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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY DEBATES

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TWENTIETH SESSION

OF THE

FIFTH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,

1944



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Thursday, 17th February, 1944.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S ADDRESS TO THE COUNCIL OF STATE AND THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

His Excellency the Governor General, having arrived in procession with the Presidents of the Council of State and the Legislative Assembly, took his seat on the Dais at Eleven of the Clock.

His Excellency the Governor General: Presidents and Members, it has been the practice of Viceroys to address the Legislature at the first opportunity after taking office. Hitherto it has happened that the earliest opportunity has been about six months after the Viceroy's arrival. For myself, as you know, the first opportunity occurred within so short a time that I felt obliged to postpone the occasion. I have now spent some four very busy months in my post; and am prepared to offer you such views and guidance as I can, at this momentous stage of India's history. You need not regard them as final views. I always look forward to making fresh contacts and gaining fresh knowledge. But they indicate certain principles on which action for the progress of India must, I consider, be based.

The last address to you by a Viceroy was at the end of the longest term of office in the history of the appointment. It was not only the longest term but the most exacting. Lord Linlithgow's patience, strength and administrative skill were shown to the full in those difficult years. The war inevitably interrupted or hampered much of the work which was nearest to his heart, to further the material prosperity and constitutional progress of India. As time goes by, the greatness of the service he rendered to India in those critical years will become even more apparent.

Though not entirely a stranger to this Legislature, I have till lately served India as a soldier. As a soldier, in the positions which I have held during this war, I know better perhaps than anyone what the United Nations owe to India for our success in the struggle against Nazism and Fascism and the barbarous ambitions of Japan. I shall do my best to see that the debt is acknowledged and paid, not only with tributes of words but with practical aid. I will also try to pay my personal debt to the Indian soldier for his gallant and enduring service by doing my best to further the welfare of the Indian peoples of whom the Indian soldier is the fitting representative. Though the soldier stands in the limelight, it is not only to the soldier that the United Nations owe gratitude; the Indian worker also, and many others in India, have made a very great and vital contribution to the war effort.

My first task here is to assist the South-East Asia Command to drive the enemy from the gates of India. There can be no peace or prosperity for India or anyone else till the Japanese ambitions are utterly destroyed.

I need say little to you on the general course of the war. You have seen for yourselves how the United Nations took and withstood the dangerous shocks of three years of war—war for which their enemies had planned and prepared, while they had planned for peace; and how they rallied from those shocks in irresistible strength. You have seen how the spirit of the British people flashed like a sword from its sheath at the challenge of the disasters in France; how they faced a triumphant Germany for a year, almost alone and unequipped, but undaunted; how they won the Battle of Britain against the mighty German air force, and the Battle of the Atlantic against Germany's many U-Boats, and, with the aid of the Dominions and India and the United States, the Battle of the Mediterranean and Africa against the combined strength of German and Italian sea, land and air forces. You have seen how Russia met the mightiest, the most formidably equipped, the most mobile, the most highly trained, the most arrogantly confident force of fighting men ever launched by land; and has

hurled them back in defeat and ruin, as she did another would-be world conqueror 130 years ago. As one who has seen much of the Russian soldier both in peace and in war, I have watched with special interest the prowess of an army and people I have always liked and admired. You have seen too how the United States of America has recovered from the treacherous surprises of Pearl Harbour and Manila, and how powerful a fighting machine she has organised to carry her counter-offensive to Japan. You have seen China indomitable for over six years though almost unarmed. You are joined with four of the toughest nations of the world in spirit and action. The end is certain, and you may be proud of your contribution to it.

When the end will come it is difficult yet to say. Germany is reeling under a series of shocks, physical and moral, which may well put her out of the ring at an early date, though we must not count on it. We shall then be able to intensify the war against Japan. You realise the physical difficulties of the re-conquest of Burma and of the other territory seized by the Japanese early in the war. It will be accomplished but it needs careful training and preparation.

India as one of the principal bases of the war against Japan must be stable and organised. To maintain stability we must solve our economic problems. Food, which is the most important of them, was so fully debated in both Houses at the last Session of the Legislature that I need say little here about it. It is an all-India problem, which my Government is trying to organise on an all-India basis. The key points in our plan are the strict supervision of dealers under the Foodgrains Control Order, the avoidance of competitive buying in the procurement of Government requirements, statutory price-control, control over movements, and rationing in the larger towns. We rely for success on the administrative energy of the Provincial Governments—and on parallel action in the Indian States—and I am glad to say that during the past four months we have made progress. We are not out of the wood yet, but, backed by substantial imports, I believe we can improve our food position greatly in 1944. Our aim is not to favour the townsman at the expense of the cultivator, but to see that the staple foodgrains are available to all at prices at once fair to the cultivator and within the means of the poorer members of our population. The "Grow More Food" campaign has already produced valuable additions to our supplies, and will, I am sure, produce more. There is likely to be a world shortage for some years after the war during the period of recovery, and India must be prepared to stand by herself as far as possible. A bold agricultural policy will be necessary.

The situation in Bengal is special, and has caused my Government grave anxiety. But there, too, conditions have improved and I trust will continue to improve. We must run no risk of last year's disaster being repeated.

The food problem is closely linked with the inflationary threat, which we are determined to avert. The Finance Member will deal fully with this in introducing the Budget, and I do not intend to speak now of the remedies he will propose. I need only say that there has been a distinct improvement in the rate of savings and that we have made some progress in increasing the supply and bringing down the prices of consumer's goods manufactured in India, as well as of those imported from abroad. The new Department of Industries and Civil Supplies has formidable tasks ahead of it but has made a good start with standard cloth, the release of woollen goods to the general public, and the control of the prices of imported drugs.

The transportation system has been subjected to great strains, which it has supported creditably, thanks to the fine work of our Railwaymen, to whose steadiness and regularity we owe a great deal. I know that conditions of travel are not easy for the general public; I am afraid that that is inevitable in war time and is a condition obtaining practically throughout the world at present. The latest problem to confront not only the transportation authorities, but public bodies, industrialists, and private households throughout India is shortage of coal. The seasonal fall in raisings which occurs in the last quarter of

the year was abnormally great in 1943. There were reasons for this—an exceptionally good harvest, the presence of easier and better paid work in the coal-fields, difficulties about the supply of food, and the epidemic of malaria, combined to draw labour away from the mines and to make their return slow. Labour conditions are beginning to return to normal; but there is much to be done to improve the raising and distribution of coal and conditions in the coal-fields. My Government has appointed a Coal Commissioner to study all the factors bearing on production and movement and to see that the policy of the departments concerned is effectively carried out. We shall, I hope, effect a considerable improvement, though it may take time.

Unless and until some other form of government can be established with general consent, the present Government of India, mainly an Indian Government, will continue to carry out to the best of its ability—and I am satisfied that it is a very good ability—the primary purposes of any government—the maintenance of law and order, the duties of internal administration, and the preparation for the work ahead at the end of the war. The winning of this war is our first task, but it must not exclude preparation for the future.

We are approaching the end of the greatest of all wars. On the whole, in view of the scale of the dangers and disasters to the world as a whole, India has come through it with less hurt than any other nation in the front line. And the war has in many directions enhanced her opportunities and prospects. It has hastened her industrial development; it will increase food production, it has strengthened her financial position. That it has not brought, as in certain other countries, an increased unity of spirit and purpose is an unhappy circumstance which we all deplore. There is, however, nothing more unprofitable than to indulge in recriminations about the past. We must look forward and not back.

The post-war world will be for India a world of great opportunities and great dangers, in which she has an outstanding role to play. It is our present business to prepare her materially and morally for these testing years.

Let us count the blessings first. India has great undeveloped resources, in agriculture and in industry. Her soil is not yet cultivated to its full fruitfulness; with improvement in methods, in irrigation, and in fertilization, we can increase our food supply greatly both in quality and quantity. We can much improve the breed of cattle. There is wide scope of development in India's main industry, agriculture.

There are also great commercial possibilities in India. There are mineral resources still undeveloped; there is abundant labour, a portion of which has now attained a considerable degree of technical skill. India has many experienced and able men of business. Her financial position at the end of this war should be a good one. There are almost unlimited markets, internal and external, for her produce.

Such are her main economic assets. She has, however, also many economic difficulties and disabilities. The pressure of increasing population, the small percentage of educated persons, the low standard of health services, the poor conditions in which the greater part both of agricultural and labouring populations live, the flagrant contrast between wealth and poverty, the inadequacy of communications, all mark the immensity of the problem which confronts India in raising the standard of living. Our task is to use rightly and to best advantage her great economic assets; not to increase the wealth of the few, but to raise the many from poverty to a decent standard of comfort. A hard task indeed, but a noble task, which calls for all for a spirit of co-operation, a spirit of hope and a spirit of sacrifice.

The present Government means to prepare the way for India's post-war development with all earnestness of spirit and with all resources, official and non-official, which it can enlist.

We have to consider first of all the "winding-up" process that follows all wars—the demobilisation and resettlement of soldiers, the termination of war-time contracts with industry and the orderly return of industrial labour to

peacetime tasks; the dispersal of property and stocks of goods acquired for war purposes.

Our great aim must be to plan for economic and social development so as to raise our standards of living and general welfare. We must lift the poor man of India from poverty to security; from ill-health to vigour; from ignorance to understanding; and our rate of progress must no longer be at bullock-cart standard but at least at the pace of the handy and serviceable jeep.

As you know, the development of India is being dealt with by a Committee of my Executive Council, which is assisted by a number of other committees with a strong non-official element. I am considering means to strengthen our planning organisation and to accelerate our progress. Much useful preliminary work has been done, and we have now reached a stage at which, for certain subjects at least, as for example the demobilisation and resettlement of soldiers, definite planning can begin in some detail. Over the greater part of the field our actual conduct after the war will depend to some extent—often to a great extent—on international factors—such as tariff policy and international currency—of which we can at present know little. But we need not wait on these; on the big questions of policy we have to make certain broad assumptions, and we are now deciding what our assumptions should be. Concurrently we are appointing individual development officers—not Committees—to draw up outline plans for subjects such as electrification, industries, road development, irrigation and agriculture. We are also arranging to give opportunities for bodies of Indians connected with industry, the health services, and other branches of development to visit the United Kingdom, and if required the U.S.A., to study for the benefit of India the latest developments in their line of work. For the main social services we already have the Educational Adviser's memorandum, and shall later have the report of the Bhoré Committee on medicine and public health. I believe that during 1944 our plans will take shape; they must cover the whole of India, and the Provinces and States will, I am sure, co-operate with the Centre in producing the best and most comprehensive possible statement of our needs. I and my Government are in earnest in doing all we can to further India's progress after the war.

We welcome constructive suggestions; and my Government is examining with interest the plan recently propounded by seven prominent business men. The views of the authors of this plan on the objects to be achieved are in principle the same as those of my Government—we must work for a substantial increase in standards of living and social welfare. We may on examination differ on the methods to be employed, their relative importance in the plan as a whole, the part to be played by the State and by private enterprise, and the financial practicability of development on the scale contemplated within the time suggested by the authors; but our aim is similar and we welcome any sincere contribution to the problem that sets people thinking and makes them realise both the possibilities and the pitfalls ahead of us.

As I said at Calcutta, it may in the initial stages be necessary for the Government of India and the Provincial Governments to devote the larger proportion of the resources available to economic development, agricultural and industrial, so as to increase the wealth of the country. But you may rest well assured that the vital matters of health and education will not be allowed to stand still, and that the recommendations of the Educational Adviser and the Bhoré Committee will receive the most earnest consideration.

So much for India's economic future. It should be possible if all goes well, to make good progress; and to lay plans well ahead. It is more difficult at present to plan India's political future in any detail. I can state to you what I know is the point of view of practically the whole of the British people, of His Majesty's present Government, and, I am confident, of any future Government of the United Kingdom. It is their genuine desire to see India a prosperous country, a united country, enjoying complete and unqualified self-government as a willing partner of the British Commonwealth. That last desire

is not prompted by any sense of imperialism or wish for domination but by a real belief that in such association India can best find security and help in the testing years ahead, and that peace in the East can so be best assured.

I am absolutely convinced not only that the above represents the genuine desire of the British people, but that they wish to see an early realisation of it. It is qualified only at present by an absolute determination to let nothing stand in the way of the earliest possible defeat of Germany and Japan; and by a resolve to see that in the solution of the constitutional problem full account is taken of the interests of those who have loyally supported us in this war and at all other times—the soldiers who have served the common cause; the people who have worked with us; the Rulers and populations of the States to whom we are pledged; the minorities who have trusted us to see that they get a fair deal. We are bound in justice, in honour, in the interests of progress, to hand over India to Indian rule, which can maintain the peace and order and progress which we have endeavoured to establish. I believe that we should take some risk to further this; but until the two main Indian parties at least can come to terms, I do not see any immediate hope of progress.

The Cripps offer was a bold and generous offer and gave India a great opportunity to progress towards solution of her problems. Be well assured that it was not made in any panic. I can say that with certainty; I was Commander-in-Chief at the time and in a position to know that there was no panic in the councils of those in authority, either in India or in the United Kingdom. We are not a people who panic easily in the face of danger. The offer was made in the hope that when war had come so close to India and threatened its national life, it might arouse, as in other countries, a spirit of unity and co-operation that would have overridden political differences in the hour of danger. That hope was not fulfilled. There is no profit in recriminations about the reasons for the rejection of the Cripps offer. But since that offer, as has been stated more than once by His Majesty's Government, is still open, it may be well to restate it here. Nearly two years have passed since the Cripps draft declaration was made public, but it stands forth today as the solemn pledge of His Majesty's Government that India shall have full control of her own destiny among the nations of the Commonwealth and of the world. It declared in unmistakable terms that India should have the same status as the Dominions or the United Kingdom itself under a constitution of her own devising. It also embodied a constructive suggestion by His Majesty's Government to aid India in the attainment of that status. Proposals were made for setting up a constitution-making body, representative both of British India and of the Indian States; and His Majesty's Government undertook to accept and implement the constitution framed by this body, subject to two conditions. First, the declaration recognised the right of a Province not to accede to the Indian Union. Such Provinces could either retain their present constitutional position; or if they so desired, His Majesty's Government would agree with them upon a new constitution giving them the same status as the new Indian Union itself. Second, the declaration made provision for the signing of a treaty between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body to provide for matters arising out of the transfer of power, including protection for racial and religious minorities. It was made clear beyond all doubt that this treaty would not impose any restrictions upon the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relationship with the other States of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

The Cripps offer was an offer to India of full self-government, of the right to frame her own constitution, and even of the right, if she so desired, to sever her partnership with the British Commonwealth. Because of the military situation—which still obtains—it was provided that, pending the framing of the future constitution, the direction of defence should remain the responsibility of His Majesty's Government, but it was contemplated that Indian leaders should be associated not only with the Government of their country—under the existing constitution necessarily, till a new constitution was framed and accepted—but with the counsels of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations.

The offer of co-operation in the Government on this basis by the leaders of Indian opinion is still open, to those who have a genuine desire to further the prosecution of the war and the welfare of India. But the demand for release of those leaders who are in detention is an utterly barren one until there is some sign on their part of willingness to co-operate. It needs no consultation with any one or anything but his own conscience for any one of those under detention to decide whether he will withdraw from the 'Quit India' resolution and the policy which had such tragic consequences, and will co-operate in the great tasks ahead.

Not the least of those tasks is the preliminary examination of the constitutional problems of India by an authoritative body of Indians. We should be ready to give this body every assistance it might desire in carrying out its task. For the present the Government of the country must continue to be a joint British and Indian affair—with the ultimate responsibility still remaining with the British Parliament, though it is exercised through a predominantly Indian Executive—until it can be transferred to a fresh constitution. But the framing of that future constitution is essentially and properly an Indian responsibility. Until they can agree on its form, the transfer of power cannot be made. We offered a suggestion in the Cripps proposals, which may or may not have been suitable. If Indians can devise a method which will produce agreement more readily, so much the better. If I may offer a personal opinion, born of some experience, the smaller the body which discusses a difficult and controversial problem, the more likely it is that a profitable solution will emerge.

On the main problem of Indian unity, the difference between Hindu and Muslim, I can only say this. You cannot alter geography. From the point of view of defence, of relations with the outside world, of many internal and external economic problems, India is a natural unit. What arrangements you decide to make for two great communities and certain other important minorities, as well as the Indian States, to live within that unit and to make the best use of its wealth and opportunities is for Indians to decide. That two communities and even two nations can make arrangements to live together in spite of differing cultures or religions, history provides many examples. The solutions of the problem have varied. England and Scotland, after centuries of strife, arrived at an absolute union; in Canada, the British and French elements reached a Federal agreement which operates satisfactorily; the French, Italian and German elements in Switzerland agreed on a different form of Federation. In all the above there were religious as well as racial differences. In the United States many elements, racial and religious, have been fused into one great nation with a Federal structure, after the bitter experience of a disastrous Civil War. In Ireland the conflicting elements have so far failed to unite, and Ireland has a sort of Pakistan, though the analogy is, of course, only relative. The Soviet Union in Russia seems to have devised a new modification of its already flexible system, which will also no doubt repay careful study. These examples are before India for her constitutionalists to study. It is for her to say which will most nearly fulfil her own needs. But no man can alter geography.

I have spoken to you frankly and bluntly as I have been taught to speak, as a soldier. Let me re-state the main principles which guide me in my heavy task and responsibility. Our primary object, overriding all others, must be not merely to make certain of winning the war—the United Nations have already done that, by endurance through adversities, by sacrifice of comforts, by unity of spirit, by unremitting hard work—but to win it as speedily as possible, and with the least draft on future prosperity. That is a great administrative task. The second task is to prepare for the future, economically and politically.

We cannot settle the future of this country without the full co-operation of the British and Indian peoples and the co-operation within the Indian people of Hindus, Muslims and other minority groups and of the Indian States.

I am conscious of the co-operation of many elements in this country—the eminent and patriotic Indians of my Executive Council and of Provincial Governments; the fighting forces of India, the largest forces ever raised in history by voluntary enlistment; the leaders and workers of industry who have made such a contribution to the war; the Rulers of the Indian States. All these place India first in their thoughts and aims, but they have a practical view of the necessity for co-operation to realise progress. There is an important element which stands aloof; I recognise how much ability and highmindedness it contains; but I deplore its present policy and methods as barren and unpractical. I should like to have the co-operation of this element in solving the present and future problems of India. If its leaders feel that they cannot consent to take part in the present government of India, they may still be able to assist in considering future problems. But I see no reason to release those responsible for the declaration of August 8th, 1942, until I am convinced that the policy of non-co-operation and even of obstruction has been withdrawn—not in sackcloth and ashes, that helps no one—but in recognition of a mistaken and unprofitable policy.

During the last three months, I have visited 7 out of the 11 main provinces of British India, and two Indian States. I am setting out tomorrow to visit two more provinces. I have seen something of the rural life as well as of the towns. I wonder whether, in considering India's economic and political problems, we always remember how much of India is countryside and how little urban, how many live in villages and how few, comparatively, in towns. I am impressed everywhere by the work which is being done for the betterment of India both by officials and non-officials. India has a very small official administration for its size, but it has very fine services; the way in which they have stood up to the additional strain and work thrown on them by the war has been admirable. There are also a very large number of non-official bodies and persons who are doing great work for India. There is much goodwill and wisdom in India if we can harness it to a common purpose.

I have no desire to make invidious comparisons but I do feel it worth while to point out that Coalition government by Indians for Indians is not an impossible ideal. It is being carried out at the Centre without friction; it has been carried on for nearly seven years with conspicuous success in the Punjab. Thanks to the leadership of men of good sense, goodwill, and good courage, the affairs of that Province have prospered with the minimum of communal friction; they have administered their Province in the interests of the Province, but also with regard to the interests of India and of the war effort of the United Nations, to which the Punjab has made so striking a contribution. I will make bold enough to say that had all Provinces worked the 1935 Act in the same spirit and with the same efficiency India would now be very close to complete self-government.

We have come a long way together up the steep and difficult mountain at the summit of which lies complete Indian self-government. We are almost within sight of the top, but as with most mountain climbs that are worth doing, the final cliffs are the steepest and most baffling of all. At such a time it is doubly necessary to test each hand-hold and foot-hold, to cut adequate steps in slippery ice, so that the whole party, roped together, may not fall back in ruin. It is not the moment that prudent mountaineers choose to unrope, to dismiss their guides, and after violent dispute to take separate routes towards different peaks. We must go on together; we cannot halt too long at the heights which we have reached, and we cannot with honour or safety turn back. We may have to pause to reconnoitre or cut steps, but we must endeavour to go on climbing, even though the rate may seem slow to impatient watchers or to the climbers themselves.

Finally, we must keep in mind the splendour of the view that lies before us when the summit is reached—the prospect of an India at peace within herself, a partner in our great Commonwealth of Nations, the mother of a great

people, a shield for peace in the East, busy and prosperous, yet with leisure to develop the thought and poetry and art which are the real salt of life and of which India has already contributed much to the world. Not an immediate vision, but I do not think it unattainable if we work together with patience, good sense and goodwill.

I believe firmly in the future of India, I am a sincere friend of India and should like to help her to political advance, but my military training has made me quite certain that no objective is ever gained without the fullest measure of co-operation from all concerned.