the vital interests of the Untouchables even for the sake of winning the freedom of India. I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll. And I would work from one end of India to the other to tell the Untouchables that separate electorates, and separate reservation is not the way to remove this bar-sinister, which is the shame, not of them, but of orthodox Hinduism.

“Let this Committee and let the whole world know that today there is a body of Hindu reformers who are pledged to remove this blot of untouchability. We do not want on our register and on our census Untouchables classified as a separate class. Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity, so may Muhammadans so may Europeans. Will Untouchables remain Untouchables in perpetuity ? I would far rather that Hinduism died than that Untouchability lived. Therefore, with all my regard for Dr. Ambedkar, and for his desire to see the Untouchables uplifted, with all my regard for his ability, I must say in all

¹ It is reproduced as Appendix III.

humility that here the great wrong under which he has laboured and perhaps the bitter experiences that he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgment. It hurts me to have to say this, but I would be untrue to the cause of the Untouchables, which is as dear to me as life itself, if I did not say it. I will not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world. I am speaking with a due sense of responsibility, and I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the Untouchables of India. It will create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political right of Untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian Society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life."

The Chairman knowing that there was no hope of getting an agreed solution before adjourning the Minorities Committee *sine die* made a suggestion to the delegates. He said :—

"Will you, each of you, every member of this Committee, sign a request to me to settle the community question and pledge yourselves to accept my decision ? That, I think, is a very fair offer..... I do want any section, or any one man. Will the members of this Committee sign a declaration asking me to give a decision, even a temporary one, on the community question, and say that you will agree ? I do not want it now. I say, will you put your names to it and give that to me, with the assurance that the decision come to will be accepted by you and will be worked by you to the best of your ability in the course of the working of the new constitution ? I have asked several sections—at least, individuals—from time to time for that, and I have never got it. That would certainly straighten out the position, but apart from that, do, please, not forget what I said in opening this meeting—that the Government will not allow community differences to prevent it from carrying out its pledges and producing a constitution. Therefore do not make the community difference more important than it is."

V

Thus ended the efforts by the Minorities Committee to bring about a solution of the communal problem. The discussion in the Committee threw Mr. Gandhi's attitude to the Untouchables in relief. Everybody felt that Mr. Gandhi was the most determined enemy of the Untouchables. So much of his energy and attention did Mr. Gandhi concentrate on the question of the Untouchables that it would not be unfair if it was said that the main purpose for which Mr. Gandhi came to the Round Table Conference was to oppose the demands of the Untouchables.

Those, who were friends of Mr. Gandhi, could not understand Mr. Gandhis attitude to the demands of the Untouchables. To give recognition to the Muslims and the Sikhs and to refuse it to the Untouchables came to them as a surprise and a puzzle. Whenever they asked for an explanation, Mr. Gandhi did nothing except to get angry. Mr. Gandhi himself could not give a logical and consistent defence of his opposition to the Untouchables. Inside the Round Table Conference his defence, was that the Hindus had seriously taken up the cause of the Untouchables and that therefore there was no reason to give them political safeguards. Outside the Round Table Conference he gave totally different reasons. In a speech in defence of his position Mr. Gandhi said :—

“Muslims and Sikhs are all well organized. The ‘Untouchables’ are not. There is very little political consciousness among them and they are so horribly treated that I want to save them against themselves. If they had separate electorates their lives would be miserable in villages which are the strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy. It is the superior class of Hindus who have to do penance for having neglected the ‘Untouchables’ for ages. That penance can be done by active social reform and by making the lot of the ‘Untouchables’ more bearable by acts of service, but not by asking for separate electorates for them. By giving them separate electorates you will throw the apple of discord between the ‘Untouchables’ and the orthodox. You must understand I can tolerate the proposal for special representation of the Musalmans and the Sikhs only as a necessary evil. It would be a positive danger for the

voters' list, and provide for fundamental rights for them in the constitution. In cases they are unjustly treated and their representative is deliberately excluded they would have the right to special election tribunal which would give them complete protection. It should be open to these tribunals to order the unseating of an elected candidate and the election of the excluded men.

"Separate electorates to the 'Untouchables' will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Musalmans will never cease to be Musalmans by having separate electorates. Do you want the 'Untouchables' to remain 'Untouchables' for ever ? Well, the separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma. What is needed is destruction of untouchability, and when you have done it, the bar-sinister which has been imposed by an insolent 'superior' class upon an 'inferior' class will be destroyed. When you have destroyed the bar-sinister, to whom will you give the separate electorates ? Look at the history of Europe. Have you got separate electorates for the working classes or women ? With adult franchise, you give the 'Untouchables' complete security. Even the orthodox would have to approach them for votes.

"Now then you ask, does Dr. Ambedkar, their representative, insist on separate electorates for them ? I have the highest regard for Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter. That he does not break our heads is an act of self-restraint on his part. He is today so much saturated with suspicion that he cannot see anything else. He sees in every Hindu a determined opponent of the 'Untouchables' and it is quite natural. The same thing happened to me in my early days in South Africa, where I was hounded out by Europeans wherever I went. It is quite natural for him to vent his wrath. But the separate electorates that he seeks will not give him social reform. He may himself mount to power and position but nothing good will accrue to the 'Untouchables.' I can say all this with authority, having lived with the 'Untouchables' and having shared their joys' and sorrows all these years."

Mr. Gandhi at the Round Table Conference was not satisfied with mere propaganda. When he found that the propaganda was not succeeding as well as he expected he resorted to intrigue. When Mr. Gandhi heard that at the suggestion of the Prime Minister the minorities were about to produce a settlement and that this settlement would have the effect of the Untouchables getting the support of the other minorities and particularly of the Muslims, Mr. Gandhi felt considerably disturbed. He

devised a scheme to isolate the Untouchables. For this Mr. Gandhi planned to buy out the Musalmans by giving to the Musalmans their fourteen demands, which Mr. Gandhi was not in the beginning prepared to agree. When he found the Musalmans were lending their support to the Untouchables Mr. Gandhi agreed to them their fourteen points on condition that they withdrew their support from the Untouchables. The agreement was actually drafted. The text of it is given below:—

“DRAFT OF GANDHI-MUSLIM PACT”¹

MUSLIM DELEGATION TO THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE²

Tel.: VICTORIA 2360

Telegrams: “COURTLIKE” LONDON

QUEEN’S HOUSE,

57, ST. JAMES’ COURT,

BUCKINGHAM GATE

LONDON, S.W. 1

6th October 1931.

The following proposals were discussed by Mr. Gandhi and the Muslim Delegation at 10 p.m. last night. They are divided into two parts—The proposals made by the Muslims for safeguarding their rights and the proposals made by Mr. Gandhi regarding the Congress policy. They are given herewith as ; approved by Mr. Gandhi, and placed for submission to the Muslim Delegation for their opinion.

MUSLIM PROPOSALS

1. In the Punjab and Bengal bare majority of one per cent. of Musalmans but the question of whether it should be by means of joint electorates and reservation of 51 per cent. of the whole house should be referred to the Musalman voters before the new constitution comes into force and their verdict should be accepted.

MR. GANDHI’S PROPOSALS

1. That the Franchise should be on the basis of adult suffrage.

2. *No special reservations to any other community save Sikhs and Hindu Minorities. (Italics are not in the original)*

3. The Congress demands:

A. Complete Independence.

1. This document was printed by me in my *Thoughts on Pakistan* as an Appendix in 1939. It was the first time it saw the light of the day. Its genuineness has never been questioned. I was able to get a copy from a Hindu Delegate to the Round Table Conference who was privileged by the Muslim League to share the secret.

2. This shows that the document was typed on the stationery of the Muslim League Delegation.

2. In other provinces where the Musalmans are in a minority the present weightage enjoyed by them to continue, but whether the seats should be reserved to a joint electorate, or whether they should have separate electorates should be determined by the Musalman voters by a referendum under the new constitution, and their verdict should be accepted.

3. That the Musalman representatives to the Central Legislature in both the houses should be 26 per cent, of the total number of the British India representatives, and 7 per cent, at least by convention should be Musalmans, out of the quota that may be assigned to Indian States, that is to say, one-third of the whole house when taken together.

4. That the residuary power should vest in the federating Provinces of British India.

5. That the other points as follows being agreed to :

1. Sindh.¹

2. N.W.F.P.²

3. Services.³

4. Cabinet.⁴

5. Fundamental rights and safeguards for religion and culture.

6. Safeguards against legislation affecting any community.

B. Complete control over the defence immediately.

C. Complete control over external affairs.

D. Complete control over Finance.

E. Investigation of public debts and other obligations by an independent tribunal.

F. As in the case of a partnership, right of either party to terminate it.

1. Stands for separation of Sindh.
2. Stands for Provincial Autonomy and Responsible Government for the N. W. F. Province.
3. Stands for Representation in Services.
4. Stands for Representation in the Cabinet.

It is true that the Untouchables are not mentioned in this draft agreement. But that the Musalmans are bound not to support any other minority except the Sikhs makes it quite clear that they were not to support the Untouchables. In this intrigue, Mr. Gandhi failed as he was bound to. The Musalmans who were out to demand safeguards for them selves could not stand up and oppose the demands of the Untouchables. Mr. Gandhi in his passion for suppressing the Untouchables had lost his sense of discrimination to such extent as not to be able to distinguish between means which are fair and means which are foul. Mr. Gandhi did not care to honour his word. In the Minorities Committee, Mr. Gandhi had said that if the Committee agreed to accept the claim of the Untouchables for separate recognition it was free to do so, which meant that he would abide by the decision of the majority. But when he came to know that the other minorities had agreed to support the Untouchables, he did not hesitate to approach the Musalmans and turn them against the Untouchables by accepting their fourteen points which the Congress, the Hindu Maha Sabha and even the Simon Commission had rejected. Even if Mr. Gandhi was prepared to flout public opinion and public morality this diabolical plot of Mr. Gandhi fell through because the Musalmans refused to disgrace themselves by joining in it. When the second session of the Round Table Conference was dissolved the delegates to the Minorities Committee accepted the proposal of the Prime Minister to put in a signed requisition authorizing him to arbitrate and give his decision on the communal issue. Many delegates did it including Mr. Gandhi.¹ There was nothing left for the delegates but to return to India and await the decision of the Prime Minister and having made him the sole arbitrator to accept it with good cheer.

VI

Before I resume the narrative and state what decision the Prime Minister gave, I must describe the strange phenomenon which I, as a member of the Franchise Committee, witnessed. After the close of the second session of the Round Table Conference, the Prime Minister thought it advisable to have

1. I did not make any such requisition. I felt that the demands of the Untouchables were so reasonable that no arbitration was necessary,

the question of franchise for the new constitution examined by a Committee. Accordingly, in December 1931 he appointed a Committee with the late Lord Lothian as its Chairman. Its main term of reference was to devise a system of franchise whereby, to use the language of the Prime Minister's letter of instructions to the Chairman,

"The legislatures to which responsibility is to be entrusted should be representative of the general mass of the population, and that no important section of the community may lack the means of expressing its needs and its opinions."

The Committee started its work early in January 1932. For doing its work the Committee took the help of the Provincial Governments and of the Provincial Franchise Committees consisting of non-officials specially constituted for that purpose province by province. The Committee issued questionnaires. They were replied to by the Provincial Governments, by the Provincial Franchise Committees and by individuals. Witnesses were examined by the Committee sitting with each Provincial Franchise Committee. The Provincial Governments and the Provincial Committees submitted their reports separately to the Committee. They were discussed by the Committee with the Provincial Government and the Provincial Committee before it came to its own conclusion. Besides the general tasks assigned to the Lothian Committee, it had a special task with which it was charged by the Prime Minister. It had relation to the political demands of the Untouchables which the Prime Minister had referred to in the following terms in his letter of instruction to the Chairman :—

"It is evident from the discussions which have occurred in various connections in the Conference that the new constitution must make adequate provision for the representation of the Depressed Classes, and that the method of representation by nomination is no longer regarded as appropriate. As you are aware, there is a difference of opinion whether the system of separate electorates should be instituted for the Depressed Classes and your committee's investigations should contribute towards the decision of this question by indicating the extent to which the Depressed Classes would be likely, through such general extension of the franchise as you may recommend, to secure the right to vote in ordinary electorates. On the other hand, should it be decided eventually to constitute separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, either generally or in those

provinces in which they form a distinct and separable element in the population, your Committee's inquiry into the general problem of extending the franchise should place you in possession of facts which would facilitate the devising of a method of separate representation for the Depressed Classes."

Following upon these instructions, it became the task of the Committee to come to some conclusion as to the total population of the Untouchables in British India.

To the question what is the population of the Untouchables the replies received were enough to stagger anybody. Witness after witness came forward to say that the Untouchables in his Province were infinitesimally small. There were not wanting witnesses who said that there were no Untouchables at all!! It was a most extraordinary sight to see Hindu witnesses perjuring themselves regardless of truth by denying the existence of the Untouchables or by reducing their number to a negligible figure. The members of the Provincial Franchise Committee were also a party to this plan. Strange to say that some of the Hindu members of the Lothian Committee were in the game. This move of denying the very existence of the Untouchables or reducing their number almost to nil was particularly rampant in certain Provinces. How the Hindus were prepared to economise truth, even to a vanishing point, will be evident from the following figures. In the United Provinces, the Census Commissioner in 1931 had estimated the total population of the Untouchables at 12.6 millions, the Provincial Government at 6.8 millions but the Provincial Franchise Committee at .6 millions only!! In Bengal, the Census gave the figures of 10.3 millions, Provincial Government fixed it as 11.2 millions but the Provincial Franchise Committee at .07 millions only!

Before the Round Table Conference no Hindu bothered about the exact population of the Untouchables and were quite satisfied with the accuracy of the Census figures which gave the total of the Untouchables at about 70 to 80 millions. Why did then the Hindus start suddenly to challenge this figure when the question was taken up by the Lothian Committee? The answer is very clear. Before the time of the Lothian Committee the population of the Untouchables had no value. But after the Round Table Conference the Hindus had come to know that the Untouchables were demanding separate allot-

ment of their share of representation, that such share must come out of the lump which the Hindus had been enjoying in the past and that the measure of the share must depend upon the population of the Untouchables. The Hindus had realized that to admit the existence of the Untouchables was detrimental to their interest. They did not mind sacrificing truth and decency and decided to adopt the safest course, namely, to deny that there are any Untouchables in India at all, and thereby knock out the bottom of the political demands of the Untouchables and leave no room for argument. This shows how the Hindus can conspire in a cold, calculated manner against the Untouchables out of pure selfishness and do indirectly what they cannot do directly.

VII

To resume the thread. Having been disgusted with the Round Table Conference where there were critics but no devotees, Mr. Gandhi was the first to return to India. On account of a statement which he is alleged to have made in an interview he gave to a newspaper correspondent in Rome wherein he threatened to revive his campaign of civil disobedience, Mr. Gandhi on his arrival was arrested and put in jail. Though in jail, not Swaraj but the Untouchables were on his brain. He feared that, notwithstanding his threat to resist it with his life, the Prime Minister as a sole arbitrator might accept the claims made on behalf of the Untouchables at the Round Table Conference. Long before any decision was given by the Prime Minister, Mr. Gandhi on 11th March 1932 addressed from jail a letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India, reminding him of his opposition to the claim of the Untouchables. The following is the text of that letter:—

“DEAR SIR SAMUEL,

You will perhaps recollect that at the end of my speech at the Round Table Conference when the Minorities' claim was presented, I had said that I should resist with my life the grant of separate electorates to the Depressed Classes. This was not said in the heat of the moment nor by way of rhetoric. It was meant to be a serious statement. In pursuance of that statement, I had hoped on my return to India to mobilize public opinion against separate electorates, at any rate, for the Depressed Classes. But it was not to be.

“From the newspapers, I am permitted to read, I observe that any moment His Majesty’s Government may declare their decision. At first I had thought, if the decision was found to create separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, I should take such steps as I might then consider necessary to give effect to my vow. But I feel it would be unfair to the British Government for me to act without giving previous notice. Naturally, they could not attach the significance I give to my statement.

“I need hardly reiterate all the objections I have to the creation of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. I feel as if I was one of them. Their case stands on a wholly different footing from that of others. I am not against their representation in the legislatures. I should favour everyone of their adults, male and female, being registered as voters irrespective of education or property qualification, even though the franchise test may be stricter for others. But I hold that separate electorate is harmful for them and for Hinduism, whatever it may be from the purely political standpoint. To appreciate the harm that separate electorate would do them, one has to know how they are distributed amongst the so-called Caste Hindus and how dependent they are on the latter. So far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electorates would simply vivisection and disrupt it.

“For me the question of these classes is predominantly moral and religious. The political aspect, important though it is, dwindles into insignificance compared to the moral and religious issue.

“You will have to appreciate my feelings in this matter by remembering that I have been interested in the condition of these classes from my boyhood and have more than once staked my all for their sake. I say this not to pride myself in any way. For, I feel that no penance that the Hindus may do can in any way compensate for the calculated degradation to which they have consigned the Depressed Classes for centuries.

“But I know that separate electorate is neither a penance nor any remedy for the crushing degradation they have groaned under. I, therefore, respectfully inform His Majesty’s Government that in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, I must fast unto death.

“I am painfully conscious of the fact that such a step, whilst I am a prisoner, must cause grave embarrassment to His Majesty’s Government, and that it will be regarded by many as highly improper on the part of one holding my position to

introduce into the political field methods which they would describe as hysterical if not much worse. All I can urge in defence is that for me the contemplated step is not a method, it is part of my being. It is the call of conscience which I dare not disobey, even though it may cost whatever reputation for sanity I may possess. So far as I can see now my discharge from imprisonment would not make the duty of fasting any the less imperative. I am hoping, however, all my fears are wholly unjustified and the British Government have no intention whatever of creating separate electorate for the Depressed Classes."

The following reply was sent to Mr. Gandhi by the Secretary of State :—

INDIA OFFICE, WHITEHALL,
April 13, 1932.

DEAR MR. GANDHI,

"I write this in answer to your letter of 11th March, and I say at once I realize fully the strength of your feeling upon the question of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. I can only say that we intend to give any decision that may be necessary solely and only upon the merits of the case. As you are aware, Lord Lothian's Committee has not yet completed its tour and it must be some weeks before we can receive any conclusions at which it may have arrived. When we receive that report we shall have to give most careful consideration to its recommendations, and we shall not give a decision until we have taken into account, in addition to the view expressed by the Committee, the views that you and those who think with you have so forcibly expressed. I feel sure if you were in our position you would be taking exactly the same action we intend to take. You would admit the Committee's report, you would then give it your fullest consideration, and before arriving at a final decision you would take into account the views that have been expressed on both sides of the controversy. More than this I cannot say. Indeed I do not imagine you would expect me to say more."

After giving this warning, Mr. Gandhi slept over the matter thinking that a repetition of his threat to fast unto death was sufficient to paralyse the British Government and prevent them from accepting the claim of the Untouchables for special representation. On the 17th August 1932 the decision of the Prime Minister on the communal question was announced.

That part of the decision which relates to the Untouchables is produced below:—

Communal Decision by His Majesty's Government 1932.

In the statement made by the Prime Minister on 1st December last on behalf of His Majesty's Government at the close of the second session of the Round Table Conference, which was immediately afterwards endorsed by both Houses of Parliament, it was made plain that if the communities in India were unable to reach a settlement acceptable to all parties on the communal questions which the Conference had failed to solve, His Majesty's Government were determined that India's constitutional advance should not on that account be frustrated, and that they would remove this obstacle by devising and applying themselves a provisional scheme.

2. On the 19th March last His Majesty's Government, having been informed that the continued failure of the communities to reach agreement was blocking the progress of the plans for the framing of a new Constitution, stated that they were engaged upon a careful re-examination of the difficult and controversial questions which arise. They are now satisfied that without a decision of at least some aspects of the problems connected with the position of minorities under the new Constitution, no further progress can be made with the framing of the Constitution.

3. His Majesty's Government have accordingly decided that they will include provisions to give effect to the scheme set out below in the proposals relating to the Indian Constitution to be laid in due course before Parliament. The scope of this scheme is purposely confined to the arrangements to be made for the representation of the British Indian communities in the Provincial Legislatures, consideration of representation in the Legislature at the Centre being deferred for the reason given in paragraph 20 below. The decision to limit the scope of the scheme implies no failure to realize that the framing of the Constitution will necessitate the decision of a number of other problems of great importance to minorities, but has been taken in the hope that once a pronouncement has been made upon the basic questions of method and proportions of representation the communities themselves may find it possible to arrive at *modus vivendi* on other communal problems, which have not received the examination they require.

4. His Majesty's Government wish it to be most clearly understood that they themselves can be no parties to any negotiations which may be initiated with a view to the revision of their

decision, and will not be prepared to give consideration to any representation aimed at securing the modification of it which is not supported by all the parties affected. But they are most desirous to close no door to an agreed settlement should such happily be forthcoming. If, therefore, before a new Government of India Act has passed into law, they are satisfied that the communities who are concerned are mutually agreed upon a practicable alternative scheme, either in respect of any one or more of the Governors' Provinces or in respect of the whole of the British India, they will be prepared to recommend to Parliament that that alternative should be substituted for the provisions now outlined.

5.	*	*	*	*
6.	*	*	*	*
7.	*	*	*	*
8.	*	*	*	*

9. Members of the "depressed classes" qualified to vote will vote in a general constituency. In view of the fact that for a considerable period these classes would be unlikely, by this means alone, to secure any adequate representation in the Legislature, a number of special seats will be assigned to them as shown in the table. These seats will be filled by election from special constituencies in which only members of the "depressed classes" electorally qualified will be entitled to vote. Any person voting in such a special constituency will, as stated above, be also entitled to vote in a general constituency. It is intended that these constituencies should be formed in selected areas where the depressed classes are most numerous, and that, except in Madras, they should not cover the whole area of the Province.

In Bengal it seems possible that in some general constituencies a majority of the voters will belong to the Depressed Classes. Accordingly, pending further investigation, no number has been fixed for the members to be returned from the special Depressed Class constituencies in that Province. It is intended to secure that the Depressed Classes should obtain not less than 10 seats in the Bengal Legislature.

The precise definition in each Province of those who (if electorally qualified) will be entitled to vote in the special Depressed Class constituencies has not yet been finally determined. It will be based as a rule on the general principles advocated in the Franchise Committee's Report. Modification may, however, be found necessary in some Provinces in Northern India where the application of the general criteria of