

HARIJAN

Editor: PYARELAL

VOL. X, No. 47

AHMEDABAD — SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1946

TWO ANNAS

WORKING COMMITTEE'S STATEMENT

The Working Committee have given careful consideration to the statement issued by the British Government on December 6, 1946, as well as other statements made recently on their behalf in Parliament. These statements, though made by way of interpretation and elucidation, are clearly additions to and variations of the British Cabinet Mission's statement of May 16, 1946, on which the whole scheme of the Constituent Assembly was based.

The statement of May 16, 1946, laid down in paragraph 15 as basic principles of the Constitution that "there should be a Union of India embracing both British India and the States," that "all subjects other than Union subjects and all residuary powers should vest in the Provinces" and that "Provinces should be free to form Groups." The Provinces were thus intended to be autonomous, subject to the Union controlling certain specified subjects. Paragraph 19 laid down, *inter alia*, the procedure for Sections to meet, for decisions to be taken as to whether groups should be formed or not, and for any Province to elect to come out of the Group in which it might have been placed.

In their resolution of May 24, 1946, the Working Committee pointed out what appeared to be a divergence between the basic principles and the procedure suggested, in that a measure of compulsion was introduced which infringed the basic principles of Provincial Autonomy. The Cabinet Mission, thereupon, issued a statement on May 25, 1946, in which it was stated that "the interpretation put by the Congress Resolution on Paragraph 15 of the statement, to the effect that the Provinces can in the first instance make the choice whether or not to belong to the Section in which they are placed does not accord with the Delegation's intentions. The reasons for Grouping of the Provinces are well-known and this is an essential feature of the scheme and can only be modified by agreement between the two parties."

The point at issue was not merely one of procedure, but the fundamental principle of Provincial Autonomy and whether or not a Province or part should be coerced against its will.

The Congress made it clear later that their objection was not to Provinces entering sections but to compulsory Grouping and the possibility of a dominating Province framing a constitution for

another Province entirely against the wishes of the latter. This might result in the framing of Rules, and the regulation of Franchise, Electorates, Constituencies for elections and the Composition of the Legislature which might seriously prejudice or even nullify the provision for a Province subsequently to opt out of a Group. It was pointed out that this could never be the intention of the Cabinet Mission as it would be repugnant to the basic principles and policy of the scheme they had propounded. The Congress approach to the problem of Constitution making has all along been that coercion should not be exercised against any Province or part of the country and that the Constitution of Free India should be drawn up by the cooperation and goodwill of all Parties and Provinces concerned.

In a letter dated 15 June, 1946 from Lord Wavell to Maulana Azad, the President of the Congress, it was stated that "the Delegation and I are aware of your objections to the principle of Grouping. I would, however, point out that the statement of May 16 does not make Grouping compulsory. It leaves the decision to the elected representatives of the Provinces concerned, sitting together in Sections. The only provision which is made is that the representatives of certain Provinces should meet in Sections so that they can decide whether or not they wish to form Groups."

Thus the principle which was emphasized again was that Grouping was not compulsory and in regard to Sections a certain procedure was indicated. This procedure was not clear and could be interpreted in more than one way and in any event a point of procedure could not over-ride a basic principle. We pointed out that the right interpretation should be one which did no violence to that principle. Further, in order to smooth the way to the co-operation of all concerned in the working of the proposed scheme, we not only made it clear that we were prepared to go into the Sections, but we also suggested that if our interpretation was not accepted, we would be agreeable to a reference on this point to the Federal Court.

It is well-known that the proposal in regard to grouping affected injuriously two provinces especially, namely, Assam and the North-West Frontier Province, as well as the Sikhs in the Punjab. Their representatives expressed their strong disapproval of this proposal. In a letter to the Secretary of State dated 25th May, 1946, Master Tara Singh gave expression to the anxiety and apprehensions

of the Sikhs and asked for clarification in regard to certain matters. The Secretary of State sent an answer to this letter on June 1, 1946, in the course of which he said: "I have considered carefully the detailed points you raise at the end of your letter. I fear the Mission cannot issue any additions to, or interpretation of, the statement."

In spite of this explicit statement, the British Government have on December 6, issued a statement which is both an addition to, and an interpretation of, the statement of May 16, 1946. They have done so after more than six and a half months, during which period many developments have taken place as a consequence of the original statement. Throughout this period the position of the Congress was made repeatedly clear to the British Government or their representatives, and it was with full knowledge of this position that the British Government took subsequent steps in furtherance of the Cabinet Mission's proposals. That position was in conformity with the basic principles laid down in the statement of May 16, 1946, which statement the Congress had accepted in its entirety. Further the Congress had expressed its willingness to refer, if necessity arose, the point of interpretation to the Federal Court, whose decision should be accepted by the parties concerned.

In the course of his letter dated June 28, 1946, addressed to Mr. Jinnah, the Viceroy stated that the "Congress had accepted the statement of 16th May." In the course of a broadcast on August 24, 1946, the Viceroy, in appealing to the Muslim League to co-operate, pointed out that the Congress are ready to agree that any dispute of interpretation may be referred to the Federal Court.

The Muslim League reversed its former decision and rejected the British Cabinet Mission's scheme by formal resolution and even decided to resort to direct action. Their spokesmen have since repeatedly challenged the very basis of that scheme, that is, the Constitution of a Union of India and have reverted to their demand for a partition of India. Even after the British Government's statement of December 6, 1946, the leaders of the Muslim League have reiterated this demand for partition and the establishment of two separate Independent Governments in India.

When the invitation of the British Government was received by the Congress at the end of November last to send its representatives to London, the Congress position was clearly indicated again. It was on an assurance of the Prime Minister of Great Britain that a representative of the Congress proceeded to London.

In spite of this assurance and of previous assurances to the effect that no additions to, or interpretations of, the statement of May 16, 1946, were going to be made, the British Government have now issued a statement which clearly, in several respects, goes beyond the original statement, on the basis of which progress has been made till now.

The Working Committee deeply regret that the British Government should have acted in a manner which has not been in keeping with their own assurances, and which has created suspicion in the minds of large numbers of the people in India. For some time past the attitude of the British Government and their representatives in India has been such as to add to the difficulties and complexities of the situation in the country. Their present intervention long after the members of the Constituent Assembly had been elected has created a new situation which is full of peril for the future. Because of this, the Working Committee have given anxious and prolonged thought to it.

The Congress seeks to frame, through the Constituent Assembly, a Constitution of a Free and Independent India with the willing co-operation of all elements of the Indian people. The Working Committee regret that the Muslim League members of the Constituent Assembly have refrained from attending its opening session. The Committee, however, appreciate and express their gratification at the presence in the Constituent Assembly of representatives of all other interests and sections of the people of India and note with pleasure the spirit of co-operation in a common task and a high endeavour which has been in evidence during the sessions of the Assembly. The Committee will continue their efforts to make the Constituent Assembly fully representative of all the people of India and trust that members of the Muslim League will give their co-operation in this great task. In order to achieve this, the Committee have advised Congress representatives in the Assembly to postpone consideration of important issues to a subsequent meeting.

In their statement of December 6, 1946, the British Government in giving their interpretation of a doubtful point of procedure have referred to it as a "fundamental point" and suggested that the Constituent Assembly may refer it to the Federal Court at a very early date. Subsequent statements made on behalf of the British Government have made it clear that they are not prepared to accept the decision of this Court should it go against their own interpretation. On behalf of the Muslim League also it has been stated that they will not be bound by the decision of the Federal Court, and a demand for partition of India, which is a negation of the Cabinet Mission's scheme, continues to be put forward. While the Congress has always been willing to agree to a reference to the Federal Court, any reference now, when none of the other parties are prepared to join in it or to accept it, and one of them does not even accept the basis of the scheme, becomes totally uncalled for and unbecoming, and unsuited to the dignity of either the Congress or the Federal Court. By their repeated statements, British statesmen have ruled this out.

The Working Committee are still of opinion that the interpretation put by the British Government

in regard to the method of voting in the Sections is not in conformity with Provincial Autonomy, which is one of the fundamental basis of the scheme proposed in the Statement of May 16. The Committee are anxious to avoid anything that may come in the way of the successful working of the Constituent Assembly and are prepared to do everything in their power to seek and obtain the largest measure of co-operation, provided that no fundamental principle is violated. In view of the importance and urgency of the issues facing the country and the far-reaching consequences which must follow any decisions, the Working Committee are convening an emergency meeting of the A.I.C.C. in Delhi early in January to consider the latest developments and to give such directions as it may deem fit.

ON TRACTORS AND CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS

[The following taken from Janab Jabir A. Ali's article in the *Rural India* of November, 1946 will be read with interest. V. G. D.]

Past practice of agriculture in India has given us the use of the wooden plough and cattle manure. . . Centuries have proved the effectiveness and soundness of these. Now comes the scientist and manufacturer and these dazzle us with the prospects opened to us by the iron mouldboard plough and chemical fertilizers, and later comes the omnipotent tractor. . .

The iron mouldboard plough turns over the soil, and the soil from a depth of 7 or 8 inches is brought to the surface. The humus-filled top-soil is diluted with soil more or less devoid of humus, and thus rendered less fertile. This loss is attempted to be made good by addition of artificial fertilizers, but the humus lost can be put back into the soil only by the application of organic matter like composts. As cattle manure is now scarcer than before, the soil deteriorates and eventually becomes useless for profitable cultivation. This is what has happened in America on a large scale. The tractor which ploughs to a depth of 12 and 14 inches intensifies and expedites agriculture. Cattle having disappeared from farms, the supply of farmyard manure is falling short, and cannot be replaced by any substitute at all.

. . . In India the tractor and the chemical fertilizer are fast coming into fashion and are looked upon as signs of enlightenment and of up-to-date agriculture. This is dangerous. The quick work of the tractor and the immediate results of the use of fertilizers are so alluring that one is not inclined to probe deeper and to make sure that this is not just an illusion.

Whether we use a tractor or not, one thing is certain: to keep up the fertility of the soil, the use on a general and large scale of organic manures is the *sine qua non* of agriculture. . . Composting has come to stay, but it is neither sufficiently understood, nor has it been adopted on a sufficiently large scale. The best help the National Government can give to our farmers is through propaganda and supply of compost. We have immense quantities of vegetation, animal waste, oil cakes, woods of all

kinds at present going to waste and sometimes becoming a nuisance. All this valuable material must be composted and well distributed. We have the sewage and nightsoil of towns, which municipalities must utilize. Then again in and around large towns we have milch cattle in large numbers whose dung and litter should be turned into compost. We shall thus not only grow more food but also grow more nutritious food.

What then of our huge Nitrogen fertilizer plants? Chemicals will always be used on a small scale and have their use, but I for one have no doubt that in the long run, if used continuously and in large measure, they are bound to have a deleterious effect on the soil and will do a lot of harm. They adversely affect the growth of useful bacteria and fungi in the soil. Shall we say they are good in emergencies but not as daily food for plants? Let me quote from Sir Albert Howard:

"The toll of disease is extraordinary and a matter of the utmost anxiety to the farmer. The public is not sufficiently aware of this unsatisfactory state of affairs. If these are the results of agricultural science, they are not encouraging and they are certainly not impressive. They are undoubtedly a phenomenon of the last forty or fifty years and appear alongside of the modern use of artificial manures.

"Artificial manures were born out of the abuse of Liebig's discoveries of the chemical properties of the soil and out of the imperative demands made on the farmer by the invention of machinery."

Experience all over the world and especially in America has shown clearly that the free use of artificial manures combined with deep ploughing has completely destroyed the fertility of millions of acres of good soil. In every case the basic cause has been the absence of humus. In our country we are on the threshold of advance along western lines. Let us hope we shall not fall into the same pits as modern farmers in the West have done. We have not even the excuse of certain countries that we have not sufficient organic matter available. All the organic matter we need is there, but it awaits proper handling and distribution. We must look to Government to create an efficient organization and composting arrangement, as well as retain for us in India all the oil-cake, bone, blood etc., which are now being exported.

PLEASE NOTE

Though we have repeatedly drawn the attention of the subscribers to not sending their subscriptions by cheques, it seems it suits some of them better. We, therefore, have to draw their attention to two things: one, to avoid sending cheques as far as possible and two, if they prefer sending cheques to remit an additional amount of annas eight to cover the discount charged by banks which varies with different banks. When this additional expense is not remitted the subscription amount becomes a fraction which is not amenable to adjustments in calculations of the subscription amount.

MANAGER

HARIJAN

December 29

1946

WHAT WILL SOUTH AFRICA DO?

(By M. K. Gandhi)

The deputation headed by Shrimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit and sent to the U. N. O. Conference by the Interim Government has undoubtedly done very effective work with marked ability and success. That is clear from the following cablegram sent by Shrimati Vijayalakshmi Pandit from New York :

"Today with your blessings justice of South African Indian cause was vindicated. Committee voting twentyfour to nineteen in our favour. Went to General Smuts after meeting and shook hands. He expressed appreciation at manner in which I had conducted case."

It remains now to be seen how the Parliament of the Union of South Africa and its European public respond. Field Marshal Smuts was able to hurl at the Indian deputation the taunt that India treated her so-called "Untouchables", legally described as the "Scheduled Classes", much worse than the Union treated her Asiatics or for that matter the Africans. There would be much to be said for the Field Marshal's taunt if it was true. It is true of South Africa that her treatment of Asiatics has legally deteriorated from time to time, so much so that it has now become well-nigh unbearable. Almost every promise made by the Union Government to the Government of India has now been broken. In India, on the other hand, there never has been any law carrying the bar sinister against the Scheduled Classes. It can be proved up to the hilt that the law has always sought to protect the Scheduled Classes. There is no legal bar, so far as I am aware, against any of the Scheduled Classes being regarded as equal in status to the tallest Indian. What is however true to the shame of orthodox Hinduism and the *Sanatani* Hindus is that religious custom has denied to these Untouchables the rights which the law has allowed, and it is unfortunately also true that sometimes custom overrides the law. But public opinion is progressively rising against this barbarous custom and it is merely a question of time when the custom will be swept out of existence. Let us, therefore, hope that instead of taking doubtful advantage of the things in India which no one defends and against which public opinion is progressively rising, the Europeans of the Union of South Africa will recognize that if the U. N. O. Conference is any index of world opinion, it is decidedly against the European prejudice which has hardened into law.

Shrirampur, 12-12-'46

REDISCOVERING FAITH

I take it that the readers of the *Harijan* follow through the daily press the movements and activities of Gandhiji in East Bengal. I consider his mission as one for rediscovering for the nation their lost faith.

Clinging fast to observances — good, bad or indifferent, but all termed religious — there is plenty of in all societies. The loss of bangles, vermilion mark, tuft of hair or beard causes, indeed, inconsolable dejection. And yet live faith has disappeared from the people. For, what is the worth of a faith, if it does not generate strength in the person affirming it, to stand for it alone; to live for it and, if need be, to lay down his life for it? Faith inherently implies the birth of a new sense of self-esteem and an unconquerable will to resist with one's very life any force which haughtily and unjustly seeks to crush it. There is no faith, worth the name, which does not create such strength in its followers, and when it loses that capacity, it degenerates into a mere bundle of beliefs, observances and customs to be adhered to while life is easy and there are no adverse conditions to face. Those customs and observances by themselves might not be worth anything, and, but for mental inertia, some of them might have been even voluntarily discarded long ago, as indeed, several modern men and women have discarded the bangles, the vermilion mark, the sectarian marks on the forehead, the tuft of hair or the beard. It was some strong faith, which created some of these customs and observances and made them the external badges of a purposeful life. But, if a people have lost that fundamental substance within, the mere retention or restoration of external symbols will not rekindle the spiritual fire, which ultimately every faith is.

It is the rediscovery of this lost faith, which is the main problem of all down-trodden peoples in general, and of our women in particular. Arson, loot, abduction, rape, forcible conversions etc. are not altogether new events in the history of the world. Time and again these things have happened in India also. The atrocities committed by the military and the police in the Punjab during the week of the Jallianwala Massacre were except for abductions and conversions, similar to, if not worse than, those in East Bengal. The victims there were not the mild Bengali Hindus, but martial Punjabis — Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. During the repressions of 1942-44 women suffered similar indignities not at Chimur alone—which on account of Shri Bhansali's memorable fast got publicity—but in many more places. On every occasion we find that, speaking broadly, men lacked not so much the physical as the moral courage to protect their women, and the women too lacked that strength of faith—that self-respect born of a purpose in life—which generates a will to resist even in the physically weak. If adequate physical strength and means were not available to their men, it cannot be expected that women could have protected themselves by a show of physical strength. And if men

too lacked the moral courage to stand by their women and the weak and protect them as best as possible until every one of the guardians died, but instead, ran away for the sake of their own lives, it is clear that God alone could help such women. I do not use the words "God alone" euphemistically for "none"; I use it to indicate that inner spirit which produces martyrs and to crush which all tyrants aspire.

Gandhiji's whole life has been devoted to enable India to rediscover this faith. He himself realized, first, the loss of this faith, when at the age of less than 25, he had to endure his first insult by the Political Agent of Rajkot. The insult by itself was relatively a trivial affair and might be explained away as the rudeness of a not well-bred individual officer. Indeed, even the Lion of Bombay, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, could give him no better counsel than to pocket it and forget it. Gandhiji pocketed it no doubt. He could not have done anything else at the time, and later on learnt to pocket even greater insults than this one. But he could not forget it, and sought for a sure specific against it ever since. This he discovered on a public coach in South Africa under the hard blows of its White conductor. Even as the hammering of a cocoanut with a stone brings out the sweet kernel within, so every blow that fell upon him, as it were, broke the outer shell and revealed to him the fire that lay hidden beneath. He discovered that a man might be beaten to death by another and tortured in a hundred ways, but he could not be made to yield to the latter against his own will. It was the fear of death, torture, loss of property, of social relations and comforts of life etc. which made man give up his independence, principles and sense of self-respect, and if that fear was once cast off, a single individual became as strong as an army. Conversely, without it, even trained soldiers would put up with all sorts of indignities and flee with as much panic as that of the terror-stricken and suspicious people of Bengal and Bihar.

And, when Gandhiji rediscovered this faith, he transmitted it to the men and women of South Africa. With what results, let his opponent, Field-Marshal Smuts, himself say:

"Gandhi . . . showed a new technique—one which he afterwards made world famous in his political campaigns in India . . . For him everything went according to plan. For me—the defender of law and order—there was the usual trying situation, the odium of carrying out a law which had not strong public support, and finally the discomfiture when the law had to be repealed. For him it was a successful coup. Nor was the personal touch wanting, for nothing in Gandhi's procedure is without a peculiar personal touch. In gaol, he had prepared for me a very useful pair of sandals which he presented to me when he was set free! I have worn these sandals for many a summer since then. . . ." (Quoted from Shridharani's *The Mahatma and the World*).

If by 'technique' we simply understand such items as civil disobedience, non-cooperation, non-payment of taxes and the like, we shall commit the mistake of appreciating a book for its jacket, binding and the quality of the paper instead of its matter. These items are only outward symbols, even as the vermilion mark and the bangles are but outward symbols of a woman's *saubhagya* (wifehood). The technique of civil disobedience by itself could not have given to the women of Bombay the strength to hold to the flag against the horse-hoofs of the mounted police, or those of Borsad to endure ruthless lathi charges and dragging by the hair by policemen. Various similar instances might be cited. It was the rediscovery—may be, only faint and temporary, nevertheless real—by a section of the Indian public of their faith, which gave them the strength to suffer hardships, and to challenge a mighty empire, as it was the lack of it which was responsible for the almost dumb and abject submission to wickedness and indignities on other occasions.

One will hardly find a place in India, in which a handful of Hindus, or a handful of Mussalmans or Christians will not be found living in the midst of a considerable number of men of another community. Must those who are few in numbers in a village or street abandon those places, if they do not wish to abjure their own faith and accept that of the local majority? Also, must one who wants to change his religion should also change his place of abode? And, if this is considered to be the only course, does it also not mean that any one who wants to visit a place inhabited by the people of another community would have to do so only under police or military escort? If the answer is, 'yes, such a position has got to be accepted,' then, a person with a living sense of human dignity and of the importance of mutual trust and amity in life, will simply refuse to accept that position lying down. Even cows and buffaloes, goats and sheep herd together, graze together and live peacefully in a common yard. Pigeons, sparrows and various birds of heterogeneous species fearlessly mix together in the field. Can a man be reconciled to a situation which reduces him to a level lower than that of birds and cattle? There is something fundamentally wrong with that situation, and it has got to be remedied. It must be possible for a single individual to live peacefully, unmolested and without fear or without artificial protection amidst people of different religious persuasions. If he cannot do so, there is something wrong about his faith, and if the other community does not allow him to do so, then too there must be something wrong about his own faith as well as the faith of that other community. In either case, he must rediscover his faith for the sake of both.

This, to my mind, is the nature of Gandhiji's present quest. The down-trodden humanity—and woman is a large part of it—must be redeemed from the feeling that they lived and propagated the race, simply because they were not dead or

that they could live only under the protection of an external strength, which might fail. But they must be made to realize that unfailing strength lies within themselves. That realization will generate in their breast the determination to risk their lives at any moment in vindication of it and of everything which they hold, for the time being, sacred, and which they identify with God, their entire being, their self-respect and honour. "A determined man," says Romain Rolland, "who is prepared to risk his life at any moment can lift the world off its hinges."

The chorus of a psalm which I often used to hear during my college days is indelibly impressed upon my memory:

Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone;
Dare to have a purpose firm,
Dare to make it known.

Vapi, 16-12-'46

K. G. MASHRUWALA

FOR PEACE AND HARMONY

Mr. O. W. Francis of Hazaribagh, Bihar, in a letter to Gandhiji appreciating his exhortations to the people to pray and to do so from the heart, as also his efforts in the district of Noakhali "to help bring peace to the hundreds of the down-stricken families whose homes were devastated," and engender by his soothing influence, "a brotherly feeling between the Hindus and the Muslims of Shrirampur, encloses the following lines" written by a man of the Religious Order, just after the great Calcutta Killing":

O God, grant peace and harmony
To our unhappy land, its distraught, sorrow-laden lives.
Pour Thou Thy sovereign balm of healing.
Into the gaping, festering wounds of discord and strife.
How sorely we need the strength that comes of Unity;
Yet how deep-rooted are the hatred and jealousy,
Suspicion and the pride of power,
The bitter feuds that reach hands to each other's throats.
The fury of fanatic, blood-thirsty creeds!
Are we not all Thy children, members of one household?
And art not Thou our goal of this earth's pilgrimage,
Where brother linked to brother, we should bend to
common tasks,
And struggle against disease and squalor,
Dire misery and abject ignorance?
To Thee the famished raise their pitiful cries;
Thou hearest the groans of millions tortured with
disease;
The wails of victims marked for the early grave
escape Thee not.
Alas! our hapless land has become a vast hecatomb;
Its sons and daughters a sacrificial holocaust.
What would change it into a smiling land of joy,
But the earnest striving of all hands,
With all hearts bound in the unity of love?
Why should religion separate us man from man?
It should draw us to Thee, draw us together,
It should teach us to love,
For Thou, O God, art Love.

Vapi, 17-12-'46

K. G. MASHRUWALA

ALL IS NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERS

At night, from Kisan Ashram we can see the lights of Mussoorie, a long sparkling line of electricity away up in the mountains. Fine houses are there, all lighted up, motor and rickshaw roads with electric standards every few yards, lines of glittering shops filled with all the fashions of East and West, cinemas, dance halls, all brightly lighted and cleanly swept. But those who keep this gay world clean are huddled up in dark, damp rooms, cheek by jowl with public urinals and latrines. No electric light is there, no bathrooms; nothing but squalor and misery.

The rich folks who do no physical or dirty work have baths and basins, taps, towels and soap. But the *bhangis* who clean their commodes and chamber-pots, sweep their drains and carry away their dirt and rubbish, have nothing but the "pail-depot" for bathing, washing and drinking. And the "pail-depot", gentle reader, is the tap and drain where all the foul pots and pails of their scavenging work have to be washed!!

Oh moneyed folks of rich Mussoorie! whose easy lives have produced this need for "sweepers", come with me and visit the quarters allotted to the human beings who keep your beautiful houses sweet and clean.

Come out of the smart bazaar down this steep narrow path — they say it is dangerous at night, there being no light on it. Here is the line of living quarters, (there are some twenty such in Mussoorie). You hold your noses—yes, there are public latrines just along here. But first look into one of these rooms. You can't see properly—of course not, there are no windows. And you hesitate to step inside. But you must come in. Mind! don't tread on the *roti* a wretched woman is trying to cook on a *chulha* just behind the door, and don't fall over the bed which is almost on top of the *chulha*! The wonder is it does not get burnt! Now your eyes are getting more accustomed to the light, look further into the room. More beds — old boxes, baskets, ragged clothes, all crammed up together, and human beings perching and squatting here and there. Let us calculate the size of the room — not more than 10 ft. by 15 ft. And how many people live in it? Fifteen men, women and children. The smoke from the *chulha* is suffocating you — you'd better get out into the fresh air. But where is the fresh air even outside? What is this on the outer side of the wall of the room? A row of public urinals, and next to them the public latrines. Don't be faint-hearted, having got so far you must face it out to the end. Here is the "pail-depot" beyond the latrines, where the muck pails are cleaned. Would you like to have a drink of water? This is the best they can offer you. Here men, women and children have to drink, wash and bathe. You are beginning to feel a bit queer? I think you would like to get away. Alright, but just peep into one more room beyond the "pail-depot". Step down carefully, the floor is rather low and the foul water

from the "pail-depot" drain makes it very damp. This time there is a window, but don't go too near it, the wall is dangerously cracked and will tumble down the mountain side one of these days.

That is enough — come away to your well swept bungalows in your pretty gardens. But may the recollection of what you have experienced today give you no peace until these pitch-black stains have been wiped away from rich Mussoorie's glittering heights!

Kisan Ashram, 28-10-'46

MIRABEHN

GANDHIJI'S ADVICE TO ASSAM

Gandhiji's views on the Constituent Assembly and the situation created by H.M.G.'s statement of December 6, are contained in an account of an interview given by him to two Assam Congressmen, Messrs. Bijayachandra Bhagwat and Mohendra Mohan Chowdhury, who saw Gandhiji on behalf of Mr. G. D. Bardoloi, the Premier of Assam on December 15.

Asked for guidance in regard to the question of Grouping, Gandhiji replied:

"I do not need a single minute to come to a decision, for, on this I have a mind. I am a Congressman to the very marrow, as I am mainly the framer of the constitution of the Congress as it stands today. I told Bardoloi that if there is no clear guidance from the Congress Committee, Assam should not go into the sections. It should lodge its protest and retire from the Constituent Assembly. It will be a kind of *Satyagraha* against the Congress for the good of the Congress.

"Rightly or wrongly, the Congress has come to the decision that it will stand by the judgment of the Federal Court. The dice are heavily loaded. The decision of the Federal Court will go against the Congress interpretation of Grouping as far as I can make out, for the simple reason that the Cabinet has got legal advice which upholds their decision.

"The Federal Court is the creation of the British. It is a packed court. To be consistent, the Congress must abide by its decision whatever it may be. If Assam keeps quiet, it is finished. No one can force Assam to do what it does not want to do. It is autonomous to a large extent today.

"It must become fully independent and autonomous. Whether you have that courage, grit and the gumption, I do not know. You alone can say that. But if you can make that declaration, it will be a fine thing. As soon as the time comes for the Constituent Assembly to go into sections you will say, "Gentlemen, Assam retires." For the independence of India it is the only condition. Each unit must be able to decide and act for itself. I am hoping that in this, Assam will lead the way.

SAME FOR THE SIKHS

"I have the same advice for the Sikhs. But your position is much happier than that of the Sikhs. You are a whole province. They are a community inside a province. But I feel every indi-

vidual has the right to act for himself. just as I have."

Q. "But we are told that the framing of the constitution for the whole of India cannot be held up for the sake of Assam. Assam cannot be allowed to block the way."

A. "There is no need to do that. That is why I say I am in utter darkness. Why are not these simple truths evident to all after so many years? If Assam retires, it does not block, but leads the way to India's independence."

Q. "The British Government has said that the constitution framed by the Constituent Assembly cannot be imposed on unwilling units. So, if some parts do not accept it, the British Parliament won't accept it."

A. "Who is the British Government? If we think independence is going to descend on our heads from England or somewhere, we are greatly mistaken. It won't be independence. We will be crushed to atoms. We are fluctuating between independence and helpless dependence. The Cabinet Mission's plan lies in between.

"If we act rightly there will be the full blown flower of independence. If we react wrongly, the blossom will wither away. Mind you, the League standpoint is quite correct. If they stand out, the Constituent Assembly cannot impose its constitution on an unwilling party. The British Government has no say in the matter, one way or the other.

"The British cannot interfere with the working of the Constituent Assembly. Supposing the vast majority, including the Muslims and others form a constitution, you can defy the British Parliament if it seeks to interfere. Power is in your hands. Some such thing happened in Ireland only recently. And De Valera is no non-violent fighter. The position of India is far better than that of Ireland. If we have not the penetration, we will lose the advantage we have, as it is apparently being lost today.

"If Assam takes care of itself, the rest of India will be able to look after itself. What have you got to do with the constitution of the Union Government? You should form your own constitution. That is enough. You have the basis of a constitution all right even now.

"I have never despised the 1935 constitution. It is based on provincial autonomy. It has the capacity for fullest growth, provided the people are worth it. The hill people are with you. Many Muslims are also with you. The remainder can be too, if you act on the square.

"You will have to forget petty jealousies and rivalries and overcome your weaknesses. Assam has many weaknesses as it has much strength, for I know my Assam."

"With your blessings we can even go outside the Congress and fight," the Assam Congressmen interposed.

Gandhiji replied that in 1939 when there was the question of giving up the Ministry, Subhas

Babu opposed it as he thought Assam's was a special case. I told Bardoloi that there was much in what, Subhas Babu had said and although, I was the author of that scheme of boycott, I said: Assam should not come out if it did not feel like it. But Assam did come out. It was wrong.

The Assam Congressmen said that the Maulana Saheb had then said that exception could not be made in the case of Assam.

Gandhiji replied: "Here there is no question of exception. Assam rebelled and that civilly. But we have that slavish mentality. We look to the Congress and then feel that if we do not follow it slavishly, something will go wrong with it. I have said that not only a province but even an individual can rebel against the Congress and by doing so save it, assuming that he is in the right. I have done so myself. Congress has not attained the present stature without much travail.

"I remember in 1918, I think, there was the Provincial Conference of the Congress workers of Gujarat at Ahmedabad. The late Abbas Tyabjee Saheb was in the chair. All the old guards were there. The Ali Brothers had not yet joined hands with me fully then, as they did later on. The late Shri Vitthalbhai Patel was there, and I moved the non-co-operation resolution. I was a nonentity then. A constitutional question arose. Could a provincial conference anticipate the decision of the Congress? I said "yes". A provincial conference and even a single individual could anticipate the Congress for its own benefit. In spite of opposition of the old hands, the resolution was carried. That paved the way for the Congress to pass a similar resolution at Calcutta. India was dumbfounded at the audacity of a provincial conference passing the revolutionary resolution.

"We had formed a Satyagraha Sabha outside the Congress. It was joined by Horniman, Sarojini Devi, Shankarlal, Umar Sobhani and Vallabhbhai. I was ill. The Rowlatt Act was passed. I shook with rage. I said to the Sardar I could do nothing unless he helped me. Sardar was willing. And the rest you know. It was rebellion, but a healthy one. We celebrate the 6th of April to the 13th. You have all these historical instances before you.

"I have given you all this time to steel your hearts, to give you courage. If you do not act correctly and now, Assam will be finished. Tell Bardoloi, I do not feel the least uneasiness. My mind is made up. Assam must not lose its soul. It must uphold it against the whole world. Else I will say that Assam had only manikins and no men. It is an impertinent suggestion that Bengal should dominate Assam in any way."

Asked if they could tell the people that they have rebelled against the Congress with Gandhiji's blessings Gandhiji said, "Talk of God's blessings. They are much richer. Tell the people even if Gandhi tries to dissuade us, we won't listen."

PEACE PLAN IN NOAKHALI

Gandhiji's peace plan in Noakhali was interpreted by Satish Chandra Das Gupta, chief of the Sodepur Ashram, to an Associated Press of America correspondent visiting Gandhiji's Shrirampur headquarters this week.

With Shrirampur at one end, the plan is being executed around an area of 20 square miles. Fifteen peace workers, divided into ten stationary peace units, have been working on the plan since November 24 in several rural areas of the Ramganj police station.

Shri Das Gupta said that Gandhiji's peace plan is centred around four corner-stones: (a) Spiritual effort. (b) Man is essentially good. (c) Love. (d) Non-violence of the brave.

He said, "The peace mission is intended to establish that there is really no bar for unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. It aims at instilling bravery in the hearts of the Hindu minority and repentance in the hearts of the miscreants. Unity can never come about so long as fear, on the one hand and hatred, on the other, are the guiding passions.

"The peace-worker's task is to produce such a revolutionary change in the disturbed atmosphere that there should be no more possibility for any mischief in future."

Discussing the *modus operandi* Shri Das Gupta said: "Peace workers must be pledged to truth, love and non-violence. They must reside in the disturbed village and move with everyone, including the miscreants, as blood brothers.

"The peace-worker should entertain no idea of defence, even if he is attacked. His only defence would be to die at the hands of his opponent.

"This sense of bravery revolutionizes the entire atmosphere. Cowards shed their cowardice and enemies shed their hatred. Peace prevails again, not the transient peace imposed at the point of the soldier's gun or the policeman's baton, but a real, lasting and sustaining peace."

Dealing with the extent of success achieved so far, Shri Das Gupta said: "The Hindus now have begun to move about fearlessly and the Muslims are shedding their hatred and anger."

Asked if more Congressmen in India should follow this plan, Shri Das Gupta replied: "If they do and if they put into test the weapon of the non-violence of the brave, the face of the world would be changing fast."

Calcutta, 21-12-'46

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