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NEW FACTORS IN INDIA

THE ATTITUDE TO FEDERATION

PARTIES AND PRINCES

From Our Correspondent in India

India is rapidly approaching a new and difficult phase in its constitutional history. The effort now being made to secure the inauguration of Federation has revived political activity throughout the country, disclosing factors new to Indian political experience. These factors are being closely analysed by the British authorities in India and will be given full consideration in reaching decisions on Federation. The early months of 1939 will be a crucial period for the Reforms. The Rulers of the Indian States are about to be informed of the basis on which their accession to Federation might be acceptable, and they will soon have to declare their intentions. It is reasonable to assume that negotiations between the Crown and the Princes have virtually ended, and that something definite will be placed before the Rulers for their acceptance or rejection. The British attitude has always been that the Princes would require to concede enough to the Federation to make it real and effective.

The political background to the new situation differs radically from that which existed when Provincial autonomy was inaugurated in 1937. The 11 Provinces of British India are now governed by Indian Ministers responsible to elected Legislatures, and those who led political parties in the past, chiefly in antagonism to the British bureaucracies, form the Governments in vast areas of the land. The interval between the inauguration of Provincial autonomy and the establishment of Federation has brought fresh complications, for those who now control the administrative machinery in the Provinces naturally occupy a strong position in relation to the Princes. That position will be similarly strong in relation to Federation, as at least eight of the 11 Provinces are in the hands of the Congress Party.

TWO OPPOSED GROUPS

Broadly speaking all the political parties in British India continue to oppose the federal scheme. It is, however, true that Indian political thought favours the ideal of Federation, objecting only to the particular form outlined in the Government of India Act, 1935. The Hindu Mahasabha (orthodox Hindu organization) raises its voice in favour of accepting the Federation and working it for what it may be worth. But the Hindu Mahasabha is not a political body in the ordinarily accepted sense, and some commentators maintain that its acceptance of the federal plan is partly due to the likelihood that Federation will enhance Hindu prestige at the seat of the Central Government. The two main political units in

only to be conceded the federal Centre is wholly inadequate. This implies an attack on the reserved subjects of finance, defence, and external affairs, and seeks the alteration of the arrangement which vests these subjects in British hands. But this phase of the conflict is side-tracked for the moment, and will reach reality only when Federation is established. At present the Congress Party is concentrating criticism on the nature of the proposed Federation, particularly in regard to the linking of the autocratic Indian States with the democratic units of British India. The demand is made that the Princes should be represented in the Centre by elected elements rather than by their own nominees, the belief being that nominated representatives will form a reactionary group and act as a serious brake upon the expression of the democratic theory. The Congress Party is also doubtful if the Princes will surrender sufficient sovereignty, especially in fiscal matters, to give reality to the Federation.

The opposition of the Moslem League is scarcely concerned with the objections raised by the Congress Party. The League opposes Federation almost entirely on the ground that it implies Hindu domination at the Centre. This is a much more serious objection than anything the Congress Party brings against Federation, for it means an intensification of that communal bitterness which it was hoped the scheme for unifying India would tend to lessen. Many Moslems, with a view to maintaining the internal sovereignty of the Moslem Provinces, urge a confederation of these Provinces as a preliminary step to association with the greater Federation of the Act. This theory has given renewed interest to the old proposal of creating a "Pakistan" of the Moslem Provinces, a proposal that does not ignore the possibilities of linking the Moslem Provinces of Northern India with those Islamic areas which form a belt of peoples of one faith stretching from Saharanpur to Istanbul. The seriousness with which Moslems are now seeking unification against the Hindus may prove to be as great a stumbling-block to the inauguration of Federation as will the political objections of the Hindus.

AGITATION IN THE STATES

Thus the two main political bodies in India are increasing their opposition to Federation for contrary reasons. The Congress Party is seeking greater control at the Centre than is possible under the present policy, and the Moslems, under the threat of a Hindu domination, aim at securing a more privileged position for themselves. These factors are further complicated by the widespread agitation which has lately been raised in the Indian States, where propagandists are urging the Princes to establish responsible government in their domains. This agitation has further widened the breach between the Congress Party and the Moslem League. While the Congress Party is not officially associated with the agitation in the States, individual Congress leaders have openly declared their interest in securing responsible government there. In many of the States organizations of the people have been formed on the Congress model, and the leaders are using the customary Congress tactics to secure their aims. The intervention of Congress leaders in States' politics is obviously fostered with a view to strengthening the party's position in the Federation, which Congress men recognize is likely to be inaugurated notwithstanding their hostility. If the Congress Party can obtain a majority at the Centre by winning some support from the States it will greatly strengthen its position for the larger campaign that lies ahead in obtaining control over finance, defence, and external affairs.

All the agitation in the States is not due to outside agencies; the peoples themselves are

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