

UNREVISED

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JOINT COMMITTEE
ON INDIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

RECORDS

of the Joint Committee on

INDIAN CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Die Martis, 10^o Octobris, 1933

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Statement on Burma made to the Joint Committee and Delegates by the Right Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, Bt., G.B.E., C.M.G., M.P., Secretary of State for India, on Tuesday, the 10th October, 1933.

MY LORD CHAIRMAN,

Burma is at present a Province of British India. It is, therefore, necessary to consider its future Government under the Committee's Terms of Reference. I have already circulated a tentative sketch of a Constitution for Burma on the assumption that it ceases to be a Province of British India and becomes a separate entity.

We have, first of all, to decide whether Burma enters the Indian Federation or whether she becomes a separate unit outside the Federation. We then have to draw up a Constitution in accordance with our decision on this issue. I think, however, that when once the initial decision is made our task should not be very difficult. If Burma enters the Indian Federation her Constitution must be the same as that of any other Indian Province, and we should have to do little more than modify the allocation of seats in the Federal Legislature so as to provide for Burmese representation. If, on the other hand, Burma is to be separated, we must still follow, in its main lines, the Indian plan. The expectations that have been held out to India apply equally to Burma as part of India and Burma has been specifically given to understand that her prospect of constitutional advancement will not be prejudiced by separation. But in the case of a separated Burma we shall have to provide not only for the functions of the provincial units in India but also for the functions of the Central Government. The Constitution I have sketched in the Memorandum is therefore an adjustment of the provisions of the federal and provincial sections of the Indian White Paper modified in some, but not many, particulars to meet the special needs of a Burma separated from India. Members and Delegates will find that in the proposals which I have circulated the points of divergence between the Burman and the Indian proposals are conveniently shown by the use of italics.

As things stand, Burma is part of India and our Indian colleagues will naturally wish to have an opportunity of expressing their opinions about its future. They will have views not only upon the inclusion or non-inclusion of Burma in the Indian Federation, but also upon the question whether Burma should be included in the Indian Federation, as some Burman party leaders have demanded, upon special terms; for example, whether she should retain for her own use customs duties levied in Burma and whether she should be free to secede from the Federation at her will.

There has already been considerable discussion about the future of Burma with Indian representatives at the first Indian Round Table Conference. But a good deal has since taken place and our Indian colleagues may wish to give their views on these developments.

I think I am right in saying that the general conclusion on this subject at the first Indian Conference was that, if it was the desire of the people of Burma that their country should be separated from India, Indians would not oppose such separation.

Now the Committee will no doubt expect to hear something from me upon the subject of separation, and I shall therefore state my own views. It should not be necessarily assumed that what I put forward as my own views are the final views of His Majesty's Government. The whole question of the future government of India, which for the present includes Burma, is now in the hands of the Joint Select Committee, and it would not be appropriate at this juncture for the Government to declare a definite decision that might appear to prejudice the Committee's deliberations.

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Subject to that I may say quite clearly that, after the fullest and most sympathetic consideration of Burma's real interests and aspirations, I have come to the two conclusions that were reached by the Statutory Commission, namely, that Burma should henceforth be separated from India, and that the general body of Burman opinion supports separation.

The history of the separation question in Burma is not a very long one. Indeed, the development of any political movement in the modern sense in Burma is comparatively recent. But it is a question that was bound to arise as soon as self-government began to develop in India, and once the movement for separation started, it developed with considerable rapidity.

The Indian Statutory Commission found that Burman sentiment in favour of separation from India was very general. Every member of the Burman Committee which co-operated with the Commission took this line, and in February, 1929, a motion in favour of Burma's separation from India was carried without a division. The Commission reported that from their own experience they had little doubt that the verdict of the Council was the verdict of the country as a whole and that this general view did not rest on mere sentiment only but was substantiated by cogent economic considerations. Not only are the economic interests of Burma and India often divergent but many of the other matters which have preoccupied the Indian Legislature are of no interest to Burma owing to differences of racial, social and religious outlook. Burma has therefore taken little interest in the proceedings of the Central Legislature, and her representatives have been more and more reluctant to undertake the long journey to attend sessions where their presence is of little practical weight or importance. What is true already will not be less true in the future.

Nevertheless in the last two or three years the natural desire of the people of Burma for a separate political existence has become somewhat obscure. When the clear issue was put to the electorate in the autumn of 1932, a majority of members styling themselves anti-separationists was returned and they opposed separation on the basis of the Constitution offered at the end of the Burma Round Table Conference. In the introduction to the memorandum that I circulated at the beginning of August, I have described the events which have taken place since 1931 and I have summed up the evidence by saying that there is an almost unanimous opinion in Burma in favour of ultimate separation from India and against Federation on the same terms as the other Provinces of India.

In spite of the apparent obscurity of the proceedings which took place in the Burma Legislature I think that the elements of the situation are as follows: The Indian community naturally desire permanent union with India and on account of its strong economic position this Community, which numbers less than 10 per cent. of the population, has an influence in politics out of proportion to its numbers. Apart from this, there is practically no opinion in Burma in favour of incorporation in the Federation on the ordinary provincial terms. Where the anti-separationists differ from the separationists is that they think that, after a short period of incorporation in the Indian Federation on special terms, they will secure better terms for a separated Burma than they would now obtain. Both groups hope to get a more advantageous constitution than that outlined in the Prime Minister's Statement at the end of the Burma Round Table Conference. One group thinks that this can be achieved by a temporary continuance of the association of Burma with India. The other has no such hope and realises that if Burma becomes involved in the Indian Federation she will

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have to stay there. Both groups are equally opposed to unconditional and permanent federation with India. Upon this at least the Resolution passed unanimously by the Burma Council in 1932 is clear. While unfavourable to the separation of Burma on the basis of the constitution offered at the end of the Burma Round Table Conference, it emphatically opposed unconditional and permanent federation with India.

It has already been stated clearly in Parliament that the right of secession from the Federation, if it could be granted at all, could not be limited to one federating party. On such a basis no federal system could be stable. Several Indian political leaders have expressed themselves in this sense and I have no doubt that the Joint Select Committee will agree with me in saying that such a right of secession cannot possibly be granted. Once this condition is made finally clear beyond any possibility of doubt, I believe that a great deal of the obscurity which has surrounded the separation issue will vanish and that the general desire of the people of Burma for separation will once more become clear.

For these reasons I think there can be no real doubt as to which the Burman people prefer of the alternatives actually open to them, and I have said enough to show why my personal opinion is on the side of separation. It will be a matter for the Committee later to say whether they agree. I am not pressing them for an immediate decision. I think that this is an opportunity for the Indian delegates to express their views, and I hope that the Committee will agree to invite a suitable number of delegates representing the various parties and interests in Burma to come to London later and join them upon the same footing as that which the Indian delegates have been occupying during the last few months.

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