

F. NO: 12

1934

Correspondence regarding the Joint
Parliamentary Committee's proposal
for Women Franchise in the new
Constitution

Joint Parliamentary Committee's
proposal for Women Franchise
in the new Constitution

British Commonwealth League,
Women's Freedom League,
Six Point Group,
St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance,
Women's International League.



10th April, 1934.

To the Members of the
Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform.

Sirs,

On behalf of the above British Women's Organisations, we desire to place before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform our views as regards proposals for Women's Franchise in the new Constitution.

We consider that the number of women to be enfranchised as proposed in the Government White Paper is totally inadequate.

We note that the number proposed by the Simon Commission would have worked out in the proportion of one woman to two men, and was reduced by the Lothian Franchise Commission to the proportion of one woman to four and a half men. We protest against the further reduction proposed in the White Paper to the nominal ratio of one woman to seven men for the Provincial Legislatures, and one woman to twenty men for the Federal Assembly.

We wish to remind the members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee that the Women's Movement in India is rapidly gaining in strength and influence, and we consider that the united opinion of the three leading Women's Organisations should not be lightly disregarded. It would surely be a disaster if the large body of progressively minded women, represented by these organisations, was alienated by the Government proposals and their co-operation lost for the successful working of the new Constitution. Moreover, these women are leaders in all work for social reform, and the Report of the Indian Statutory Commission emphasised the importance of supporting them in the following words:-

"the movement among Indian women..... is one of the most encouraging signs of India's progress and we believe that the movement would be strengthened by increasing the influence of women at elections."


At the All-India Women's Conference held last January in Calcutta, which was attended by a representative gathering from all over India the demands regarding Franchise made by their three women representatives before your Committee on August 2nd, 1933, were again endorsed and a cable sent to that effect to the Secretary of State for India.

We have not been given an opportunity of appearing ourselves before your Committee to give evidence, and we therefore wish to put before you in writing our declaration that we stand in support of the organised Indian Women's demands for the Franchise. We have come to this conclusion not only because we feel that they have a right to make

these demands and to judge what is suitable for their country, but also because we consider that their proposals are reasonable and are based on right principles, and we believe that they could be worked effectively.

We wish particularly to emphasise the fact that we sympathise with the united determination of these women to avoid the Communal issue, and with their stand for equal rights of citizenship.

At the same time we urge that no less than 6½ million women may be enfranchised, and we support the following proposals of the leading Indian Women's Organisations for adequate franchise:-

- 
1. Literacy (ability to read and write in any language) as a qualification for both men and women voters for the Provincial Legislatures and also for the Federal Legislatures.
 2. The property qualification as recommended in the White Paper for both the Provincial and Federal Legislatures.
 3. In addition to the above qualifications, adult franchise for men and women in all Urban areas for both the Provincial and Federal Legislatures.
 4. Men and women to be equally eligible for membership of the Upper House, property qualifications being supplemented by educational qualifications for membership.

We further support the organised Indian women in their objections to the following proposals in the White Paper:-

1. The reservation of seats for women on a communal basis.
2. The special qualifications for Franchise of being the wife or widow of a person possessing the property qualifications entitling him to a vote for the Provincial Legislatures.
3. The system of indirect election of women to the Federal Assembly from the Provincial Legislatures.

Finally, we urge that the principle of equality between the sexes should find a definite place in the declaration of the Fundamental Rights of Citizenship in the Constitution Act.

We are determined to give publicity in this country to the demands of the organised Indian women, and we are convinced that there is already widespread support for their proposals among British women.

(SIGNED) Margery Corbett Ashby, Chairman,
British Commonwealth League.
Emeline Pethick Lawrence, Chairman,
Women's Freedom League.
Flora Drummond, Chairman,
Six Point Group.
Kathleen E. Innes, Chairman,
Women's International League,
V. Loughton Mathews, Chairman,
St. Joan's Social & Political Alliance.

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POST

WRITING SPACE



Mrs. Mukherjee

The Hon'ble Organizing Secretary
A F W C

Sec. Gen.

17

Chennai

Sd/-

For Jt. Committee file

"Sea View", Clifton,
Karachi.
December 2nd, 1934.



To
Rani Lakshmi Bai Bajwa,
Chairwoman, Standing Committee,
Dwalior.

Dear Rani,

Received Dr. Reddi's wire late last evening. As the W.I.A. are unwilling to have the joint meeting at Delhi, and the N.C.W. are unwilling for Karachi, I don't see how the three Associations are to meet to consider the J.P.C. Report.

If it comes to the worst, would it do to have a joint meeting of our representatives and those of the W.I.A. here on the 30th December, which is a Sunday and a free day, and arrange for our representatives to meet the representatives of the N.C.W. later, on the 5th January, 1935, at Delhi. Under these circumstances I don't see what else can be done. Please let me know by wire as I shall have to send out the notices as soon as possible and inform the two other Associations.

Yours sincerely,

Sd. C. Mukerjee,

Hon. Organising Secretary.

Copy forwarded to Mrs. Dr. Mathulakshmi Reddi,
Rajkumari Anurit Kaur,
Mrs. Hamid Ali,

for information.

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Hon. Organising Secretary.
4. 12. 34.

Recd Mr.
8.12.34



Sangur

Dec: 4th 1934

Dear Mrs. Mukkerji,

I am here with sending you the list of delegates that hope to come from East Punjab. regarding the Committee meeting at Delhi in January I don't think I will be able to spare my self again so soon after coming from Karachi. I am sorry for this as I hope you will forgive me as I hope have got very small kiddies in the house.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely

L. Pitam Singh.

S. C. M. East Punjab

As there are a number of substitutes so East Punjab will send full to delegates. If any of these fail the substitute will come.



"Sea View", Clifton,
Karachi.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX

The 4th December, 1934.

Dear Madam,

Thanks for your letter of the 1st instant.

Your reply has been noted.

Yours sincerely,

Hon. Organising Secretary.

To

Mrs. Sorejini Naidu,
C/O. Babu Rajendra Prasad,
Patna.



"Sea View", Clifton,
Karachi.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX

The 5th December, 1934.

Dear Begum,

Thanks for your wire. I was waiting to get replies from some of the members before writing to you. I am afraid it will be very inconvenient for our members attending the Conference here which is over on the 3rd January, 1935, to wait till after the 8th for the joint meeting at Delhi. I have had replies from 3 or 4 accepting 5th or 6th Jan., but I could suggest the 7th or 8th if that would be alright for you.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

EW

Hon. Organising Secretary.

S/-

Begum Shah Nawaz,
C/o. Lady Baffi,
Lahore.



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No.



INDIAN POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS DEPARTMENT

Q 19/20 GWALIOR H 5 5 32

MRS. MUKERJEE SEA VIEW CLIFTON

KARACHI

APPROVE SUGGESTION HOLDING JOINT MEETING WITH WOMENS INDIAN ASSOCIATION
AT KARACHI ON 30-TH AND NATIONAL COUNCIL WOMEN INDIA AT
DELHI 5-TH JANUARY -

-RAJWADE.

*Recd. C.M.
6-12-34*

19/55 498

This form must accompany any enquiry respecting this telegram.

Child-marriage and Untouchability.



"Yet it must be recognised that, in a country where the habits and customs of the people are so closely bound up with their religious beliefs, this attitude, however justifiable it may have been, has sometimes had the result of making it difficult for the Government to carry into effect social legislation in such matters (to name only two obvious instances) as child marriage and the problem of the untouchables."

Page 74, Para 134.

Suttee.

"We are only too well aware of the formidable obstacles which every reformer in this field will encounter, and we have reason to believe, for example, that there is even now a large body of opinion in India which would condone the dreadful practice of suttee".

Page 73, Para 132.

Women's Franchise.

Ratio	at present	Recommended by Franchise Committee
	1 : 20	1 : 4.5
(1)	by extending to all women property qualification	
(2)	" wives and widows of men with property	
(3)	literary qualification - registered on application	

White Paper recommendation identical excepting that wives and widows' (property) should make an application :

Educational qualification substantially raised.

Page 14.

"Authorities apprehensive - administrative difficulties

ask give full weight to Indian Social conditions" ??

Proposals and Recommendations.

Page 75 Para 135.

- (1) "Application (on property) should be dispensed with in respect of Bengal, Bihar & Orissa, the Central Provinces and in Urban areas in the United Provinces."
- (2) "In Bombay, C.P., U.P., Punjab, Assam, literary qualification substituted as Educational qualification;"
- (3) "Every province subject however to further consideration in the case of N.W.F. the wives of men with Military service qualification for the vote and widows - mothers of Indian Officers and soldiers should be enfranchised - registration by application only"
- (4) "..... mitigate deterrent effect of this requirement on the registration of votes by women, e.g. by allowing women to apply by letter, application by husband, and the entry of the name as wife of A.B.C. in cases in which, for social and religious reasons, there is any objection to the entry of the actual name on the electoral roll"

Note.- "This attitude" means desire for non-interference in all matters which touch the religions of India.

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Resolution and Statement on the Report of the Joint Select Committee
proffered by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur for the consideration of the Standing
Committee, A.I.W.C. with a view to final adoption by the open Session.



Resolution.

Whereas the Report on the White Paper, as a whole, and, in particular,
where its recommendations concern the status of women in the new Consti-
tution falls far short of our demands, we do hereby state in unequivocal
language our strong disapproval of and inability to accept the same. We
give reasons for our dissatisfaction in the appended statement.

Statement.

We feel that the Joint Select Committee was animated by a genuine
desire to bring women in greater numbers on the electoral roll and give
them a definite place in the Legislatures of the new Constitution. For
this spirit of sympathy with us we also for their unqualified recognition
of the part that women must play in the public life of the country, we
place on record our sincere appreciation. At the same time, however, we
feel constrained to express in no uncertain terms our inability to accept
the recommendations, as they stand, for the following reasons:-

1. We deplore the fact that our inherent right to citizenship as women has
not been ~~xxxxxxxx~~ clearly set forth in the Declaration of Rights. We
feel keenly this omission as an injustice to our sex and hope it may even
now be rectified.

2. The greater number of women enfranchised under the recommendations are
going to be the wives and widows of property holders and to this must
have also been added the wives of men with the military service qual-
ifications of the vote and the pensioned widows and mothers of military
and soldiers. Our reasons for our strong objections to this method of
enfranchisement have been stated in clear language on more than one
occasion. They still hold good and we regret that, in spite of our protests,
a qualification wholly unacceptable to us is being sought to be imposed
on us. We reiterate our belief in the quality rather than the quantity of
the vote and object strongly to the doubling of the vote for any vested
interest as being against all canons of justice for the poor who consti-
tute India's main population and against democratic principles.

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We see no reason why the literacy qualification should not have been made universal. In our opinion far too much weight has, from the outset, been laid on administrative difficulties where women are concerned.

4.

We have not swerved from our position that we do not, on principle, approve of reservation of seats in Legislatures for ourselves or for any particular interest. Nevertheless, seeing that this expedient has unfortunately been accepted in the Report, we deplore the entire omission of women from the Assemblies of several Provinces. We feel very strongly that in the case of those Provinces where women may be less vocal the exclusion of their representatives from the Legislatures constitutes a grave omission and neglect of the very causes for which we stand.

5.

If certain selected Provinces are definitely to be burdened with Second Chambers we see no reason whatsoever why women should not be accorded a definite place in all these as well as in the Council of State. We regard such as our inherent right and must, therefore, protest against this omission.

6.

With Lord Lothian we are "unrepentant believers in a system of direct election" and we, therefore, object with all possible emphasis to indirect election at any time and for anyone. We refuse, likewise, to accept nomination for ourselves, knowing by bitter experience what nomination and separatism have stood for in our Country heretofore.

7.

We have no words sufficient in which to express our deep sorrow over the fact that we have, against our united protest *ab initio*, been brought in to the Communal arena. We still fervently hope that for the reserved seats for women in the Provincial & Federal Assemblies the method of election thereto will be by joint Electorates of men and women. For both Provincial ^{Upper} Chambers and the Council of State we stand for election by a single transferable vote.

While mentioning the above details we wish to make it quite clear that, even if we had ^{secured or} secure for ourselves all that we had wished or wish to secure and if, at the same time, we felt that the recommendations, as a whole, were not in the true interests of India, we would, as women, the natural guardians of future generations, feel it our bounden duty

to deny all special privileges for ourselves for the sake of the common good. In the light of general criticisms of the Report we know that the recommendations are unacceptable to all shades of representative opinion in the country. We, therefore, join in this universal protest and still hope against hope that the new Constitution may eventually be such as will meet with general approbation.

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