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Clement Attlee, Indian Constitutional Reform, House of Commons Debate, 10 December 1934 Hansard, vol. 296, cc.70-72.	Code Sujet	CCV
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Let us suppose that we have this Constitution. What will be the position of the masses under it? Self-government is only a means to an end. We do not want to hand over the workers and peasants of India to the Princes, landlords, moneylenders, industrialists and lawyers. I fear that that is what we are doing.

5 In the Provinces there are second chambers in which vested interests are entrenched. They are pretty strong in the first chambers as well. At the Centre they are not only entrenched, but dug right in. There is no provision in the Constitution for extending the franchise. I grant that the extension given under the proposals of the Committee are far wider than we have at present, but we

10 want to see a definition provision that adult franchise should be introduced as soon as it is administratively possible. I am not going to suggest that if we did this the Indian peasants and workers would emancipate themselves to-day. It is not the experience of history that a class that is given the franchise emancipates itself straight away. I have no doubt that they will do just as Britishers have

15 done and continue to elect the landlords, the moneylenders and the lawyers for many generations, but the potentiality ought to be with the workers. I want to put the Indian politician in the position of courting the suffrages of the poor. I want there to be an opportunity in this matter which will lead to their education. The report denies them this, especially at the Centre.

20 I have no wish to weary the House with Committee points, but I think the report fails as an instrument for gaining the live forces in Indian life. It is a backward step in that it really relies on vested interests and does not go out on a bold course. In our view the forces of the modern world, political and economic, are alive in India to-day, and the question is, Are they to be destructive or

25 constructive; are they to work constitutionally or unconstitutionally; are they merely to gather strength by struggling against restrictions imposed from outside, or are they going to be disciplined and controlled by responsibility? In our view our co-operation in India can only be fruitful if we meet India in a spirit of generosity and understanding, and work with the live interests of the Indian

30 nation. I would say to those who think that somehow or other we are betraying all the Englishmen who have served in India that I was very much struck by a passage in a letter of that great Governor of Bombay, Elphinstone. He wrote, 110 years ago: It may be urged that if we raise the natives to an equality with

ourselves by education and at the same time admit them to a share in their own
35 government, it is not likely that they will be content with the position assigned to
them, or will ever rest until they have made good their title to the whole. It
cannot be denied that there is much ground for apprehension, but I do not see
that we are at all more secure on any other plan. It is better for our honour and
interest, as well as for the welfare of mankind, that we should resign our power
40 into the hands of the people for whose benefit it is intended than that it should
be wrested from us by a rival nation. And here is one other quotation from
Elphinstone: The moral is that we must not dream of perpetual possession, but
must apply ourselves to bring the natives into a state which will admit of their
governing themselves in a manner that may be beneficial to our interests as well
45 as their own and that of the rest of the world, and to take the glory of
achievement and the sense of having done our duty for the chief reward of our
labours. I think those were profoundly wise words. We have to face up to the fact
that we have educated the Indians, that we have trained them in self-
government, that there is no other plan than that of going forward and that the
50 boldest and safest plan is to go forward with a clear goal in view, whereas what
we are going to do is to give them a little bit and say, "We are going to see how
you get on." We should tell the Indians, "We are out for you to achieve full status
within the British Commonwealth of Nations, we are working for the elimination
of our own control and for the complete control of India by Indians." In that way
55 I think we shall turn the devotion and enthusiasm of the youth of India to
building up India and not to rending it into ruin.