

The Fourth Bombay Provincial
Liberal Conference Poona.

29th August, 1925

Welcome Speech

By B. S. Kamat,

The Fourth Bombay Provincial Liberal Conference, Poona.

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WELCOME SPEECH

BY

B. S. KAMAT, B. A.

Chairman, Reception Committee.

POONA:

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The Fourth Bombay Provincial Liberal Conference.

FELLOW-LIBERALS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

On behalf of the Reception Committee I have great pleasure in offering you a cordial welcome to this historic city and the political capital of the Bombay Presidency. I deem it a great privilege to have been assigned the task of welcoming you on this occasion. I sincerely wish it had been entrusted to abler hands.

The venue of this Conference, which was originally intended to be held elsewhere, had to be fixed for Poona rather in an unexpected manner. I trust you will have no cause to regret the change; and I hope you will kindly overlook the discomforts of Poona, as also the deficiencies of our arrangements made at short notice.

Poona in days gone by has been the maker of Indian history. A genius for politics still lingers in her people. I think Poona can still claim to be the maker of modern history. It has been the home of three illustrious sons of India who may be said to have laid the foundations of Swarajya. True, some of you re-visiting Poona after a number of years may feel that you sadly miss the towering presence and the inspiring atmosphere of the good old days of Ranade, Tilak, or Gokhale. It is often remarked that Poona at the present day has many men of prominence, though few of eminence. None the less, we are not entirely fallen on barren days. Poona has many noble institutions; it collectively influences and sometimes leads the political thought of India. Indeed, owing to some of its institutions with which we Liberals are familiar, Poona can justly be called India's nursery of political men; and when India is fully a self-governing country one may not look in vain to Poona for men who can fittingly hold the proud position of her Prime Ministers.

The immediate occasion which has called us together is, you will agree, of unusual importance. For the first time since the days of the

Montagu-Chelmsford discussions of 1918-19 we are on the eve of the next step—a most halting step in comparison—which the successors of those two distinguished statesmen are going to take on the path of constitutional advance. I trust you will bring to bear on the situation and on the Birkenhead—Reading proposals the same considered judgment which characterised the views of the Liberals in 1918-19.

Before I offer a few observations on some questions of the day, it is my melancholy duty to refer to some of the serious losses which the country has suffered by the cruel hand of death since we met last. Foremost amongst these is the recent irreparable loss of our veteran leader, the late Sir Surendra Nath Bannerjee who fifty years ago began the struggle for the constitutional freedom of India. In him India has lost a matchless orator of modern times, a hero of many a stubborn fight, and a liberal statesman whose imperishable fame will be cherished in every home in the country for generations to come.

Another loss, universally mourned has been the sudden death of the late Mr. C. R. Das, whose unique sacrifice and courage had won the admiration of all political parties. What he perhaps lacked in far-seeing sagacity, he made up in qualities of leadership. We sincerely mourn the premature termination of his brief but striking career.

Coming to our own Province, the death of the late Sir Gokuldas Parekh earlier in the year has rendered the ranks of the Liberals poorer by a staunch and sturdy man. Sir Gokuldas died full of years after a career of great usefulness, particularly in the sphere of agrarian and social reform. I am sure you will join me in deploring his death.

Politics and Progress.

The period of fifteen months which has elapsed since we held our last session at Ahmednagar in May 1924 has been a most eventful one in Indian politics. The Labour Government in England after a short-lived career had to make room for the present Tory Government. In India the most notable measures of political importance during this period have been the Lee Commission, the Reforms Enquiry, the Tariff Board Enquiry, the Taxation inquiry, the Mercantile Marine inquiry, the Economic inquiry, the Auxiliary and Territorial Force inquiry, and the recently announced committees on the important questions of an Indian Sandhurst, and Currency and Exchange. In regard to national activities the general features of the political situation at present are

a decline of Gandhism and the Congress influence, a breakdown of the Swarajist policy, accompanied by a climb-down of that party, nebulous character of the work of political parties, and an alarming growth of communal bitterness in the country.

I am sure you will agree that it would be an encroachment on my part on the province of the presidential address if I were to deal in detail with all these topics. I shall content myself with a few observations on some of them; I propose also to deal later on with some questions of Provincial interest. But before I do so, I shall permit myself one or two general remarks. With reference to the general political atmosphere in the country, I believe from the Liberal point of view we have reasons to rejoice that Gandhism is fast decaying and that the weakening of the Swarajist position augers well for a better understanding and goodwill all round. Further, although prospects of constitutional advance appear to be for the moment out of the question, it must be acknowledged that except in that respect considerable political progress is being made in various directions of vital national importance. I have some faith I confess in progress by Committees. Of course, we are all familiar by now with the device of Majority and Minority Reports. Nevertheless, I am confident some of the Committees set up will not be entirely barren of result. Moreover, Liberals have a legitimate reason for considerable satisfaction in the appointment of some of the Committees, as these owe their appointments to their labours. The Indian Sandhurst Committee, for instance, is due in a great measure to the persistent advocacy of our leader, Sir Sivaswamy Iyer. The silent work of Liberals through such Committees is in itself a valuable contribution of the Liberal Party to the cause of the country.

Political Situation.

Before I offer some criticism on the speech of the Secretary of State in the House of Lords—a subject which is uppermost in our minds—let me dwell for a few minutes, in order to have a correct perspective, on the trend of recent political events in the country, so that we can properly interpret the implications of certain aspects of our political life and the growth of public opinion during the last few months.

Decay of Gandhism.

The general position is that though the N. C. O. movement is long since dead, Gandhism as a national psychology is still alive; at any

rate it held the field till the Congress session held at Belgaum in December last. Political life continues to be harnessed to the Congress, which body though politically effete, remains practically under the servile Dictatorship of one single individual. Unable entirely to follow the Mahatma, yet afraid to displease him, the country has drifted into a state of inertia and political stagnation. A shadow of despair and indecision, born of defeat and discord, has overspread the land. *Charkha* is the eleventh Commandment of the Mahatma. Within the Congress, dress is an article of faith, the tyranny of dress varying from semi-nudity to *Khaddar* conscription. From our own point of view we regret the excessive importance attached to such things, but it ought not to be overlooked that a country gets the politics it deserves. Sentiment and spiritualism have been the age-long traditions of India. This heritage cannot be thrown off in a year—a fact which our critics in England in their political survey do not properly assess. No wonder shibboleths, fasting cures, catch-phrases are still the staple of Indian politics, but is it not some satisfaction that in the vicissitudes of public opinions the people are transcending these national traits only after a Quinquennium of N. C. O. folly?

Swarajist Stage-play.

While such is the improvement in the attitude of the lower political strata, the last few months give us further hopeful indications that politics is now emerging from the ludicrous on to practical plane. The Swarajists are cutting their wisdom teeth. The stage-play with the Mahatma to which they had lent themselves is approaching its *denouement*. They have realised their political impotence in the Assembly and in many Provincial Councils, so far as wrecking tactics are concerned. In Bengal and C. P., they did produce, no doubt, a deadlock; indeed, Bengal witnessed some very clever political maneuvering on the part of their later leader. But the Constitution has survived and Government has been able to carry on. The fact remains that, bragging apart, the late Mr. Das seems to have realised that his tactical victory led him nowhere. This was reflected in his Faridpur speech, which doubtless marked a turning point since April last in the Swarajist policy, being a distinct, and, I fancy, an unconditional climb-down on his part,—three steps at a bound. A further wholesome change in public opinion came in May last, when the Maharashtra wing of Swarajists displayed considerable courage at

Satara and attempted a tilt at the Mahatma's pedestal with a view to a full control over the Congress. Public opinion thus has been beautifully ripening.

Congress Mortgaged.

Recently, Mr. Gandhi has relaxed the rigour of his Spining franchise, and finding his own following bankrupt in political talents, has surrendered,—virtually mortgaged—the Congress to the Swarajists. Not that he has played his last card ; he may still propose sending the country on a new trail of individual civil disobedience. Meantime, Pundit Motilal Nehru has accepted to serve on the Indian Sandhurst Committee and is definitely broken to harness.

Breakdown of Swarajism.

Thus, the breakdown of Swarajism has come about in less than 18 months. If Non-co-operation is dead and buried, Obstruction only awaits a burial, with a grave side by side. From the point of view of Liberalism we are gratified to see that the country has passed a second awkward corner on its political path ; we now emerge, I hope, upon a straighter course. I wonder whether critics of Indian political development correctly appraise the significance of this rather rapid awaking on the part of an inexperienced and illiterate populace. I, for one venture to think that the two political blunders of India of the last few years may be attributed to inexperience rather than political cus- edness of the people, who, compared to masses in other countries, have, I believe, displayed a political instinct to quickly come to the right road.

Other working forces in politics.

There are two or three other working forces in politics to day, of which we must take account. These are, Dr. Besant's admirable work on her own practical lines through the Home Rule League, the inchoate work of the Independents, and last though not least, the bureaucratic hidden hand in party politics, working from behind the scenes in Legislative Councils. During the present year Dr. Besant has completed drafting her Commonwealth of India Bill despite all turmoil of party currents and under currents. The Bill deserves, I think, for its basic idea at least, a far better attention than the country is bestowing upon it. As for the Independents, the only good they seem to be doing is at times the curbing of the breakneck speed of the Swarajists. But are they a Party ? Have they any platform of their

own? Any creed, any organisation in the country, any *locus standi* with the electorate? I feel it is time this so-called party instead of oscillating as each question comes up stabilise themselves and re-inforce some recognised party for a better development of Indian politics. As regards the official *bloc*, they have developed into a party machine *incognito*, and since in order to win the game, their only weapon under diarchic working is an appeal to the communal instincts of members of the legislature, they are simply contributing to demoralise the work of the Councils.

Communal Differences.

So far I have attempted a sketch of the party forces at work. The most depressing feature of the year, however, was the outlook as regards communal bitterness and jealousies. The year witnessed an alarming number of communal disturbances in numerous parts of the country. And, what is worse communalism, open or veiled, is observable in the conduct of men right up from some highplaced Ministers down to the man in the street, infecting civic and political life in every sphere.

This result seems to be the combined effect of the vista of new power opened out by the Reforms, the aftermath of the Khilafat movement, and the inopportune activities of movements and counter-movements like the *Shudhi* and *Sangathan*, *Tanzim* and *Tabligh*. An attempt at Hindu-Moslem unity was made by Mahatma Gandhi last October without any result. A similar attempt in respect of Party unity was made in November last at Bombay through an All-Party Conference, but unfortunately it ended into appointment of Committees and sub-committees to a vanishing point. The *morale* of public workers was shaken. The moral collapse of national activities was obvious. The bureaucracy was not slow to observe the disintegration and they consolidated their victory by carrying into effect, almost at a shot, the recommendations of the Lee Commission. The "steel frame" has been since strengthened and braced, with a copious supply of bolts and nuts. The position of the Superior services has been made not only comfortable but impregnable. Meantime, what about the Reforms Enquiry?

Lord Birkenhead.

This brings me to the recent pronouncement of the Secretary of State for India and the speech of H. E. the Viceroy—the outcome of Reforms Enquiry. H. E. Lord Reading's speech, being a re-iteration,

except in tone and earnestness, of Lord Birkenhead's arguments we can deal with the two speeches together. Now, gentlemen, let me assure you that I have read these speeches not only with the attention they deserve but also with an attitude of mind so as not to do any injustice to their authors. I have tried to imagine myself in the position of a Britisher who is said to be naturally slow for political changes; I did not also forget that in addition to this he has unfortunately been given during the last five years of non-co-operation considerable cause for caution. Making due allowance for all this, my reading of Lord Birkenhead's speech has given me an honest impression that on the main issue as regards dyarchy the speech is unconvincing in argument, elusive in phraseology and palpably one-sided in its findings. What grieves me more is that the conclusions he arrives at do the greatest injustice to the impartiality, the close reasoning and the judgment of the Minority members of the Muddiman Report, as also to the almost unanimous opinion of Ex-Ministers and Indian Executive Councillors who worked dyarchy. Lord Reading's speech, only deepens the disappointment, since he at any rate had first hand knowledge, not only of the situation, but of the judicious bent of mind of the Minority members, some of whom should have been given the credit by him of at least knowing the difficulties and complexities with regard to full Provincial Autonomy.

" I must not go into all the points raised by Lord Birkenhead. Let me examine only one or two. The main issue was "Has the constitution succeeded" ? on which his Lordship's finding is "It has neither altogether succeeded nor has it altogether failed." "It has never been given a chance"—Now, if Lord Birkenhead had carefully read the Minority Report an answer is furnished there that even if dyarchy is given a chance in the best of conditions you can never escape the inherent defects of it. Can you conceive of a better chance for this ill fated dyarchy than it had in the first three years of its life ? Assume for a minute that according to Lord Birkenhead's advice the Swarajists come forward to work dyarchy with a good will ; does his Lordship imagine that these erstwhile sulky ministers will conceivably work dyarchy with a better good will and harmony than the first batch of Ministers ? Take again the second inherent defect of diarchy pointed out by the Minority members, viz the anomalous position of the Services and control over them by Ministers. In regard to this H. E. the

Viceroy contends that dyarchy will work better as henceforward Ministers will have full authority over new recruitment and can build up their own Provincial Services. Let us assume, again, that according to Lord Birkenhead's suggestion some Swarajists are willing to be Ministers. Now the only change in respect of the control of the Services that will come into effect under the Lee Commission's recommendations is confined to the recruitment of the Services in the transferred field, and not to the existing men in the All-India services or any new recruits therein. Now Ministers are bound to come in contact with the All-India Services men, whose position has now been made more secure than ever by the Civil Services Bill. How can dyarchy under the new dispensation possibly function better, I ask? And are Ministers to hang on to dyarchy till they build up their cadre with these new and tractable recruits? The same about the supposed advantage of improved conditions of finance to which the Viceroy has referred. How can dyarchy fare better, say, in Bombay even if tried till 1929 or 1939, simply because of the doing away of the provincial contributions, so long as a member of the reserved half holds the purse strings? Similarly about joint deliberations or joint responsibility of the Ministry. These are to be enforced on important questions according to the majority recommendations, by definite rules and modification of the Instrument of Instruction and the Devolution Rules. This is indeed enforced co-operation between the two halves of Government by Rules and regulations! And who is to determine what is an "important question"?

It will thus be seen dyarchy in the best of circumstances can conceivably find no better chance than it already had, and insistence on a further trial of this defective machine is only a subterfuge to gain time. I can certainly understand and appreciate a plain refusal from the Secretary of State to grant constitutional advance on other political grounds, but to base the refusal on a solemn finding in the face of overwhelming evidence that dyarchy has *not* failed is, to say the least of it, making a disingenuous use of the Muddiman Report.

We are told the difficulties of full Provincial autonomy have not been thought out by the Minority section of the Muddiman Committee, and it is hinted that they did not even probably understand them. Surely, it does not line in the mouth of those who drafted the narrow terms of reference to make this charge. And if Government specify

the difficulties they foresee, it would not be, I am confident, beyond the capacity of non-officials to find a solution, if necessary, with help of constitutional experts.

Now let me speak a word about the offer by the Secretary of state to Indian politicians to frame a constitution according to Indian genius. We welcome the offer, but at the same time we note that it is hedged in by conditions which may, in the absence of good will on the part of Whitehall, prove in the end elusive. Lord Birkenhead is extraordinarily cautious in his wording. The Indian scheme according to his Lordship must have a fair measure of general agreement amongst the great people of India"—this condition we do not mind. But suppose the suggested alternative scheme is drafted, say, in six months. What happens? will it be considered by a Royal Commission immediately appointed for its consideration? No, his Lordship says it will be carefully considered by him, by the Viceroy, and the Commission "*whenever that body may be assembled*"! I shall not detain you any longer on this subject. Let me only add that Lord Birkenhead's remarks on the Indianization of the Army, and his reference to his determination not to abandon India as a Trust till any foreseeable future are not at all reassuring and confirm the very "demon of suspicion" he wishes to exercise.

What Next?

The Reforms Enquiry having ended in this manner the question is what should be our next step? My frankest answer is this. Political struggle is a series of disappointments. We need not be disheartened or dismayed by this one. It is no small gain that the Government of India Act is purged of some imperfections.

If I were asked what my next steps should be, I would unhesitatingly answer as follows :—

Continue working the constitution, with the Muddiman modifications for all its worth; ask the Swarajists to create better atmosphere by co-operating in the Councils; elicit from Government precisely what those mysterious "Complexities" are as regards Provincial autonomy; accept Lord Birkenhead's offer, for whatever it may be worth to frame an alternative constitution on Indian lines; invite suitable representatives from all parties to join us, if they care to, in drafting such a constitution, or take Dr. Besant's Bill as a basis; submit the final

draft, when ready for approval and ratification to the Congress and other organisations, or better still have it ratified at an All-Party Conference like the one held in Bombay last year ; make this the national demand from every platform in India ; and with this, ask the Secretary of State for the immediate appointment of a Royal Commission.

The greatest need of the day is unity between Parties, unity between communities, unity in submerging our differences on Hindu—Moslem claims ; above all, unity in framing a scheme for the good of India. Let us not, however, make too much of the unity of any particular Forum from which we should proclaim our united demand.

South Africa.

The position of our unfortunate countrymen in South Africa under the persistent persecution of the Union Government is growing worse every year. Although the Class Areas Bill of last year has been thrown out, General Hertzog's Government which is now in power has introduced another anti-Asiatic Bill through Dr. Malan, the Minister of Interior. This measure goes further than the Class Areas Bill of last year and provides that on the application of any Municipality the Government may, upon the advice of a Board of Enquiry specially constituted set aside certain trading areas or residential localities to " persons having common racial peculiarities "—The Bill further empowers the Governor-General to prohibit members of any Asiatic race from acquiring land either by lease or ownership in Natal, except in the coastal belt. Lastly, the Bill restricts immigration of Indians particularly of women, even the wives of men already domiciled in the Union, in utter violation of the Gandhi-Smuts Settlement of 1914, or the findings of the Asiatic Enquiry Commission with respect to the alleged influx of Indians into South Africa. Every country has the right no doubt to regulate its immigrants ; but no country has a right in this barbarous manner to make the lives of its domiciled citizens unbearable, and to degrade any country in the eyes of the world by unscrupulous and barefaced enactments. We are told by H. E. the Viceroy that negotiations are still proceeding in this matter. The attitude of the Government of India in this matter seems by common consent entirely to be feeble,

PROVINCIAL.

I now propose to deal with some provincial matters, which, I am sure, will form the subject of your deliberations. I shall confine myself only to considerations of general policy.

Provincial Finance.

The finances of the Presidency are, as you know, by no means stable or satisfactory. Instead of having expanding revenue the Government is living a hand to month existence. May I venture to ask if this Conference will consider what should be the general attitude of the Liberals towards the financial policy of Government? Should it be one of

Revenue Expansion or stagnation.

Retrenchment of a few lakhs here, or increase of revenue by a few lakhs there by *ad hoc* taxation like the Entertainment Tax has been tried these four years. There are many people who fondly believe that by further retrenchment we can develop the Presidency. Let us not remain under that idle hope. This year, it is true, we have obtained some relief in the Provincial contributions (22 lakhs out of 56); but wiping out these contributions is only a part of our problem. The problem, if you take a long perspective, is a bigger one, and I feel it is the duty of this Conference to prepare public opinion to face the question of expansion of revenue even at the risk of some unpopularity, as upon revenue will depend the fate of all our beneficent schemes.

The Prospect.

For instance, to refer to only two popular ideals, if we are really serious and intent on achieving, say in ten years (i) compulsory primary education throughout the Presidency, and (ii) total Prohibition of drink (not to speak of other schemes) let us roughly visualise how we may stand. Wiping out the present Excise revenue of Rs. 4 crores odd, our present normal revenue will shrink from Rs. 14 crores odd to Rs. 10 crores. On the other hand, our present expenditure will mount up from Rs. 15 crores to, say, Rs. 17 crores. Add to this other schemes for Social services, or "nation-building" departments as we call them, and the whole amount may reach a higher figure. How are we to make up the lacuna, from

10 crores to, say, 17 crores? Our only hope obviously lies in two things; firstly, in releasing from the "jaws of crocodile", I mean, the Government of India, a substantial share of our income-tax revenue by a revision of the financial relations between the Central and Provincial Governments, so as to secure for us at least 4 to 5 crores of revenue, which will replace our excise; and secondly, in having a policy of land revenue expansion.

Financial Relations.

Speaking about this, we have every reason to feel indignant at the manner in which the Government of India are treating the Bombay Government and our representatives in the Assembly over this question. In almost all federal systems of taxation, income-tax is a divided head. Here in India, the Central Government is sucking the life-blood of one Province, Bombay, to the relief of other provinces as will be obvious from the following figures, quoted in a debate in the Legislative Assembly by one of the Bombay representatives. On the population basis, Bombay is contributing Rs. 4 per head to the Central Government, Bengal contributes only Re. $\frac{2}{3}$, and Madras contributes Re. $\frac{1}{2}$ only. Then, again, since the Reforms, Bombay, in order to make both ends meet, has taxed herself from time to time to such an extent that comparative taxation in the three Presidencies, as at 1922-23, stood thus:—Bombay 6·1 per head, Madras 3·2, and Bengal 1·9. Is it fair that Bombay should start industries only to fatten the Government of India? It is hoped in some quarters that the Taxation Committee will come to our rescue by its recommendations for an equitable distribution of taxation. Let me hope it will; but I believe the Government of India have shrewdly kept out the question of the revision of the financial relations from the province of that committee as a direct issue. The Taxation Committee can help us only indirectly, if at all. I strongly hope this Conference will forcibly work up public opinion regarding this important grievance of ours against the Central Government.

Land Revenue Assessment.

But even if, and when, this grievance is satisfactorily removed, even assuming we obtain Rs. 4 to 5 crores from the income tax share, can piecemeal taxation—e. g. a Race-Course Tax or an Entertainment

Tax help us to have universal primary education? I fear *volens volens* we shall have to fall back upon the problem of examining improvements in agricultural incomes and enter on a policy of expanding revenues. I am glad Government have appointed a Committee to go into the question of Land Revenue Assessments. I, for one, do not approve of the tendency in certain quarters amongst some of our politicians against revision settlements. Not that I am for indiscriminate enhancements, neither do I approve of any procedure of virtually one-sided inquiry by executive authority for revision settlements. I know the question bristles with difficulties. But it is no use denying the fact that in many tracts of the country agricultural profits must be increasing by virtue of the benefits of irrigation, roads, railways etc., brought in by the general tax payer's money. By all means, provide an impartial machinery to satisfy the cultivator that he is realising more profits; but for his own benefit in the villages, for better roads and better dispensaries etc. for him, indeed,—if we have any proper conception of developing this raw country on modern lines—let us not oppose reasonable measures for expansion of land revenue.

Concurrent Measures.

While I think this would be the proper attitude as regards land revenue, I maintain it is the function of Government concurrently to launch on a policy of promoting a larger production of taxable wealth amongst the people by encouraging and giving a whole hearted stimulus to (i) Technical education; (ii) promotion of industries, and (iii) greater help for improvement of Agriculture. I cannot approve of the present lukewarm attitude of Government in respect of technical education. Government are not doing their own part in this matter by popularising Technical training. So also in respect of promoting industries their record is totally unworthy. It is high time for Government to consider if a State Aid to Industries Act was not overdue in Bombay Presidency. As regards Agriculture, much has, indeed, been done but a great deal still remains to be done. In this connection I welcome the idea of the Central Government giving a powerful impetus to Agricultural Reform foreshadowed in the recent speech of the Secretary of State for India, as undoubtedly there are immense possibilities of wealth production in India, if agriculture is done on something else than the present primitive style.

Education.

In the sphere of education, it is gratifying to note that, in spite of financial stringency, the presidency is making satisfactory progress. Ten years ago expenditure on primary education from Provincial revenues was Rs. 30 lakhs; it is now over Rs. 1 crore and ten lakhs. Indianization of the posts in the I. E. service is equally satisfactory. In 1914, the I. E. S. was purely European; to-day, two thirds of the posts are held by Indians. Facilities for the education of the depressed classes and the backward communities are being afforded on a good scale. It is no small satisfaction to us Liberals, that it was a Liberal Minister who had initiated some of these features. Rules under the Primary Education Act have been now passed and Local Boards are about to assume control of primary Education.

One or two points in respect of educational matters deserve a reference. Although Rules under the Primary Education Act were carefully considered by all concerned, an anomaly, it is said, has arisen with regard to the liability that will now fall on local bodies in the matter of grants to private aided schools in urban areas. Hitherto, these schools were practically financed from Provincial grants and fee receipts, without any burden on the rate payers. Under the present rules, a considerable burden is likely to fall on the local bodies, unless Government make it clear that the level of the existing grants to these schools would be maintained by them and treated as a datum line, any extra expenditure over this to be shared between Government and local bodies in the fixed ratio.

The other question to which the attention of Government may be drawn is the inordinate delay in arriving at a decision over the pay of primary teachers. The solution of this question is hanging fire for an inconceivably long period. The discontent amongst primary teachers is as acute as that which prevailed amongst the I. C. S. men in the pre-Lee Commission unhappy days. A committee appointed for this purpose has, I hear, met recently after nine months and made a report. The question is not a simple one, I know; but I would venture to suggest to the Minister in charge to take the bull by the horns and come to some decision at once.

Local Self-Government.

In another branch of administration, namely, Local Self-Government the progress under the regime of the Hon'ble Mr. Ghulam Hoos-

sein Hidayatulla has been remarkable during the last few years, for which he deserves our warmest appreciation. Notable steps have been taken to liberalise local bodies right up from the bottom in rural areas to the top. Thus, the Village Panchayat Act, 1920, about which we passed a resolution at our last session has been referred to a committee with a view to its provisions being overhauled. The provisional recommendations of this Committee appear to be conceived in a practical spirit, especially in respect of finding finance for the Panchayets. Another Committee has been asked to recommend steps for financial help to Local Boards. Similarly, a bill has been introduced to improve the powers and the composition of City Municipalities and it appears to me to go a long way to make City Municipalities fairly autonomous. I trust this Conference will be able to offer detailed suggestions in respect of these subjects.

Excise.

In the matter of Excise, we are glad during the year we have advanced a step further. The Bombay Government has accepted a policy of total Prohibition as its ultimate goal; the labours of the Excise Committee of last year have not been in vain. It is to be regretted, however, Government are not countenancing a policy of local option and are pushing on with the system of rationing liquor. This system is having good results so far as it goes, as will be noticed from the figures of consumption of liquor, which has gone down by no less than 35.7 per cent since 1919-20. On the other hand, it must not be overlooked that so long as the poor man has to pay a heavy price for his drink, no matter whether he drinks comparatively less in quantity, the misery to this wife and children as regards his family Budget is almost the same. It must be recognised that the replacement of the large excise revenue and the strengthening of the inspecting staff to prevent illicit distillation in the event of total prohibition are rather difficult problems; but on the whole, the drink question is being tackled with steady earnestness since this Department has become a transferred subject.

Bombay Mill Industry.

The Situation of the Mill industry in Bombay has reached an acute stage. I would ask the members of this Conference to look at the problem neither from Millowner's nor from only a labour point of view. If the industry is crippled it is a blow to all concerned, and to

the well-being of the Presidency. With reference to the abolition of the Excise duty, Government admit the injustice of the impost but refuse to give immediate relief on the ground of financial stringency. This is grossly unfair. So far as the Millowner's contention that a wage cut is the only other alternative to save the industry, in the event of the Excise duty not being abolished, I do not think they have laid all their cards on the table and proved their case to the satisfaction of any independent tribunal; first, they wanted a wage cut of 20 p. c., then a 15 p. c., from which they have come down now to 11½ p. c. Neither have they disapproved the allegation made in the Press that after all Japanese competition affects the industry only in a small way. Japanese imports of cloth are said to be only 5 p. c. of Indian manufacture. It seems to me but fair that an independent Committee should be appointed to explore all possible methods of effecting internal economy in this industry and the Millowners should be prepared to place the Committee in possession of all facts regarding their internal management.

Conclusion.

Ladies and gentlemen, I fear I have detained you too long. I welcome you once again to this Conference and now ask you to proceed to elect your President, and be ready to listen to an address from him, which I am sure, will repay all the inconveniences you have undergone for the occasion.
