

# INDIAN POLITICAL NOTES

## Final Phase Of Constitution-Making

By "CANDIDUS"

**T**HE CONSTITUENT Assembly has entered upon the final phase of its task. It is now engaged in the discussion of the draft constitution which, it is hoped, it will adopt before many weeks pass by. Much has happened since it was placed before the public in February last. The face of India has undergone a transformation. Through the democratisation, integration and merger of most States the status of the people of "Indian India" has changed considerably. As the result of closer association with the Indian Union than originally contemplated the States units have acquired a bigger voice in the determination of the country's future. Naturally their altered relationship with the Union imposes on them a larger obligation.

### UNIFICATION

No more can they take a relatively detached and restricted interest in all-India affairs. Whatever the strictly constitutional position, the compulsion of events has plunged them into the main current of Indian life. They have to swim or sink in it. The elimination of the traditional "yellow" from the Indian map and the territorial consolidation of India—big as these changes are—are as nothing compared to the unification of the political life of the States peoples with that of Indians. This is the main result of the happenings of the current year. It is inevitable that they should have considerable bearing on the future life of the country and on the constitution that is now in the making. It means a change not only in the status of the component units of the Federation but also in the form and character of the Union. That is at once the meaning and force of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's appeal to the States to fall in line with the provinces and make the country a strong, cohesive entity so as to enable it to play the role which destiny holds for it.

This time last year the outlook was far from promising. Quite apart from the tribulations that followed in the wake of partition, the country's structural framework was loose. The attitude of two of the largest States was in doubt, while the others had only acceded on the basis of the Cabinet Mission's Plan, namely, cession of minimum power to the Centre. That did not make for cohesion since it enabled them to continue as "islands" in the Union except in respect of the three subjects which they agreed to surrender.

### NO ISOLATION

Technically speaking that position persists today, but in actual fact there is an irresistible force operating against the isolated existence of States. For one thing, the number of these "islands" has been reduced from close upon 600 to under 30. For another, the six States Unions, which between them comprise hundreds of States, have indicated their readiness to come on a level with provinces in regard to their relationship with the Centre. That leaves only a handful of States which on paper are states within the State. Even these, however, are feeling the impact of public opinion both in India and within their own boundaries, demanding closer association with the Centre.

This is, of course, due to the shift in the political centre of gravity within the States. In most cases the Ruler has ceased to be the repository of power which has in more or less degree devolved on the people. By and large the inclination of the States peoples is clearly in favour of a common life with the rest of India, although in a few instances personal considerations stand in the way of sacrifice for wider interests—self-effacement is always a higher human endeavour. Just as the schedule of the component units of the Union has shrunk, it is permissible to hope that in the next few weeks public opinion in the States will demand closer integration with the Centre.

Strangely enough, while the people of most States think in terms of

greater cohesion, the people in some of the provinces are falling a prey to centrifugal forces. In the name of compact administrative units, admittedly on recognised principles, they are pulling away from the Centre. Concentration on local patriotism necessarily involves corresponding deconcentration on a national outlook. Moreover the manner in which realignment of provincial boundaries is advocated has given rise to mutual ill-will which is manifestly destructive of national solidarity.

The Constituent Assembly, which is charged with the task of building a constitution that will facilitate the evolution of a strong India, will, therefore, have to take serious note of the mischievous potentialities of linguism and consider whether in the prevalent explosive atmosphere it is advisable to disturb the present territorial structure of the provinces.

### LANGUAGE

Language threatens to be a source of trouble in another direction. If rivalry among local language groups has upset provincial tempers, the adoption of a common language for a vast multi-lingual country provides an immense problem. There are two difficulties. While the majority of the population speak or at least understand Hindi, there are large sections alien to it. Few will question the claim of Hindi to be the language of India. It must nevertheless be admitted that it will take a long time for Hindi to attain that position in non-Hindi areas. The ideal may be achieved in the next generation with timely and proper handling of the education of the children of today. Obviously there must be a time lag before Hindi can take the place of English as the all-India official language. The desired result cannot be brought about by a stroke of the pen but only by a gradual and well-planned process.

Nor is it yet clear whether Hindi will be universally accepted. It depends on the content of Hindi. There is opposition alike to over-Sanskritised Hindi and over-Persianised Hindi. The compromise lies perhaps in the common man's Hindi. But then the tongue of the masses is not adequate for official purposes or as a medium of instruction, especially in the sciences. Here is scope for constructive effort to enrich the language without affecting its simplicity.

### SCRIPT

Similarly there is controversy over the script. The dispute has fortunately eased in the past few months consequent on the realisation that the few must accept that to which the many are accustomed. The use of the Urdu script is confined to the upper classes of Muslims and that too is specified areas. The bulk of Indian Muslims use the Devnagri script or its derivatives such as Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali, except in the South where Tamil, Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam scripts are used. The case of the Urdu script has of late tended to weaken. It may, therefore, be assumed that the Constituent Assembly will have little difficulty in coming to the conclusion that Hindi written in the Devnagri script should be the country's official language, although the translation of this decision into action must allow for the time and patience essential for its evolution.

The draft constitution has in the main followed the principles already settled by the Assembly. Some of these principles have been called into question during the public discussion of the draft. The Assembly will have to consider whether any revision of its earlier decisions is called for. Besides, hundreds of amendments have been proposed for the clauses in the constitution, which demand careful examination. Above all there is the question of the future relationship of India to the Commonwealth. Opinion on this point is still in a fluid state; the leadership of the Assembly does not seem to have reached final conclusions. There is little doubt that the Assembly will readily accept their lead.