

**The Honourable Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy** (Assam: General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, it is indeed a great privilege to associate myself in rendering tribute to Dr. Ambedkar and the other members of the Drafting Committee for the stupendous task they have undertaken to bring out this Draft Constitution. They all deserve our best thanks.

To me, the structure of the Constitution depicted in this draft looks good though it requires certain modifications in some details and important matters. By this Constitution, India is to have unity in diversities, India with diverse races, colours, creeds, languages and cultures and with varied degrees of civilisation is being moulded into one Nation that will work together for the good of the common whole. This is not a small task. India is like the different States in the continent of Europe which have not been able to form a united sovereign country. But by the help of God and the wisdom given to our leaders India is having unity in the midst of diversities. This unity is not to be achieved by eliminating all diversities and putting all component parts into one mould by a stroke of the pen, for such an attempt will cause terrible revolution and great distress everywhere. The process for achieving the unity of India is by evolution as provided in this Draft Constitution.

The provisions for freedom of worship etc. etc. for minorities and for certain special areas and for hill tribes are the necessary stages for evolving unity in the midst of diversities. The wisdom of our leaders and of the majority community in acknowledging the necessity for allowing diversities in this unity structure is greatly appreciated and will be greatly appreciated by all. This is God's own method. God's own creation everywhere is unity with diversities. I thank Sardar Patel, the Chairman of the Advisory Committee for Minorities etc. He appreciated the needs of minorities and special tribal hill areas.

I must especially thank the Drafting Committee for accepting the draft for the creation of District Councils with autonomy in the hill districts in Assam which in the Sixth Schedule are called autonomous districts. These hill districts, inhabited by tribal hill people, will under this constitution be able to develop themselves according to their own genius and culture. The result, I believe, will be charming if these autonomous districts are nurtured to develop themselves in their own way without disturbing the main purpose of unity underlying the constitution presented in the draft. These tribes, though small in themselves, have been self-governing bodies from time immemorial. The India of tomorrow will surely stand to gain if the schemes for development of these areas are duly financed by the Government of India as proposed in the draft. Certain improvements in the Sixth Schedule will have to be made in the draft. I hope the House will accept the amendments which will be moved in due course.

While I fully appreciate the attitude expressed by Dr. Ambedkar and others as regards the strengthening of the Centre, I have to express that my views are very strong against the unbalanced strengthening of the Centre at the cost of causing weakness to the component parts thereof. It will be like the picture of an unbalanced man with a very big head but with bony and lean limbs. Such a head in that very condition will not be able to stand.

In perusing the printed amendments to Article 131 it appears that the Drafting Committee wants that the Governor should be appointed by the President. Powers are therefore proposed to be centralised. I hope the Drafting Committee will revise their view and find it undesirable to move it. I think this country has long given up the idea of nominated governorship with discretionary powers. The Drafting Committee has also given an alternative proposal for the appointment of Governors from a panel of four candidates to be elected by Members of the Legislative Assembly of the State. The argument of some of the members of the Committee is that the co-existence of an elected Governor and a Prime Minister responsible to the Legislature might lead to friction and consequent weakness in administration; but at the same time the existence of a nominated Governor with discretionary powers might cause obstruction and deadlock. I have had experience as a Minister with eight nominated Governors. I am strongly of the opinion that an elected Governor will be better substitute. This matter will be discussed at length when the amendments to Article 131 are moved in this House. I shall have occasion to say more about this then.

In the matter of Finance this draft is very unsatisfactory - particularly in reference to smaller Provinces. It does not give a fair deal to the Provinces. Poor Provinces like Assam and Orissa have reasons to be particularly disappointed. Those Provinces should not be weakened financially. Even one weak limb of the body will make the whole body weak. If India is to live and prosper, the States which are its component parts should function as healthy organs of the body politic of India. To come to the point, I want to say that the provisions of Articles 253 and 254 cannot be appreciated by us. They are couched almost in the same language as that of section 140 of the Government of India Act of 1935. The good wishes of the Government of India have so far remained a dead letter while the backward Provinces like Orissa and Assam remain where they were before. Even this year, Sir, our Assam Province is being greatly hit by the financial policy of the Central Government. We were in great hopes that our most essential needs such as building up of institutions for educating and training personnel in various nation-building activities would be satisfied, but we are told that these have to be postponed or delayed. The construction of strategic highways and roads absolutely essential for giving relief to our distressed people living on the border of Pakistan and for the protection of the country are proposed not to be pushed on with the same rapidity as it is essentially necessary to be done for we are told that not even one-fourth of the money required for these schemes for the current year will be available to us. The great Congress organisation has declared that our

goal is a co-operative commonwealth, but when rural centres for an all round development of the villages are proposed to be opened on co-operative principles, the money required for the fulfillment of the schemes in this connection is not forthcoming. Our Assam Government in order to raise the maximum finances it is capable of doing, within the provincial list, has exhausted all the sources of taxation; but our province is yet faced with a deficit of about a crore, while its substantial income is only over four crores. But Assam would have had enough to bear its own responsibilities without begging from the Centre, had not the Central Government taken away the export duty on tea. Tea and petroleum are produced in Assam. If the excise and export duties on tea and petroleum are allotted to us, which give about eight crores of rupees annually from Assam alone to the coffers of the Government of India, we shall have enough to finance our development schemes all round. Why should not this export duty be given to Assam, at least the largest share of it, every year?

An Expert Committee was appointed to investigate these questions and the Premier of Assam, Mr. G. N. Bardoloi himself led the deputation before the Committee. While the Committee conceded that a portion of the export duty on jute could be given to Bengal (a small portion of which comes to Assam also) and that a portion of the excise duty on tobacco might be given to the Province of Madras, the Committee did not consider it desirable to concede anything in favour of Assam on account of tea and petroleum produced in Assam. Is this just and equitable? Assam is kept under this system of eternal doles from the Centre. It passes our comprehension why this difference is made. Is it because Assam does not have a strong voice in the Centre? For many years during the rule of the British, Assam has been crying hoarse against this injustice committed by the central financial authorities in the past; but all our cries and condemnation of that injustice have gone unheeded by the Centre. Why reduce this producing province which could have had enough to support itself to a state of a beggar perpetually? Sir, I hope any strengthening of the Centre financially in this manner while robbing a province of its legitimate right will not be supported by any one. I believe that this just House with reasonable minds and sympathetic hearts will see that the province gets a fair deal. Facts should be faced.

I think myself that the authorities have been so busy with other matters that their attention could not be drawn in the past to this matter of life and death for Assam. We are today appealing to all the Honourable Members to come to our rescue at this time. Let it not be forgotten that Assam is a Frontier province which is subject to aggression from all sides. It is the duty of the whole Union to attend to this from the very beginning before evil days come. It is also very necessary for India to keep the bordering areas supplied with the necessities of life in order to keep them satisfied, otherwise adverse elements will cause great trouble which may cost India ten times more than the amount of money which may be spent during peaceful time. It will be a shortsighted policy to deprive our Assam province of its export duty on tea and to reduce its legitimate share of excise duties on tea and petroleum etc. In the past the bureaucratic Government overlooked the claims of backward provinces like Assam or Orissa, but how can we imagine that this Constituent Assembly will allow the perpetuation of the same wrong which was by the alien Government? I hope, Sir, that when the amendments to right this wrong are brought before this House, they will receive full support from all the Members of this august Assembly.

Before I close, Sir, I must also say that adult franchise is necessary as the basis of election. The people everywhere must feel that freedom has come to them and that

they have a share in the shaping of the administration of the country. This has been the hope given by the Congress in the past and any deviation from this principle will cause disappointment and arouse agitation in the country. It is true that the common man in the villages does not understand much, but it is the duty of the politicians to educate the common man in the right direction. We have adopted democratic principles, and the salvation of our country is to educate the common man and trust that he will be guided to exercise his right of franchise in the right direction.

I do not want to take the time of this House with other observations and criticisms which I would have liked to make, but before I conclude, I want to say that if we are going to build up a democratic State, we must make every one in this country, however humble and poor he may be, feel that he has a share in the making of a better country. We must cultivate the spirit of fraternity and this should have full sway in this country of ours so that every one of us, however humble and low we might be, can feel proud of this country to which we belong. God also will no doubt help us when we are saturated with this spirit of honesty and fraternity.