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INDIAN REFORMS.

It was suggested on the last occasion when this matter was discussed at the War Cabinet that it was impossible for His Majesty's Government "in "the midst of a great war to give adequate time and thought to the proper "and full consideration of so important and complex a question." Since the date of the meeting there has been a change in the Secretarvship of State for India, and the Viceroy has expressed in a telegram to the Prime Minister his natural anxiety lest the change in office should delay the formulation of a definite scheme of action. I should wish to reassure the Viceroy in this regard, and have therefore lost no time in studying this difficult question.

The Cabinet are aware that the Viceroy, the Government of India, and the Heads of Provinces are urging most strongly that a public announcement should be made on the policy that is to be pursued. In repeated telegrams Lord Chelmsford has impressed upon those in authority at home the importance of a prompt decision. In his letters to the late Secretary of State the Governor of Bombay has taken the same line, and he holds that the delay that has already occurred has strengthened the hands of those working against the Government by their advocacy of the impracticable policy of immediate and complete Home Rule for India. I feel that our duty to the Viceroy requires that he should be put in possession of a definite policy with which he and his Government can meet what I may call the growing Indian "opposition."

The Russian Revolution, the activities of Mrs. Besant and her friends, the issue of the Mesopotamian Commission Report, the improved status given to India by her representation at the Imperial War Conference and the Imperial War Cabinet, seem to have produced a situation in which, unless a certainty of substantial reform is at once conceded to India, the Indian Government and its friends have reason to fear a considerable recruitment to the extreme party from the moderate party, such as has occurred in Ireland, and a general feeling of discouragement and pessimism which would be, very grave in its results.

The problem for us to solve, therefore, is this. We must endeavour to find some immediate pronouncement without prolonged discussion in the Cabinet or efforts to solve vastly complicated questions in a time of such pre-occupation, but we must find an announcement which satisfies the necessities of the moment.

I would suggest that the public statement must include both the objects which we have in view and the steps which we propose to take to carry out those objects.

As regards the objects which we have in view, it seems to me desirable to state them for the following reasons:

1. In order that Indians may be given to understand that, provided they are moderate in their demands as to the fulfilment of the object, rational and constitutional in the steps that they take towards the achievement of the object, their desire for ultimate self-government within the Empire is not regarded by the British Government as hostile or criminal, but indeed as a legitimate aspiration.

2. That it may be declared that the objects which the British Government have in view—objects which many British Governments have in the past had in view—are not dissimilar from the objects which really loyal Indians of nationalist tendencies have in view.

3. In order that young Indians who take an interest in their country and young civilians who take up the great work of helping to govern India may have a test by which to mark the success of their lives' work, the degree in which they are enabled to carry affairs towards the goal which we should have set them.

But in order to obviate prolonged discussions, the formula which I feel inclined to recommend to the War Cabinet ought to be merely a statement of the general principles of policy, and should not be explained or elaborated at the present stage. When Parliament is asked to sanction the steps which must immediately be taken towards this goal, or when the Cabinet is deciding on these steps, it might be possible to define what we mean or do not mean by self-government.
I am myself prepared to accept at this stage the wording proposed on several occasions by Mr. Chamberlain:—"The gradual development of free institutions with a view to self-government." In my opinion, no formula which does not include the words "Self-government" is any use for the purposes 1 and 2, above, for without these words we do not give the moderate his answer to the extremist. The loyal progressive Indian says in effect to the Government: "I look forward to self-government eventually. "Do you? Tell me in order that I may as your friend answer your enemies. "If you do we have community of purpose. If you don't, say so, and I shall "have to join those who are hostile to you."

I have my own views on what is likely to be the form of ultimate self-government in India. I think it will tend towards a commonwealth of self-governing provinces or countries united to the Home Government, to one another and to the Native States.

This is my view of the ultimate, and possibly in its complete form unrealisable, ideal to which our policy should approximate as the years go on, and if this were laid down with proper cautions and safeguards, I believe it would serve the useful purpose of ending any tendency to an alternation or variation in our policy between devolution and centralisation; for devolution would then be accepted as the proper method of progress and every Viceroy, Governor and Civil Servant would know of it as settled policy.

I wish to guard myself against misapprehension. I do not mean that the existing provinces would necessarily be the self-governing provinces. I do not mean that there is any chance, in my opinion, of dealing with the different countries in India simultaneously in the same way; just as some provinces have received Executive Councils before others, as some provinces get High Courts before others, so it may well be that some provinces will eventually become self-governing while other provinces may never become self-governing; it may be that some provinces may get at once reforms not possible in others for many years, if at all. In fact, I agree with Lord Curzon when he says that "different forms or degrees of self-" government will be attained in different parts, some more, and others less "advanced." Indeed, if Lord Curzon were to agree that there might be in India, some day or other, some States enjoying responsible Government, there would be no material difference between my views and the views which he expresses in his Memorandum.

But I would submit, in order to save the Cabinet's time, that this point does not much matter at this stage. If we content ourselves with a statement made in the House of Commons of the kind which I suggest below, at a later date when our plans are complete we can decide whether we can go into greater detail.

It will however, be agreed by those interested in the subject, and in particular by the Viceroy, that no statement or formula of the kind that I have suggested is any use without practical steps showing that we really mean what we say and that we are intending to obtain the necessary legislation as soon as may be, possibly not till immediately after the war. Therefore we must accompany a statement as to our aim by some announcement as to action. I agree most thoroughly that such action cannot be elaborated by the War Cabinet now. Indeed, if the Cabinet had time, matters are not ripe for such a discussion. The Viceroy has sent home proposals. They have been submitted to a Committee of the India Council, and I do not think I am guilty of exaggeration when I say that the proposals of the Government of India do not survive this examination. It seems to be agreed by all concerned that despatch and counterdespatch does not promise a speedy solution of our problem, and I see that various suggestions have been before the Government on the subject of a Commission of Enquiry, that a Commission was finally accepted by the Viceroy, but with great reluctance. I find in the Office some draft terms of reference sketched by Mr. Chamberlain before he left office. I append them to show how alarming a Commission would be, and yet the terms of reference are none too wide to do any good. But the idea of a Commission with such terms of reference roaming round the Government of India is abhorrent. Indeed a Commission with stated terms of reference seems to me bad policy.
It seems to me that what we want to do is to bring London and Simla together with a view to elaborating a policy. I would not send out a Commission. I think the right thing would be to send out a Deputation which would inform itself of the views of those interested here and then go out to India to confer with the Viceroy and his Government and anybody else whom the Viceroy and the Deputation thought they ought to see. It might be possible that after a few weeks in India the Viceroy and the Deputation would have agreed upon a cut and dried plan. It might be possible that the preliminary step of a conference between a Deputation on behalf of the Government and the Government of India would lend ultimately to the formation of a Commission. But as a preliminary step a conference in India seems to me of the greatest possible value. The Viceroy was anxious that Mr. Chamberlain as Secretary of State should visit India himself, and this policy had the great advantage (there are innumerable disadvantages) of avoiding the introduction of a third body or persons into the discussion and the formidable task of absorbing its views into the views of others interested. No sooner did I assume office than the Viceroy sent me a cordial telegram urging me to transfer his invitation to Mr. Chamberlain to myself. When one has to co-operate with a man whom one does not know at all, 3,000 miles away, the temptation to have a talk with him is almost irresistible. On the other hand, for a Minister to be away for two or three months from London just now is very difficult. Like my predecessor, I am in the hands of the Cabinet. I would be inclined to suggest to the Cabinet this sort of immediate announcement:

"His Majesty's Government and the Government of India have in view the gradual development of free institutions in India with a view to ultimate self-government within the Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible. As a preliminary to considering what the steps in this direction should be, His Majesty's Government have decided that it is of the highest importance that there should be a free and informal exchange of opinion between those in authority at home and in India. They have therefore decided"

either (a) "that a Deputation should proceed to India in the cold weather to discuss these matters with the Government of India."

or (b) "that the Secretary of State should accept the Viceroy's invitation to proceed to India to discuss these matters with the Viceroy."

"The names of those who will either (a) "form the Deputation"

or (b) "accompany the Secretary of State will be published later."

"I may add that there will be ample opportunity for public discussion of the proposals that will be submitted in due course to Parliament. The Government on whom the responsibility lies as the trustees of the Indian people are convinced that immediate self-government is impossible and agitation for it mischievous. In this view I am certain all responsible and well-informed persons will agree. The time at which the ultimate stage is reached must depend on the success of the intermediate stages and the co-operation of those upon whom they will confer new opportunities of service to India."

If the Cabinet think fit to sanction either of these alternatives, I shall at once telegraph to the Viceroy to ascertain whether he agrees or wishes to make any suggestions.

E. S. M.

30th July 1917.

P.S.—In case any member of the Cabinet may think that the questions raised in this Note are not of extreme urgency, I have collected in Appendix II a number of extracts from telegrams and letters from the Viceroy, the Governor of Bombay, and Sir James Meston, to show how united the highest authorities in India are in holding that an immediate pronouncement is necessary. These extracts speak for themselves.
APPENDIX I.

Whereas we are desirous of developing self-government in our Empire of India:

And whereas the Indian Councils Act, 1909, and the rules made under it made divers important changes in the constitution and functions of the Indian Legislative Councils and in the constitution of the Executive Councils of the Governors of the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay, and also authorised the creation of similar Councils in other provinces:

And whereas a sufficient period of time has elapsed for the working of the provisions of the Act of 1909 to be ascertained and we are advised that the time has come for a further advance:

We have deemed it expedient that a Commission should forthwith issue to examine and report upon the following matters in connection with the Legislative and Executive Councils, Imperial and Provincial:

1. The working of the Legislative Councils since their reconstitution in 1909, with special regard to their legislative, political and administrative results;

2. Whether the Legislative Councils as now constituted adequately represent, or within the numerical limits fixed by the Statute of 1909 can be constituted so as adequately to represent, the different classes and interests of the community;

3. The effect, as regards the representative character of the Legislative Councils, of the system on which the constituencies are formed and the elections held; and what changes are desirable in either;

4. Whether greater effect should be given to the elective principle in constituting the Councils;

5. What powers should be given to the Legislative Councils in matters of legislation, administration, and finance, and whether the constitutional position of the Councils to the executive Government should be modified;

6. Whether the Executive Councils are suitably constituted;

7. Whether for the better attainment of these ends, and if so in what respects, the control now exercised by the Secretary of State in Council over the Government of India, and by the Government of India over the Local Governments, in financial and administrative matters should be relaxed, and a more complete separation effected between the Imperial and the Provincial finances.

And generally to consider the requirements of government in India and to recommend such modifications or expansions in the existing constitutional system as may seem to them expedient.

APPENDIX II.

(a) Extracts from Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, dated 18th May 1917.

The present situation renders it extremely desirable that Government should make some public declaration in regard to constitutional and administrative changes proposed after the war and also as to its attitude towards agitation inaugurated by Home Rule League.

The Russian Revolution, publication of statements as to right of the peoples to govern themselves, the reception accorded to representatives of India at the recent War Conference by the authorities in the United Kingdom
and by the representatives of the Dominions, the feeling that India had done so much to assist the Empire during the war and the general democratic influences of the war, have in the last few months affected political feeling in India materially.

The agitation for immediate Home Rule is being fomented with great vigour by Mrs. Besant, Tilak, and others, and, in absence of any definite announcement of Government as to its policy in the matter, is attracting many of those who hitherto have held less advanced views.

On the other hand there is an influential, though timid, unorganised and comparatively inarticulate body of opinion which is opposed to and afraid of any sudden and violent changes in the constitution and looks to Government for support against the extremist propaganda. There are also many wavering who are looking to us for guidance. The omission of Government to make its attitude clear on this subject is misunderstood by the general public and leaves a free field to extremists. The absence, indeed, of any pronouncement has been the cause of some embarrassment to Local Governments.

Dated 18th May 1917.

We have given this matter of an announcement very careful consideration, and it has been pressed upon us by the Government of Bombay, who are particularly affected by the Home Rule agitation. We have hesitated, therefore, to press you for a decision at a time of such grave preoccupation, but we feel now that it is our duty to do so.

Dated 11th June 1917.

The position here is becoming increasingly difficult owing to my inability to make any authoritative announcement of policy. Bombay, Punjab, both pressing us for an authoritative statement as to how to deal with Home Rule. Lord Pentland and Sir M. O'Dwyer have made statements, and other Local Governments most uncertain what to say.

Dated 6th July 1917.

Can you give me any indication as to when I may expect an announcement of His Majesty's Government's decision as to policy and the appointment of a Commission?

The position of the Government of India is being seriously weakened by our inability to take any line of policy in the absence of a decision by His Majesty's Government.

Dated 10th July 1917.

An interim announcement would be of immense help to us in order to present the difficulties, and we hope it will be made with as little delay as possible.

I lay special stress on the announcement being of His Majesty's Government. I believe that an announcement, if made promptly, would have an excellent effect and would greatly ease the situation.

Dated 18th July 1917.

I hope now that some action may be taken by His Majesty's Government with reference to an announcement on the subject of constitutional reforms. I had hoped that we were on the point of some such announcement when your predecessor resigned.
Government of India were anxiously awaiting an announcement of policy on the eve of his (Mr. Chamberlain's) resignation, and we fear that in consequence of this event a decision as to policy may be indefinitely postponed.

The Home Rule agitation continues. I wish we could have a firm declaration to stop it.

I have just come back from a flying visit to Simla, where I went chiefly in the hope of hearing that a "declaration of policy" had finally been agreed upon between you and the Government of India. I found, alas, that no decision had been come to, and the Viceroy told me that the Cabinet was meeting to settle both this matter and also the advisability of a committee of enquiry.

I have written so much on all this matter to you of late that I am almost ashamed to say more, but I must put to you what I feel to be a very grave danger in delaying a pronouncement.

Tilak and Mrs. Besant and their party have a positive policy which is gaining adherents every day, chiefly for the reason that Government has nothing positive to offer themselves. Any speech that is made by any of us must be of an absolutely negative character; we may tell them what they can't have, but we mayn't tell them what they may look forward to. Many moderates I know of are getting absolutely hopeless of Government giving a lead, and are going over to the Tilak side.

I must express my confirmed opinion to you once more that I think we should have avoided all this trouble if a declaration of policy clear and distinct and without qualifications had been made a year ago. If it is made now it may do some good, but I fear it is too late, for the Home Rule Leaguer will say that he has forced it out of an unwilling Government.

The demand in India for further constitutional advance has reached a stage at which it merits the early and special attention of His Majesty's Government.

The circumstances which combine to bring the question into peculiar prominence now are these:- (1) It is known that the late Viceroy was keenly interested in it, that Lord Chelmsford has taken it up with equal keenness, and that proposals have actually been advanced by the Government of India. (2) A definite scheme was recently presented to the Government of India by a section of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, and there is much speculation as to how far their recommendations correspond with or ignore that scheme. (3) The National Congress has also put forward a revised constitution, and although that body has been urging reform for 30 years, its demand to-day has a special insistence, and appeals to a much larger constituency than at any period in its history. For, after years of schism, the two parties in the Congress—the Extremists and the Moderates—have united in what was virtually a surrender by the Moderates to the Extremists; and, what is even more striking, the Congress has for the first time absorbed
the Moslem League in a common policy, and put an end to the traditional Mahomedan attitude of aloofness from Hindu aspirations. I am aware that many observers consider the Nationalist sentiment to be more extensive than intensive, and regard the racial entente as ephemeral. My own conviction is that Nationalism is both spreading rapidly and sinking deeply, and that it has permanently captured the young Mahomedan party. (4) The last circumstance which I need mention as giving a special fillip to the demands for progress is the unexpected consideration which has been paid to India in the recent Imperial Councils. The cordiality of her reception will gratify India enormously, but it must also and inevitably stimulate her anxiety to meet the Dominions at future Conferences on terms of greater equality as regards her own domestic position.

Now what is it that we ask for? (a) In the first place, we suggest a definite and authoritative statement of British policy in India. There is, I take it, no question that our business in India is to fit it for ultimate self-government. Opinions differ enormously as to when it will be fit; but that is a practical issue which must be left to the future. The goal of free institutions is there, however near or however distant; it has presumably always been there; and why should we not say so? A clear declaration by the Secretary of State in Parliament, or in such other manner as he may advise, would sweep away a mass of doubt and difficulty and distrust which is at present hampering India at every turn.