

tion and the manner of its composition impose on it an obligation to be amenable to public opinion.

Other factors too suggest a careful review of the draft constitution. Since its submission eight months ago there have been drastic changes in the political landscape which dictate a fresh approach. The democratisation and integration of States, which had just begun while the draft was being finalised, advanced considerably during the year, and the resultant position requires much more than formal amendments to the list of the component units of the Union. Even the terms of accession of States have altered as the result of the merger of several units and the readiness of many to cede greater powers to the centre. The tendency towards the creation of a strong centre, discernible from the start and encouraged since partition, has become all the more pronounced as the result of the territorial unification of India. On the contrary the dormant cult of linguism has in recent months spread furiously, leading in some cases to heat and bitterness and threatening to dilute the idea of a strong centre. The very pace and virulence of the movement has, however, produced a revulsion and set far-sighted men thinking whether a normally legitimate aspiration, to which India's leadership rightly pledged itself in the past, might not by the time chosen for its fulfilment and the manner in which it seeks consummation affect the solidarity of the new State and imperil freedom itself.

COMMONWEALTH

Apart from the lessons of recent experience, the Constituent Assembly has to tackle some aspects of the constitution which have been left undecided. The foremost of these is the country's future relationship with the Commonwealth, while two others which are bound to provoke controversy are India's official language and national anthem. An amendment which negatively seeks to retain the present link with the Commonwealth or rather enables it to be retained has already been suggested by Dr. Ambedkar. Several speakers in provincial Assemblies and publicists outside have advocated India's continued association with the Commonwealth. More recently the Commonwealth Premiers gave earnest thought to this important question. Pandit Nehru who had occasion to place India's viewpoint at London and to ascertain the views of the spokesman not only of the United Kingdom but of the other members of the Commonwealth will doubtless report to the Constituent Assembly his impressions and in consultation with his colleagues in the Cabinet and party advise the Assembly on the course that will best promote the country's interests.

Certain principles embodied in the draft constitution have been called into question since their adoption by the Constituent Assembly or its committees. One of these is adult franchise. Although the leadership of the Congress is committed to this principle, there is growing evidence of anxiety lest in the present state of the masses' education the vesting of this powerful political weapon in the entire adult population should lead to abuse of the democratic system. No less a person than Dr. Rajendra Prasad has given expression to hesitancy in this behalf. A similar feeling was voiced in the Madras legislature when that body discussed the draft constitution six months ago. Constitutional pundits ask, "Are we going to be governed by the ignorant, the unwise, the thriftless?" It may be a trifle late in the day to go back on the principle of universal suffrage, but the Constituent Assembly might profitably consider devices which would minimise the dangers of unrestricted political power in the hands of millions not yet sufficiently trained in the art of democratic government.

GOVERNORS

In the category of details come several important aspects of the constitution which have aroused widespread comment and criticism. There is a growing volume of opinion in the country against the Governors of provinces being elected by the people. It has been rightly pointed out that "a Governor elected by direct vote of the people might feel tempted to overshadow a Chief Minister elected by voters of a particular territorial constituency" and that the doctrine of ministerial responsibility might suffer in consequence. That provincial Governors should instead be appointed by the President or the Cabinet of the Union is the view stoutly put forward by public men in several parts of the country. Other points of criticism relate to the "excessive" powers of the Union President and to the power vested in the centre to interfere with the units. These various well-meant, constructive suggestions merit serious consideration by the Constituent Assembly.

CONSTITUTION

Task Before The Assembly

After more than one postponement the Constituent Assembly meets this week for what is widely expected to be its final session. Those who are in a hurry to have general elections are critical of the slow progress and contend that two years are more than ample for hammering out a constitution. They forget, however, that since its first meeting in December 1946, the country has undergone a many-sided revolution. Partition brought about a drastic change in the constitutional outlook of India as well as in the composition of the Assembly. For months together uncertainty prevailed over the place of princely India in the constitutional picture. The consequences of the division of the country and the administrative and economic problems that followed in the wake of independence—not to speak of Kashmir and Hyderabad—monopolised the attention of leaders. If amidst these preoccupations the Assembly achieved what it has, it bespeaks the zeal and energy of its leading lights and its various committees. Indeed considerable progress was made in the latter half of last year and the draft constitution was ready in February this year. There has since been a lull in activity which is by no means unprofitable. The intervening period has been occupied by a public discussion of the provisions of the draft constitution in the press and provincial legislatures. Examination and scrutiny have revealed defects, deficiencies and inconsistencies.

CAUTION NEEDED

These relate not only to details but also some principles underlying the constitution. No doubt the drafting committee was largely governed by the Assembly's earlier decisions on principles, although in respect of some matters the committee has made changes. Public opinion has not, however, felt bound by all the principles laid down by the Constituent Assembly, and amendments have been suggested on quite a few important points. The Assembly will do well to pay heed to these suggestions, even though they might pertain to issues already discussed at New Delhi. It must be recognised that there can be two opinions on most subjects. In a field of work in which India is inexperienced and has a multiplicity of world precedents it is advisable to proceed warily. The Assembly is engaged in the task of framing a written constitution governing the lives of 300 million and of future generations. Nothing must therefore be done without a full examination of all the implications and in disregard of democratically expressed opinions on tentative conclusions. The circumstances of its crea-