

OFFER OF FULL DOMINION STATUS TO INDIA

FRAMING OF CONSTITUTION AFTER WAR

British Proposal For Constituent Assembly PROVINCES' OPTION OF SEPARATE UNIONS

NEW DELHI, March 29.

SIR Stafford Cripps made public today the historic proposals with which he has been entrusted by the British War Cabinet for the solution of the Indian problem.

It envisages a scheme of Dominion Status with the right to secede and its implementation by a convention during the period of the war with the qualification that defence shall remain, during this period, a British responsibility.

Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities a constitution-making body will be elected by the lower houses of the provincial legislatures by the system of proportional representation and provision will be made for representation of Indian States. Britain binds herself to accept forthwith the constitution so framed.

However, any provinces which are not prepared to accede to this union can form a separate union, which will be recognised by Britain.

The following is the draft declaration brought by Sir Stafford Cripps for discussion with Indian leaders:—

The conclusions of the British War Cabinet set out below are those which Sir Stafford Cripps has brought with him for discussion with Indian leaders, and the question as to whether they will be implemented will depend upon the outcome of those discussions which are now taking place.

His Majesty's Government, having considered the anxieties expressed in this country and in India as to the fulfilment of promises made in regard to the future of India, have decided to lay down in precise and clear terms the steps which they propose shall be taken for the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India. The object is the creation of a new Indian Union which shall constitute a Dominion associated with the United Kingdom and other Dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic and external affairs.

His Majesty's Government, therefore, make the following declaration:

(a) Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities steps shall be taken to set up in India, in the manner described hereafter, an elected body charged with the task of framing a new constitution for India.

STATES' PARTICIPATION

(b) Provision shall be made, as set out below, for the participation of Indian States in the constitution-making body.

(c) His Majesty's Government undertake to accept and implement forthwith the constitution so framed subject only to:—

(i) The right of any province of British India that is not prepared to accept the new constitution to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so decides.

With such non-acceding provinces, should they so desire, His Majesty's Government will be prepared to agree upon a new constitution giving them the same full status as the Indian Union and arrived at by a procedure analogous to that here laid down.

(ii) The signing of a treaty which shall be negotiated between His Majesty's Government and the constitution-making body. This treaty will cover all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands; it will make provision, in accordance with undertakings given by His Majesty's Government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities; but will not impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in future its relationship to other member States of the British Commonwealth.

Whether or not an Indian State elects to adhere to the constitution it will be necessary to negotiate a revision of its treaty arrangements so far as this may be required in the new situation.

(d) The constitution-making body shall be composed as follows, unless the leaders of Indian opinion in the principal communities agree upon some other form before the end of hostilities:

Immediately upon the result being known of provincial elections which will be necessary at the end of hostilities, the entire membership of

the Lower Houses of provincial legislatures shall as a single electoral college proceed to the election of the constitution-making body by the system of proportional representation. This new body shall be in number about 1/10th of the number of the electoral college.

Indian States shall be invited to appoint representatives in the same proportion to their total population as in the case of representatives of British India as a whole and with the same powers as British Indian members.

(e) During the critical period which now faces India and until the new constitution can be framed, His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for, and retain the control and direction of, the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organising to the full the military moral and material resources of India must be the responsibility of the Government of India with the co-operation of the people of India. His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. Thus they will be enabled to give their active and constructive help in the discharge of a task which is vital and essential for the future freedom of India.

DOCUMENT NOT A DECLARATION

Indian Consent Awaited

In a statement accompanying the document Sir Stafford said: "In handing you a copy of the conclusions arrived at by the War Cabinet I want to explain and make clear to you the form in which the document is drafted."

It is in form a declaration by His Majesty's Government as to the future of India and as to the immediate problem of Indian Government and defence.

I am giving it to you for publication today as a proposal which has been submitted to the leaders of Indian opinion by the War Cabinet and its publication is not the publication of a declaration by His Majesty's Government but only of a declaration they would be prepared to make if it met with a sufficiently general and favourable acceptance from the various sections of Indian opinion.

I rely upon you all to make that position abundantly clear.

Secondly, I am sure I can rely upon every paper in India and throughout the world to deal with this document with the deep seriousness and responsibility which it deserves. You have a very great opportunity and a great responsibility in the way in which you deal with the matter.

WEIGHTY ISSUE

It is difficult to imagine a more weighty issue than this one, upon which the future, the happiness and the freedom of 350 million people may well depend.

Whatever you say as to it, I know I can trust you to say it with a full sense of its importance and with a full realisation that you, too, may play a part in the solution of this difficult problem, by the way you treat the document and by the manner of your publicity.

I have waited to make the document public until I had had the opportunity of submitting it personally to the leaders of the main interests in India and until they had been able to submit it to their colleagues.

Now it is to be given a wider publicity and I commit it to your hands in the confidence that whatever your views may be you will seek to help to bring all Indian opinion together and not to divide or exacerbate differences.

I shall myself be broadcasting an explanation tomorrow night to the Indian peoples and in view of that fact I do not now propose to answer any questions except upon the meaning of the document itself, in case there are any passages which are not wholly clear to any of you.

I will read the document to you slowly—and thereafter I will answer your questions.