

CHAPTER - VI

Election and the final acquiescence in a settlement(1946-1947)

On 21 August 1945, Lord Wavell announced the government decision to hold election to the provincial assemblies and the Central Assembly sometime in the winter of the same year. The elections were long overdue. They could not be held in time because of the critical situations of war. But now it was felt by His Majesty's Government "to convene as soon as possible a constitution-making body" as a preliminary step to hold elections and thereafter to undertake discussions with the popular representatives. The purpose for initiating such exercise, it was further announced by the Viceroy was that the "Government are determined to do their utmost to promote in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion the early realisation of full self-government in India".⁽¹⁾ Curiously it may be noted here in paranthesis that the eagerness of the Labour Government to arrive at a settlement and grant self-government to India was a sham. Wavell tells us that the Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin hated the idea 'of our leaving India' and he felt that both Alexander (a member of the Cabinet Mission) and Bevin "are in reality imperialists and dislike any idea of leaving India".⁽²⁾

Ambedkar was unhappy at the announcement of the election decision. The Working Committee of the All-India Scheduled Castes

Federation opposed the proposed election to the Central Assembly as well as the idea of Constituent Assembly. The objection was not wholly without reason. The Scheduled Castes could not obtain their representation in the Central Legislature under the Government of India Act 1935, as the federal part of the Act had not been implemented and they had, therefore, only one nominated representative there. So election to the Central Assembly was opposed on the ground that the Scheduled Castes had no representation in it. The plan of Constituent Assembly was opposed because such a body would remain pliable to the wishes of the majority community and also because of the fact that the Scheduled Castes with a very small membership in the provincial assemblies would have remote chance to find satisfactory representation in the Constituent Assembly. Finally the Scheduled Castes would still stick to their old demand of immediate cancellation of the Poona Pact arrangement because they believed that a joint electorate system devised by the Poona Pact would not be able to send their real representatives in the Constituent Assembly. But all said, the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation decided to take part in the election and called upon all Scheduled Caste people to join their organisation which was claimed to be the sole representative body of the scheduled castes. (3)

The results of the general elections in India were revealing in many ways. Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly which

was already held and of which the complete results became available towards the end of December 1945 showed that the Congress won an overwhelming success in the General constituencies and the Muslim League won every Muslim seat. Elections to the provincial legislatures which were held according to a staggered schedule also showed the same result. Thus Congress ministries were formed in six provinces. The election results now convinced Lord Wavell that the Congress commanded the support of practically all Caste Hindus and of certain other elements as well. The Viceroy also realised that the Scheduled Castes were divided and many of them even supported the Congress. The election results, therefore, strengthened the earlier colonial assumption that the political fate of the country need to be settled in consultation alone with the two representative parties of India namely the Congress and the Muslim League and the opinion of other sections, the Scheduled Castes for example need not be taken very seriously.

As for the performance of the Scheduled Castes it may be noted that their community fielded candidates for the election in three separate categories i.e. those belonging to the Congress, those nominated by Ambedkar's All-India Scheduled Caste Federation and those belonging to the mushroom regional parties as well as independents. In the election of 1937 Ambedkar's followers contested mainly on a regional level. Now they had organised themselves at the all-India level and seemed to have gathered

enough strength to become an able rival of Congress. But the election results indicated an almost different picture. Out of 151 Scheduled Caste seats Congress won 123, the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation only 2 and other parties including the Independents 26.

Primary elections could be held only for 43 seats where the voters were exclusively Scheduled Caste people. In such constituencies the percentage of votes polled by the Congress, the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation and the Independent candidates were 29, 26 and 44 respectively. In all these contests Congress topped the poll in 20 seats, the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation in 13 seats and other parties including Independents in 10 seats.⁽⁴⁾

The election result and the reverses of the non-Congress Scheduled Caste candidates was interpreted by Ambedkar in his own way. Acting upon his poll analysis of seven Madras constituencies viz., Coconada, Ellore, Bandar, Tanjore, Mannargudi, Ariyalur, Sattur and Amalapuram, Ambedkar showed that many of the Scheduled Caste candidates who won the contest secured votes even larger than those obtained by Caste Hindu candidates. This is a clear enough indication that the winning Scheduled Caste candidates owed their success to the votes of the Caste Hindus and not of the voters of their own community. Then again Ambedkar made a statistical analysis of the results of primary elections and

compared them with those of the final election. Thereafter he pointed out that the Scheduled Castes candidates who were elected in the final round were found to be invariably the persons who had failed in the primary elections. This means that a successful Scheduled Caste candidate would have to remain as 'yes master' of his boss namely the Caste Hindus without whose support his political career would be doomed. Finally, Ambedkar also referred to the extreme disparity between the voting strength of the Hindus and the Scheduled Castes which according to him was largely responsible for the poor performance of the latter group of candidates in the election. He would therefore once again plead for a reversion to the Communal Award or a separate electorate system without which the Scheduled Caste people cannot have a true representative in any popular body.⁽⁵⁾

The results of 1946 election served as an eye-opener in another direction. In 1937 it was noticed that quite in a number of cases a large number of Hindu voters were reluctant to exercise their franchise for returning the Scheduled Caste candidates in the poll. In 1946 election the Caste Hindu voters felt more serious about election matters in the sense that most of them this time voted in favour of the Congress nominated or Congress sponsored Scheduled Caste candidate. This was the reason why Congress won majority of Scheduled Caste seats while winning minority of popular votes in primary elections.

The Congress not only captured an overwhelming majority of the Scheduled Caste but also of the general non-Muhammadan seats.

Regionwise election analysis had also revealed that in spite of the general trend of communal voting throughout the country Congress was the only party which had to a partial extent spread its political influence over a large segment of Indian population cutting across the barriers of religion and caste. The N.W.F.P. Governor for instance, reported to Wavell in February 1946 that while Muslim officials and the 'bigger Khans' or landlords were all for the Muslim League, the Congress was still getting the support of the 'less well-to-do' Muslims due to its promises of economic reforms. (6) In view of the general success of the Congress the British Government now felt convinced that the political settlement in India could no longer be kept uncertain on a plea of indecision among the different communities. In a debate in the House of Commons on 15 March 1946, Prime Minister Attlee therefore made a significant announcement - 'We are mindful of the rights of the minorities and the minorities should be able to live free from fear. On the other hand, we cannot allow a minority to place their veto on the advance of the majority'. (7) The announcement made it quite clear that ministerial changes in England had also led to a substantial change in the old imperial policy to the colonies. The idea of British trusteeship for the Indian minorities held by the former Prime Minister Churchill, had been discarded and the government did no longer seem to be willing to function under a paradoxical situation of making Indians responsible for governing themselves and at the same time retaining the so-called colonial

responsibility for the treatment of minorities. The result of the election and the changed policy of the British Government on the question of minorities indicated that Ambedkar's claim for the treatment of the Scheduled Castes as a minority as distinct as the Muslims would not receive any serious consideration.

On March 15, 1946, it was also announced that the British Government would send a Cabinet Mission to India to resolve the Indian political deadlock. On March 23 three cabinet members, Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade and A.V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty arrived in India. By then the trend of elections already complete was indicative of sweeping Congress victory in the Scheduled Caste seats. Nevertheless while selecting leaders to hold discussion with the Cabinet Mission the Viceroy betrayed his undue inclination for Ambedkar's organisation. "If the trend shown by the elections", the Secretary of State also commented, "...continues it is quite possible that Dr. Ambedkar himself... would have no chance of being elected to the Constitution-making Body".⁽⁸⁾ He felt helpless that in that case the true representative of the 'Depressed Classes' could not be accommodated in the said Body. So the Viceroy decided to chose Ambedkar to represent the Scheduled Castes. But then in view of the spectacular Congress victory in the Scheduled Castes seats, the Viceroy had also to invite three Congress Scheduled Caste leaders namely Jagajivan

Ram, Radhanath Das and Prthvi Singh Azad who represented the pro-Congress All-India Depressed Classes League.

Before the Cabinet Mission had started discussion with the leading individuals the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation in its meeting held at Delhi resolved that the future constitution of India must include proper safeguards for the protection of the rights and interests of the Scheduled Castes in a manner determined by the Federation which was claimed to be the only impartial spokesman of their community. Once again demand was placed for separate electorate and abrogation of the Poona arrangement. The Working Committee of the Federation also objected to the scheme of Constituent Assembly. A memorandum containing the viewpoints of the Federation was also submitted to the Cabinet Mission. Paragraph 5 of the said memorandum made a list of safeguards designed to secure to the Scheduled Castes adequate representation in Government and the Public Services. It was also specifically laid down that the Federation would never accept any constitution in which those safeguards were not included.

Three days after the said meeting of the Federation Ambedkar had a discussion with the Cabinet delegation on 5 April 1946. In course of that discussion Ambedkar said that he did not want a Constituent Assembly at all because he was afraid that it would be dominated by the caste Hindus, and the Scheduled Caste members

would be no more than a small minority which would always be outvoted even if 'a three-quarters or a two-thirds majority were required for the Assembly's decisions'. He was further apprehensive that "there would be an immense amount of corruption in the Assembly - members would be bought over to vote against the interests of their communities".⁽⁹⁾

In his long parley with the Viceroy Ambedkar had described that the mechanism of double election was responsible for a total discomfiture of the banafide Scheduled Caste candidates who could not win the election contest even though they polled highest in the primary election. He had also accused the Congress for overawing the voters in order to secure the return of candidates after its choice. As for the much publicised change in the attitude of the Caste Hindus he held that the condition of the Untouchables did not improve at all and in most cases they were in the same miserable position in which they had been before. To Ambedkar, the Scheduled Castes, therefore must be of necessity granted separate electorates for they would never have their own representatives without. Finally, while giving his opinion as to how communal questions can be settled Ambedkar said that the question should be referred to a conference of the leaders of the different communities. "If the conference failed to arrive at an agreed solution His Majesty's Government would have to make an award". He hoped that this would no doubt be accepted. At any rate some satisfactory settlement had to be worked out failing

which he thought "that if India became independent it would be one of the greatest disasters that could happen".(10)

Three days after Ambedkar had his discussion with the Cabinet delegation, Jagajivan Ram, Radhanath Das and Prithvi Singh Azad, all representing the pro-Congress All-India Depressed Classes League were invited to exchange their views with the same delegation on 8 April 1946. In that meeting a memorandum prepared on behalf of the All-India Depressed Classes League was submitted to the delegation. The memorandum stated that the League had been most disappointed to note that Ambedkar and Sivaraj had originally been invited by the Delegation to represent the Scheduled Castes. The recently held election results, the League pointed out, had exploded the myth of popularity of Ambedkar and his Federation among the Scheduled Caste people. It was also proved beyond doubt that the majority view of the Scheduled Castes was represented by the All-India Depressed Classes League and not by an isolationist like Ambedkar and his party. The delegates then pointed out that so far defending the rights and interests of the Depressed Classes were concerned they were no less zealous than the Federation. "The difference between the Scheduled Castes Federation and the Depressed Classes League was that the Federation holds that the Scheduled Castes are not Hindus, but a religious minority of their own. The League view was that this was incorrect, in that the Scheduled Caste considered themselves Hindus, and had sacrificed much for the cause of Hinduism".(11)

It may be noted here that the League's views were nearer the truth. The so-called Depressed Classes even with a self-estimated sense of minority cannot be identified as a minority so far as the number of their population is concerned and more so when some other backward people are also included within their category. Moreover Hinduism being essentially a way of life no one can excommunicate a large number of people from its fold especially when they would prefer to be called Hindus. Even Ambedkar with all his hatred for Hinduism 'got all the funeral obsequies performed by his son in the Hindu tradition' and got his head even tonsured after the death of his beloved wife who died as a Hindu. In his bereavement he had also put on a hermit's dress.⁽¹²⁾ No wonder then that most people would consider him a Hindu at least so long as he would not apostatize from its fold. It is not, therefore, correct to say that the Untouchables were a religious minority. The League representatives who met the Delegation further held that the main disability of the Scheduled Castes "was not religious or social, but economic, though there was in South India a certain amount of untouchability and social prejudice against them". Once again the League had not merely made a correct diagnosis of the ailment but had also prescribed a correct remedy for the disease - this 'would disappear when their economic status had been improved'.⁽¹³⁾

The representatives of the Depressed Classes League firmly held that although they were not in favour of separate electorate

they would expect that in the future constitution of India the Depressed Classes would have adequate safeguards for the protection of their rights and interests which should continue as long as these classes do not reach the level of the Caste Hindus. As regards the Interim Government, the League was opposed to weightage being given to any community by depriving another community of its legitimate share. "But if it was decided to give weightage the Scheduled Castes must also be given weightage". With regards Interim Government the League further suggested that the Scheduled Caste members of the Provincial Assemblies should be allowed to form an electoral college to select persons to be included in the Central Government. "Any interim arrangement", it had very clearly pointed out, "which did not fulfil these conditions would be unacceptable to the Depressed Classes".⁽¹⁴⁾

After having had long interviews with different leaders the Mission next sat in conference in Simla which had its several meetings from 5 May to 12 May 1946. But the delegates could not arrive at a decision and it was then announced in an official communique that the Conference had failed to evolve an agreed plan and it was therefore left to the Mission to take a unilateral decision in the matter. The decision was announced on 16 May 1946. The most important recommendation was to set up a Constituent Assembly whose members were to be elected by the provincial legislatures by means of proportional representation with provision of reserved seats for the Muslims and the Sikhs. Secondly an Advisory Committee would be also set up which

'should contain full representation of the interests affected'. The function of the Advisory Committee will be "to report to the Union Constituent Assembly upon the list of Fundamental Rights, the clauses for the protection of minorities, and a scheme for the administration of the tribal and excluded areas, and to advise whether these rights should be incorporated in the Provincial, Group, or Union constitution". It was announced that in the interest of keeping administration in India running, an Interim Government would also be established and such a government need to have the support of the major political parties of the country. (15)

The proposals of the Cabinet Mission with regard to the problem of the minorities indicated that as announced earlier by the Prime Minister Attlee, the British Government were no longer concerned with the problem of the minorities in the sense that they would like to see the problem settled by the Indians themselves. This is the reason why it chose to refer the entire issue to the Constituent Assembly and more especially to the proposed Advisory Committee. Ambedkar, therefore, wrote a letter to the Secretary of State in which he first wanted to know whether the term 'minorities' in paragraph 20 of the Viceroy's statement also included the Scheduled Castes. He also wanted to be sure as to who would guarantee that the Advisory Committee 'does in fact contain full representation of the interests affected'? Ambedkar's third query was that whether His Majesty's

Government reserved to itself the right to nominate persons to the Advisory Committee from outside the Constituent Assembly so as to ensure full representation of the Scheduled Castes. Ambedkar also referred to paragraph 22 of the Viceroy's statement of 16 May which contained a provision for a treaty between the Constituent Assembly and the United Kingdom. He then wanted to know as to whether the proposed Treaty include "a provision for the protection of the minorities as was stipulated in the Cripps proposals? If the Treaty is not to have such a provision, how does H.M.G. propose to make the decisions of the Advisory Committee binding on the Constituent Assembly"?⁽¹⁶⁾

What Ambedkar really wanted was a guarantee of the Scheduled Castes' rights from His Majesty's Government in Great Britain. But the British Government had already disowned that responsibility. In his reply to Ambedkar the Secretary of State pointed out that it is "certainly our intention that the term 'minorities' in paragraph 20 of the Statement includes the Scheduled Castes". As for the possibility of inducting a Scheduled Caste representative outside the proposed Constituent Assembly the Secretary of State made a cautious reply and said "we assume", that the Constituent Assembly "will desire that it (i.e. the Advisory Committee) should be fully representative". As a matter of fact the statement of the Secretary of State contained no guarantee in the manner Ambedkar expected him to make. The British Government, he made it abundantly clear would

interfere neither with the constitution of the Advisory Committee nor with the Constituent Assembly's decisions on the issue relating the protection of the minorities. (17)

The evasive reply of the Secretary of State and the so-called indifferent treatment made in the Simla deal announced by the Viceroy had largely worried the Scheduled Castes. A meeting of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation was held in Bombay on 4th June 1946 under the Chairmanship of N. Sivaraj to consider the situation arising out of the proposals made by the Cabinet Mission regarding the future constitution of India. The Working Committee passed a series of resolutions which contained open accusations against the British Government and the Congress. The government was accused of its lack of sympathy which became evident in so far as "the Cabinet Mission has not mentioned the Scheduled Castes even once in the course of their statement of 5000 words". The Mission, it was further alleged had violated the pledges given by His Majesty's Government "that no Constitution which had not the consent of the Scheduled Castes would be imposed upon them". The Working Committee had also reminded the authorities that the Cabinet Mission's recommendation was contrary to the spirit of the previous pronouncement of His Majesty's Government in which it was most certainly admitted that "the Untouchables were separate from the Caste Hindus and constituted a distinct element in the national life of India". (18) Another grievance of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation was that the Cabinet Mission had ensured the safety of

the Muslim community against the possible tyranny of the Hindus whereas no such protection was afforded to the Scheduled Castes who were more exposed to the violence of the Hindus. The experience of 1946 elections had shown that quite a large number of Scheduled Castes villages had been put to fire and their voters were belaboured by a partisan police force as also the common people belonging to that community were denied supplies from the ration shops - all at the instance of the Hindu Congress in order to compel these helpless people to vote in favour of the Congress nominees. These facts were not unknown to the government and the Cabinet Mission was also not unaware of such situations. Naturally the Scheduled Castes expected that the Mission would protect them from the Hindu tyranny by making provision for them for separate electorate and separate settlement. But their expectations were belied because the Mission showed "greater concern for the protection of the Muslim community than for safeguarding the interests of the Scheduled Castes".⁽¹⁹⁾

It may be noted here that the Mission had information that a section of the Scheduled Caste community felt bitter about its decision which they thought had made no provision for their representation. Therefore in one of its Press interviews held almost at the same time when the announcement was made the Mission declared "that they have made double provision for the representation of the Scheduled Castes in the Constituent Assembly and in the Advisory Committee". The working Committee of

the Federation however held that these provisions were 'absolutely illusory and unworthy of serious consideration'. The Committee explained that as the provincial Legislatures were not obliged to return a Scheduled Caste the Constituent Assembly may have none of them at all. The Working Committee of the Federation made it plain that :

"even if a few representatives of the Scheduled Castes should find place in the Constituent Assembly, they being elected by Hindu votes, they can never represent the true interests of the Scheduled Castes. As to the Advisory Committee it cannot be substantially different from the Constituent Assembly. It will be a reflection of the Constituent Assembly".⁽²⁰⁾

In the circumstances stated above the Committee held that an electoral scheme under which a Scheduled Caste candidate winning the primary election contest had little chance for being returned in the final contest could scarcely ensure their entry in a representative body. Therefore the so-called guarantee of 'double provision' declared in the Viceroy's Press interview was nothing more than an eye-wash.

The resolution of the Working Committee when sent to the Viceroy for his consideration also contained a prayer for obtaining early amendment of the Cabinet Mission proposal on some major points. The amendments sought for are given below :

First, the Scheduled Castes should have the right to be represented in the Legislatures through separate electorates.

Secondly, the Constitution shall contain a provision making it obligatory on the Government to undertake the formation of separate settlements for the Scheduled Castes.

Thirdly, arrangement should be made in a manner that the Scheduled Caste candidates who topped the list in the last primary elections can be inducted as members of the Advisory Committee and be allowed also to elect five other representatives of the Scheduled Castes to the said Committee.

In conclusion of its charter of demands the Working Committee of the Federation held out a threat to the government and to the nation which seemed to be resembling the militant spirit of the Muslim League. The tone of its humble supplication had suddenly changed when the Committee stated that they would expect that the Mission proposals were amended in the light of their representation submitted to the Viceroy.

"Failing this, there will be no alternative for the Scheduled Castes but to resort to direct action. If circumstances require, the Working Committee, in order to save the Scheduled Castes from this impending catastrophe, will not hesitate to ask the Scheduled Castes to resort to direct action".

The Working Committee also informed the government that the trend of situations having convinced it of the inevitability of such a course of action the Committee had already authorized its President to constitute a Council of Action which would draw up the detailed programme of the proposed direct action.⁽²¹⁾

But the petition and the threat, however much moving and appalling, failed to leave any impression upon the government. Two weeks after the said resolution was sent to the government the Viceroy wrote,

"I do not know enough about the wrongs and disabilities of the Scheduled Castes to feel really sympathetic or sentimental about them, ... I should not feel inclined to hamper the progress of India by special measures for them at this stage".

This is again a re-assertion of the Labour Government's policy that in India a minority must not be allowed to veto the progress of the majority. It may be however noted in this connection that although Wavell had expressed his unwillingness to support the cause of the Scheduled Castes so far as their franchisal and electoral rights were concerned, he was nevertheless convinced that "they are not capable of supplying for a very long time to come at any rate, the men of character, education and ability of whom India is so sorely in need". However he always sincerely wished that the Scheduled Castes "must be given their chance to develop gradually".⁽²²⁾

On having received an evasive reply from the government the Scheduled Caste leaders now once again turned to Congress and sought clarification from Gandhi as to what would be their status in the forthcoming constitution of free India. A printed leaflet seeking such clarifications was dropped into the car of Gandhi as he was proceeding to attend the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee. The same leaflet was personally handed over to him on 12 July 1946 by Rajbhoj, the General Secretary of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation. The leaflet contained the same old demand of separate electorate as well as the recognition of the claim of a scheduled caste candidate winning the primary election to be declared returned also in the final contest.⁽²³⁾ Thereafter from the middle of July 1946 the Scheduled Caste people particularly the followers of Ambedkar including members of the Federation took to its proclaimed course of direct action albeit in a non-violent way. On 15 July a large group of Federation members started *satyagraha* at Poona against the Congress which was alleged to have deprived the Scheduled Castes of their legitimate rights of representation. The same day another demonstration was held in Lucknow where 223 people courted arrest as per a civil disobedience programme arranged on the next day. On 17 July, 89 Scheduled Caste volunteers from Bombay, Nasik and Baramati offered themselves for arrest in Poona by defying the ban on demonstration. Next day when the *satyagrahis* were brought on trial they read out before the trying magistrate a statement in support of their *satyagraha*.⁽²⁴⁾

In the meantime after the members of the Cabinet Mission had left for London (June 29, 1946) its work had come for review in both houses of the British Parliament. In the discussion of the House of Lords the Secretary of State referred to the Depressed Classes led by Ambedkar and said that they would have very full representation, through the Congress affiliated organisation. It was also stated that the Mission had interviewed the leaders of the Congress and was "convinced of their genuine desire to help the Depressed Classes". The Secretary of State also expressed the hope that the Advisory Committee would be generous in their allocation of seats to minorities.⁽²⁵⁾ The speech of Sir Stafford Cripps revealed the same tone of optimism when he rose to give his views on the subject of protection of smaller minorities in the House of Commons. He also lent support to the views of Pethick-Lawrence and expressed confidence in the sense of justice of the majority party namely the Congress which would sure enough safeguard the rights and interests of the minorities. He also referred to the device of Advisory Committee and held :

"We believe that this method is more likely to produce sound and just results than an insignificant minority in the Constituent Assembly which is the most that could, by any electoral device, have been obtained for the minorities".⁽²⁶⁾

Frustrated everywhere Ambedkar became more critical of the Congress. In a Press interview on July 21, he once again

thundered against the Congress and remarked that the Scheduled Caste people had every right to demand that the Congress being the inevitable recipient of British authority in India must disclose its policy with regard the 40 million Untouchables of the country. He also claimed immediate abrogation of the Poona Pact which "was a virtual disfranchisement of the Scheduled Castes. In the end he issued a warning that if moral resources were exhausted, they would look for other means to register their protest".⁽²⁷⁾ Once againing this was a veiled threat that the *satyagraha* operation by the Scheduled Castes may soon give way to a strategy of direct action which could very well involve the nation in a state of civil war.

But thanks to the good sense that prevailed upon the majority of the Scheduled Caste people, nothing really calamitous happened in the long run. The only significant event worthy of being noted at this period of the year was the entry of Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly as a candidate sponsored by the Muslim League and seeking representation from Bengal far off his own country where his political influence was presumably on the wane. Wavell considered him to be 'not an attractive personality'. He was not wrong if one views him from his election performance.⁽²⁸⁾

While *satyagraha* was going on the names of the Members of Interim Ministry were announced on 24 August 1946. Ambedkar was rather shocked to know that Jagajivan Ram was accommodated in the

Ministry and was given the portfolio of Labour. Shortly after this he had received another surprising news, that Jogendranath Mandal, a standing member of the Working Committee of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation was also inducted in the Ministry (Law) as a Muslim League candidate. Mandal's entry into the cabinet had no doubt increased the strength of the Scheduled Caste representatives in the Ministry. Curiously although having access into the cabinet with Muslim League support Mandal perhaps to avoid being called a renegade declared "that he had Ambedkar's full support for his joining the Interim Government". (29)

Judged on all sides the fate of Ambedkar did not seem to be very favourable. Persons of lesser stature, as some members of his community thought remorsefully, had their place in the Ministry while he alone was left out of it. Ambedkar now decided to take a last chance for making a further representation of the case of the Scheduled Castes before the members of the British Parliament. He had already prepared a memorandum which he got printed in London where he first approached the political bosses of England. On the last day of October 1946, Ambedkar had also talks with some leading British politicians connected with India. He discussed his Memorandum with both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State. He also saw the former Prime Minister Churchill and Sir Samuel Hoare, the dispenser of the Communal Award. Churchill was partially convinced. He insisted that demands of the minorities, notably the Muslims and the Scheduled

castes 'for whom Dr. Ambedkar has the right to speak' must be satisfactorily met before the transfer of power.⁽³⁰⁾ On November 5, Ambedkar had another round of discussion with the political dignitaries of England which included some influential M.P.s of the Labour Party. The discussion lasted for about an hour. Ambedkar placed facts and figures before the learned members of the audience. "But there seemed no hope for him to gain his points. There was lip sympathy and nod of assent here and there". But it served no meaningful purpose.⁽³¹⁾

Thus came the end of a long series of struggle which although started with a bang had now ended in a whimper. Whatever might be the Conservative party's arguments on the minorities' protection, the Labour Government had decisively given up the earlier British policy of using the minorities for creating a political stalemate in the country. Under such circumstances both Ambedkar and his Federation looked like a spent force with perhaps the only recourse to work for the interests of the Scheduled Castes in the Constituent Assembly.

Most of Ambedkar's misgivings against the Hindus whom he held responsible for most of the miseries of the Untouchables originated because he could not trust that the Congress was really serious about the welfare of the Scheduled Castes. The Congress election manifesto of 1946 declared that the party has stood for equal rights and opportunities for every citizen of

India and has always held high aloft the ideal of "the unity of all communities and religious groups" of India. In formulating the constitutional rights of the future citizens of India the manifesto has not merely upheld the principle of universal adult suffrage but has also emphasised that there shall be no disability to any citizen by reason of his religion, caste, creed or sex and that all "citizens have equal rights in regard to wells, tanks, roads, schools and places of public resort".⁽³²⁾ But such pronouncements were taken for usual rhetorics of a political party. Therefore, Ambedkar was not convinced of the bonafides of Congress intentions.

Such distrust was manifest even when the Harijan leader had come to work as a member of the Constituent Assembly during the period of its early sessions. Then he had to be persuaded by a member of his own community Shrimati Dakshyani Velayudam who while addressing the members of the Constituent Assembly on 19 December 1946 remarked :

"I visualise that the underdogs will be the rulers of the Indian republic. I, therefore, appeal to Harijan delegates that they should not harp on separatism. They should not make themselves the laughing stock of future generations. Communalism whether Harijan, Christian, Muslim or Sikh is opposed to nationalism".

Velayudam was treated with a big hand in the House when she

further explained that Churchill and his imperial henchmen often appearing to have loudly defended the Harijan interests did not while in power pass any legislation to remove the social disabilities of the Depressed Classes. She had also made it plain that the so-called Harijan leaders propped up by Churchill with an imperial motive were rank communalists themselves since they forgot that "Harijans are Indians and they have to live in India as Indians" and their social disabilities need to be remedied with the support of the Indians and not the British Government.⁽³³⁾

But all said Ambedkar's apprehensions were not totally unfounded. Perhaps he thought that the liberal pronouncements in the election manifesto only showed that the Congress was 'now half dissolving to a liberal thaw'⁽³⁴⁾ and it may change its attitude at any time in near future. Sensitive to the precariousness of its own position and haunted by memories and fears of satyagraha and civil disobedience, recently launched by the Depressed people, the Congress, Ambedkar thought, had proclaimed its liberalism which would be set at naught as soon as the party becomes entrenched in power. But there were indications of momentous change in the outlook of the nation which even the disconsoled Harijan leader could little imagine.

On April 29, 1947, the Constituent Assembly declared to the world : "Untouchability in any form is abolished and the

imposition of any disability on that account shall be an offence". It was a good fortune of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to move this resolution as part of the draft constitution. Of course the passage of this resolution did not result in the immediate abolition of untouchability root and branch, because sanction behind the practice of untouchability was social and not legal. But judged in the legal sense too this measure constituted a radical departure from the past policy of the British Government which not only hesitated to declare untouchability illegal but also extended legal support to it. It was therefore, a glorious day in the history of India when the ruling power in India declared its will to wash out the stigma of untouchability. The world Press described this event as the freedom of the Untouchables, the day of emancipation of the outcastes, a historic act proclaiming outlawry of untouchability and a victory for human freedom. The *New York Times* commented : "The advance toward wiping out their ancient stigma has been matched in modern times only by our own abolition of slavery and the freeing of the Russian serf". The *New Chronicle*, London, praised it as one of the greatest acts of History. The *New York Herald Tribune* described it as one of the fresh and clean beams of light in the post-war world.⁽³⁵⁾ Then again, in the new constitution of which Ambedkar had been an architect provisions were made for the fundamental rights of the citizens and also for safeguards against their invasion. The constitutional proposals of Ambedkar also included provisions for the protection of the minorities including the Scheduled Castes as well.

Ambedkar complained that the Poona Pact had disfranchised the Depressed Classes whose real representative could be returned only through separate electorate. He had moreover lost faith in the sense of justice of the Caste Hindus and therefore demanded separate settlement for the Untouchables. Early since the beginning of the present century the Depressed Classes had also complained that the scheming Hindu elites had prevented their entry into the lucrative offices of the state and so they needed protective discrimination like reservation in matters of appointment and the like. The most effective answer to these age-long grouse and grievances came when Ambedkar already a member of the Constituent Assembly was also unanimously chosen to function as the architect of the future constitution of India. Yet this was not enough. The Congress party not only took anti-untouchability measures but also sought to utilise the services of the ever critical separatist leader, Ambedkar, in the building of free India by offering him the post of a minister in the first cabinet of the national government (15 August 1947). It may be noted in this context that once after returning from his recent visit of London (October 1946) Ambedkar remarked to a correspondent of the Globe Agency that the merger of the Untouchables into Hindu society "would become easier only when the Untouchables rose to the social status of the caste Hindus".⁽³⁶⁾ Although this is a desideratum till today Ambedkar's smooth entry into the cabinet was a great leap forward to this end. The rebel leader must have felt immensely surprised at the

gesture of the Brahmin Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. But he accepted the offer with a graceful remark - "one could serve the interests of the Scheduled Castes better from within the government than from without".⁽³⁷⁾

The stormy petrel flew back to the shore and so ended the first phase of the struggle of the Depressed Classes.

NOTES

1. Menon V.P., *op.cit.*, pp. 218-219.
2. Moon P (ed.), *Wavell : The Viceroy's Journal*, Delhi, 1977, p. 399.
3. *IAR*. Vol. II (1945), pp. 171-173. Proceedings of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation held at Poona dated 3 October 1945.
4. Pradhan A.C., *op.cit.*, p. 206.
5. *BPSA*. Appendix III, pp. 237-252.
6. *T.P.* Vol. VI. p. 1085. Document no. 479.
7. Menon V.P., *op.cit.*, pp. 234-235.
8. *T.P.* Vol. VI. pp. 995-996. para 5.
9. *T.P.* Vol. VII. p. 145. Document no. 58.
10. *Ibid.* pp. 145-147.
11. *Ibid.* p. 171. Document no. 69.
12. Keer D., *op.cit.*, p. 249.
13. *T.P.* Vol. VII. p. 171. Document no. 69.
14. *Ibid.* pp. 170-172.
15. Moon P., *op.cit.*, pp. 478-479. Appendix II, paragraphs 20,23.
16. *T.P.* Vol. VII. pp.661-662. Document no. 359. Letter from Ambedkar to Pethick Lawrence dated 22 May 1946.
17. *Ibid.* p. 723. Document no. 399. Letter from Pethick-Lawrence to Ambedkar dated 28 May 1946.
18. *Ibid.* p. 809, para 2. Document no. 409. Resolution of the meeting of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation dated 4 June 1946.

19. *Ibid.* pp. 810-812, paragraphs 5 and 9.
20. *Ibid.* p. 809, para 3.
21. *Ibid.* p. 811, paragraphs 6, 7 and 9.
22. Moon P., *op.cit.*, p. 299. Entry for 21 June 1946.
23. Harijan 28 July 1946. HN. Vol. X pp. 238-239.
24. Pradhan A.C., *op.cit.*, p. 304.
25. IAR. Vol. II (1946), p. 151.
26. *Ibid.* p. 154.
27. Keer D., *op.cit.*, p. 282.
28. Moon P., *op.cit.*, p. 299.
29. *Ibid.* p. 386.
30. Pradhan A.C., *op.cit.*, p. 309.
31. Keer D., *op.cit.*, p. 385.
32. Sitaramayya P., *op.cit.*, pp. i-ii. Appendix - I. 'The Congress Manifesto'
33. IAR. Vol. II (1946), pp. 357-358.
34. cf. Byron's characterization of Tsar Alexander :

Now half dissolving to a liberal thaw,
 But hardened beck whene'er the morning's raw;
 With no objection to true liberty
 Except that it would make the nations free.

35. Keer D., *op.cit.*, p. 393.
36. *Ibid.* p. 386.
37. Patel Sardar Vallabhbhai, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Vol. VI (edited by Durga Das), Ahmedabad, 1971-74, p.331. See Ambedkar's letter to J. Nehru dated 28 April 1948.