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FEDERATION AND THE STATES

THE HOSTILITY OF CONGRESS

A BAR TO PROGRESS

By Sir Frederick Sykes

Not many people in this country are able to assess the nature of the attack that has been launched by the All-India Congress Party against the Princes. Knowledge of Indian politics is largely limited to those with Indian experience; but the British public has a special responsibility to understand and judge the main issues that have arisen from the Government of India Act, 1935. The war has helped to make these controversies more remote, and they have been further obscured by the demands of the Congress Party in connexion with the war itself. This is all the more reason for revealing the Congress attack on the Princes as an attempt to destroy the balance of the Federal Constitution, rather than as a disinterested championship of democracy.

Objection may be raised over several points. The Congress case against the Princes omits some facts that are ascertainable, and distorts others. It is destructive in intent, and takes no account of the special rights and responsibilities of the Princes. Finally, it does not distinguish between those States that are backward and those in which administration and progress compare at least favourably with British India.

The Princes have been stigmatized, one and all, as enemies of freedom and progress. Individual rulers have been vilified, the whole Princely order has been condemned, and subversive agitations have been excited by Congress agents among their subjects. Echoes of this vituperation have reached this country; but distance has softened its over-tones. That is the danger. In Britain it sounds less like abuse, and more like a protest against the undemocratic character of Princely rule in India.

INDIAN INDIA

In fairness not only to the Princes but to the many intelligent men in India who support neither the creed nor the methods of the Congress Party, it is necessary that the States should be seen in accurate perspective. In the first place, it must be clearly established that the Indian States are outside British India, but so important an element of the whole Indian Empire that Federation cannot be achieved without them. The relations of the Princes with the Crown, unlike those of British India, are for the most part regulated by treaties, in which the territories and rights of the Princes are guaranteed. A third of the Indian sub-continent, containing a quarter of its population and comprising some 500 widely scattered States of the most diverse size and kind, is not under British rule, but only subject to the Paramount Power.

The States are not mere picturesque survivals, but an essential part of modern India. Some of them are modern in themselves, with administrative and social services that equal or surpass those in British India, with enlightened policies and prosperous budgets. The High Courts of Justice, the graded Civil Services with their pension and provident funds, the up-to-date

towns more than vindicate the claim to the cherished epithet of modern. It is fair to add that there are small backward States, and a large number of intermediate size and development. The variety and territorial complexity of the States make generalizations about them impossible; but this does not exclude the comment that the majority are intent upon administrative and social progress within the means at their disposal. Tyranny and maladministration are the exceptions that emphasize the rule.

In the second place, it is important to understand that the Indian States are only separated politically from British India. Geographically they are as mixed with the Provinces as currants in a pudding. Within the boundaries of the Bombay Presidency alone are some 200 States, which have been associated with it ever since the downfall of the Mahratta Empire. It would be plainly impossible to establish a federal system in India from which these units should be excluded. Already, under the present system, there has been difficulty in maintaining direct relations between the Viceroy and the numerous States that are like islets in the Governors' Provinces, and with which many issues could best be settled locally.

For these difficulties the States are not to blame. Their boundaries and their rights were guaranteed *in statu quo* by the Paramount Power; but since that time matters of common concern like Customs, railways, irrigation, to mention only a few, have increasingly cut across the separation between the States and the Provinces. It is the fact of this separation on the one hand and the growing community of interests between the States and the Provinces on the other that make a federal system of government a necessity. Only by such a system can there be a central authority to handle matters of common concern, coupled with local self-government. As far back as 1919 the authors of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report wrote:—"Looking ahead to the future we can picture India to ourselves only as presenting the external semblance of some form of Federation."

LOCAL RIGHTS

Freedom of internal administration is an essential condition of Federalism, which is based upon a division of general and particular interests. Thus, self-government has been introduced by stages in the Provinces both in order to associate Indians with government and to prepare them for Federation. The Act of 1935 prescribes two processes: first, the establishment of provincial self-government and, second, the Federation of India.

Two points should be noted. Princely India is not self-governing in the parliamentary sense; nor is it necessary that all the members of a Federation should have the same form of polity. What is essential, and is worth repeating, is that the rights of each member should be fully safeguarded to ensure the cooperation of all in promoting the common interests. There is the primary answer to the Congress demand that the Princes should disappear from Federal India.

The Princes themselves were quick to recognize that Federation was in the best interests of India and of their own order. Their representatives took an active and constructive part in the Round-Table Conference of 1930, which prefaced the publication of a Federal Constitution in the White Paper of 1933. Their readiness at the time to collaborate and to make the necessary sacrifices of sovereignty are a striking disproof of the reactionary stigma with which Congress is trying to brand them.

Much of the present difficulty over an agreed Federal Constitution has sprung from the delay in inaugurating the new régime. Many of the Princes began to doubt the advantage of ceding irrevocably so large a measure of their sovereignty. This doubt was reflected in a decelerated policy of internal reforms, and so allowed the attack of Congress upon the Princes

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