

EXTREMISTS AND MODERATES.

(A Study.)

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CHAPTER I.

Extremists and Moderates.

EXTREMISTS are anxious to make out that there is no difference between them and the Moderates, that all are Nationalists; what little difference there is, is one of pace or speed—one party would go fast, the other go slow. This view is erroneous.

The abstention of the bulk of Moderates from the Extremist Congress in Bombay indicates more than surface difference. Veteran leaders who helped to build up the Congress would not lightly stay away from it. In fact, the abstention was the result of careful and anxious deliberation. What are the forces which separate the two parties? A calm study of recent movements and events discloses a fundamental difference between the two schools, both in ideals and methods of work.

The Extremists can roughly be divided into three classes—(1) revolutionaries, (2) those who sympathise with and secretly help revolutionaries but do not admit it for fear of the law, and (3) visionaries impatient of foreign domination but opposed to violent methods. Thus, Extremism ranges from criminality to impatient idealism.

The Moderates are those who, not content with the existing order of things, want ordered progress by gradual stages. They are less assertive than the Extremists and more balanced in political judgment.

Let us analyse the difference a little more in detail, with reference to ideals and methods.

Ideals.—The Extremists would have nothing to do with the English, in the Government or outside; the Moderates consider co-operation with the English necessary for national development—political, industrial, economic and otherwise. The Extremists would straightway assume full responsibility of Government; the Moderates think that would lead to chaos and would proceed by stages. It is the difference

between cataclysm and evolution. The Extremist ideal is destruction of the existing order of things in the hope that something better will take its place, for nothing can be worse than what is; the Moderate ideal is formation of a new order of things on definite progressive lines. One is chance, the other is design.

Methods.—The primary difference is that Extremist method is not necessarily constitutional; the Moderate method always constitutional. Some Extremists use violence. Others work secretly and spread discontent and disaffection. Others again, pretending to follow legitimate methods of agitation, take care not to discourage unconstitutional methods or even crimes; nay, they miss no opportunity to applaud criminals as martyrs. There are others, again, who merely idealize and are content with rousing the passions of the people. Intrigue and abuse are the chief weapons in the Extremist armoury. The Moderates always act openly and with dignity and follow lawful methods of agitation. The Extremists always oppose the Government. The Moderates co-operate with authority, and oppose, when necessary, in the interest of the country. Lastly, the Extremists appeal only to the passions of the people; the Moderates appeal to their reason.

Such being the differences between the two schools, let us examine their attitude towards the Reform Scheme. From the outset, and before there was time enough to understand it, the Extremists looked upon the Scheme with distrust and resentment. They would reject it unceremoniously. The Moderates found in it a distinct advance towards responsible Government and hailed it with hope and confidence. The Extremist outcry became so extravagant that the Moderates had to exert themselves chiefly to combat Extremist misrepresentation.

The special session of the Congress was to consider the Reform Scheme. The inactivity and trustfulness of the Moderates had resulted in the Congress organization passing into Extremist hands. The position, before the Congress was timed to meet, was this: the Moderates were in favour of the Scheme in its broad outlines and the Extremists were loud in the denunciation of it, root and branch. It became

obvious that the Moderates could not go to the Extremist Congress and be party to resolutions designed for the destruction of the Scheme. After anxious deliberation they decided that if they were to assist in the realization of the proposed reforms they must stay away from the Congress and formulate their criticisms and suggestions, according to their own ideals, separately.

In the next two chapters it will be seen how the abstention of the Moderates was rendered necessary by the uncompromising attitude of the Extremists, before the Congress, and how fully such abstention was vindicated by the Extremist resolutions passed in the Congress.

CHAPTER II.

Extremists and the Reform Scheme.

BEFORE the Reform Scheme was published, the Extremist leaders had made up their minds to condemn it. For, once India was started on the road to responsible Government the occupation of the Extremists would be gone.

The Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms was published in India on the 8th July, 1918. It was necessary to prepare the Extremists in advance. Madras and Bengal took the lead, though Bengal did little more than carry out the behests of the Madras headquarters. On the 2nd June, 1918, a post-card was issued from the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee in these terms :

“You will keep yourselves ready to hold public meetings, to attend the Congress and the Conferences in very large numbers and to fearlessly criticise the proposals if they fall short of *our ideal*.” (See *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 2nd July, 1918).

On the 4th July, Sir Subramania Aiyar wrote to the press :

“If any Scheme does not give final goal of full responsible Government in India and indicates steps towards its realization, it should not be accepted” (*A.B.P.*, 6th July).

There is no mistake as to the Extremist ideal—immediate full responsible Government and no steps or stages.

On the 8th July, Mrs. Besant came out with her clarion call in *New India*. She summoned her adherents to follow her

“into a struggle for freedom.” “I shall see now how many will follow me into the struggle which tests what is in a man. . . . I call on those who love liberty and on none else to follow me, and I take the risk of speaking first.”

She ended the bellicose article thus :

“The Scheme is unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India. It is petty where it should have been large, banal where it should have been striking. There is about it no spacious and far-seeing statesmanship, no constructive genius, no vision for India of even future evolution into freedom.”

The same day fifteen Madras stalwarts issued a manifesto which contains this :

“The Scheme is so radically wrong alike in principle and in detail that in our opinion it is impossible to modify or improve it. Nor do we think it possible to devise any system of safeguards against the mischievous working of the whole complex scheme. It cannot consequently form the basis of discussion or compromise by the people or their representatives. . . . We are satisfied that unless the present scheme is *altogether abandoned* as to the political reform of the Government of the country and a new one substituted, embodying principles or plans in consonance with the inalienable rights of the people of this country to achieve responsible Government, which is different in nature and magnitude from a vaguely recognized right of co-operation, a deep wide-spread and enduring national discontent would be the consequence.” (*New India*, 8th July.)

The *Bombay Chronicle*, on the same day, echoed the same inflexible sentiment. It.

“refused to support a scheme which does not take one jot or a tittle of the real power from the bureaucracy. . . . We cannot offer an iota of support for such a scheme.” (*New India*, 9th July).

On the 9th July, Mr. Tilak said :

“The Montagu Scheme is *entirely unacceptable*.” (*New India*, 10th July).

In his paper *Kesari*, Mr. Tilak in the course of an article said—“It has dawned, but where is the sun!” (*New India*, 10th July).

It is useless multiplying instances. The Scheme is admittedly very complex, and, a day or two clearly inadequate for a close study of it. The views quoted above cannot, therefore, represent honest opinion upon a proper understanding of the Scheme. It is denunciation aforethought. There was no change in the Extremist attitude as time went on. The rank and file had to be impregnated with the same ideas. The campaign proceeded with unabated vigour in view of the special session of the Congress. On the 11th July, Sir Subramania Aiyar wrote to *New India* :

“The Scheme is an utterly disappointing one. Not even a small fraction of the thing aspired after is intended to be given. Not even one anna out of the sixteen.”

He feared lest “the unfortunate contingency of its being accepted by Parliament befall the motherland.”

“It is the progeny of a terrible misalliance, an alliance between the spirit of the unmitigated autocrat, on the one hand, and that of the unblushing exploiter on the other. . . . It is due to all Home Rulers and Congressmen that every one of us should distinctly pledge himself to the demand that the Scheme be *rejected in toto*.”

What were the rank and file to do? The veteran general's command went :

“Agitate, agitate till the goal of Home Rule is won.”

Mr. Wadia, of the General Staff, said :

“The Scheme when applied will crush the soul of India. It is unconsciously playing the part of the murderer of the National Soul.” (*New India*, 11th July).

The campaign of denunciation was carried into the districts. The Chairman of the Trichinopoly District Conference expressed his “bitter disappointment and *disgust*” (*N.I.*, 13th July). People who did not know English had to be inoculated with the virus. So, the *New India* in its *Hindi* column said this (13th July) :

“Not to speak of happiness, there must be few in whom it has not given rise to feelings of pain and anger. As we *predicted*, the Report has turned out to be

worthless. It is our duty now to hold meetings all over the country and agitate for the *rejection* of such reforms. English statesmen know well now to make promises, but, let alone fulfilling those promises, they do exactly the opposite. The story of the Report is similar to this."

Again, the same Extremist organ wrote :

"Therefore, if this Report become law, the Indian will remain the 'under dog' and the European the 'top dog,' and all talk of equality and co-operation will be in reality a sham. We Indians are to ever remain inferior, continue to be insulted and treated like slaves in our own country. This will be the most noteworthy outcome of Montagu-Chelmsford Report *if accepted*" (N.I., 16th July).

Thus feelings of bitterness and hatred began to be excited by violent articles in the Extremist organs all over the country. Meetings were held, curses called down on the heads of Moderates and the Scheme denounced wholesale. At one of the meetings, the question "Can the Scheme be improved?" was answered thus: "We are for ending the Scheme and not for mending it." The Chief of the Staff, Sir Subramania Aiyar, put it with soldierly bluntness thus :

"If the scheme of reforms is produced by any section of our countrymen, we have a duty to carefully examine that scheme. Anything which originates with foreigners, violates the principle of self-determination and, therefore, time and energy should be economised in dealing with them. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report falls in the second class, and a *strong, wholesale and prompt rejection* is all that is necessary." (*Modern Review*, August, p. 193).

In the series of meetings which followed, the same implacable spirit was rampant. On the 5th August, the Madras Extremist Conference declared that the announcement of the 20th August, 1917, was not binding on them. The Bengal Provincial Conference declared that the Scheme was disappointing and unsatisfactory. The passions roused by the campaign of vilification, hate and resentment went out of

control. Moderate speakers were shouted down. The mere mention of names of respected Moderate leaders evoked curses and violent scenes. Even Mrs. Besant was howled down on one occasion.

The Moderates would have nothing to do with this meretricious and unpatriotic campaign which ran counter to their ideals and opposed to the best interests of the country. They took a firm stand, and, on the 16th August, at a Conference of Moderate leaders of all provinces, it was decided that they should abstain from the Extremist Congress. In the Reform Scheme they found a distinct and substantial step towards the progressive realization of responsible Government and a workable machinery for further advances till the goal was reached. The Extremists were determined to wreck the Scheme. The Moderate attitude did not affect their resolve. Nor did the reasoned opinion of responsible persons in India and England. The House of Commons was friendly to the Scheme; the British press generally approved it; and all friends of India welcomed it. The Extremists were at bay.

This was the state of things on the eve of the Congress. Voting naked rejection would discredit them; yet they must subvert the Scheme. The Extremists, therefore, put on the mask of acceptance subject to impossible modifications. The mask will be discovered in the next Chapter.

CHAPTER III.

Extremists in Congress.

THE Extremist Congress met in Bombay at the end of August and beginning of September last. It was largely attended. A few Moderates were present. It is reported to have been an enthusiastic gathering. It would have been equally enthusiastic if the resolutions passed were different in spirit and substance. Enthusiasm at such gatherings is created by the number and variety of persons, by the personality of the leading spirits and by the traditions of the Congress. There was eloquence, there was passion, glamour, mysticism—all that appeals to a large mass.

Let us come to cold reason. It would be wearisome to go through all the resolutions. A few samples will show how the Extremist leaders, determined to wreck the Reform Scheme, committed the Congress to the practical rejection of it under the guise of suggesting modifications.

The policy of the British Cabinet, announced on the 20th August, 1917, lays down the following definite conditions: (1) That progress in the policy can only be achieved by successive stages, (2) That the British Government and the Government of India must be the judges of the time and measure of each advance, and (3) That each advance would depend upon the co-operation of the Indians with the Government and the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility. This policy got the general approval of Parliament, and, it may be taken for all practical discussion, that any scheme of reforms which may be propounded must conform to this policy. It is idle to ignore the conditions laid down in the policy or to attempt to go behind them.

In order to give effect to this policy the authors of the Scheme propose to begin by transferring certain subjects to popular control. They say:

“Our idea is that as the popular element of the Government acquires experience and learns to discharge its duties efficiently further powers should be entrusted to it. The process in fact will be one of adding to the transferred subjects and of taking from the reserved ones, until such time as with the entire disappearance of the reserved subjects the need for an official element in the Government vanishes, and thus the goal of complete responsibility is attained in the provinces.”

They say further that the above arrangement is intended to provide merely for *ad interim* changes. They propose that at the end of ten years the working of the new system should be reviewed by a Commission appointed under the authority of the Parliament with a view to a further advance till complete responsible Government is established in the provinces. They say :

“In many of the provinces no such consummation can follow in the time named. The pace will be everywhere unequal, though progress in one province will always stimulate progress elsewhere. The reasons that make complete responsibility at present impossible are likely to continue operative in some degree even after a decade . . . We recognize that time is necessary for the development of responsibility in the electorates and the growth of proper relations between representatives and constituencies.”

No reasonable man can quarrel with the policy or the means devised to carry it out. It involves steady progress towards the goal of full responsible Government.

The proposals, however, are calculated to defeat the activities of those who would fish in troubled waters. The whole scheme had therefore to be undermined. It would not do merely to nibble at the details of the proposals. To strike at the root of the proposals it was necessary to attack the policy of gradual evolution, of periodic enquiry, of further advance on the success of the experiment. The Extremists, therefore, began with a declaration that India was fully fit for responsible Government. There must not be any periodic enquiry but a limit of time should be fixed within which the present autocratic Government must be replaced by

complete democratic Government. No training is necessary ; no time required for the people to adapt themselves to the new democracy—a people who for centuries had been accustomed to nothing but absolute forms of Government. Here are the resolutions of the Extremist Congress :

“The Congress declares that the people of India are fit for responsible Government and repudiates the assumption to the contrary contained in the Report.”

The Congress demanded

“That full responsible Government should be established in the whole of India within a period not exceeding fifteen years and in the provinces within a period not exceeding six years.”

The absurdity of the resolutions is patent on the face of them, but they were necessary to defeat the Scheme. They deliberately violate the conditions laid down in the policy of August 20, and are, therefore, destructive of the Scheme which is based on that policy. Yet, there are simple-minded persons who have been deluded into the belief that the Congress has not rejected the Reform Scheme.

So far, we have seen how the substance of the Scheme has been sought to be destroyed. The Extremists do not stop there. They have devised a means of sending the Scheme to its doom through procedure also.

The Congress resolved :

“That so far as the question of determining the franchise and the constituencies and composition of the Legislative Assemblies is concerned this Congress is of opinion that instead of being left to be dealt with by the Committees it should be decided by the House of Commons and be incorporated in the Statute for the constitution of the Indian Government.”

The authors of the Reform Scheme recognize the immensity and complexity of the above matters. They say :

“We must measure the number of persons who can in different parts of the country be reasonably entrusted with the duties of citizenship. We must ascertain what sort of franchise will be suited to local conditions, and

how interests that may be unable to find adequate representation in such constituencies are to be represented. Such an elaborate survey of the entire country is obviously beyond our powers at the present time."

It can well be imagined that it will be round these questions that the fiercest controversies will rage. It will not be an easy matter to co-ordinate the different interests claiming representation. The authors of the Scheme, following the precedent of cases where delay is inexpedient, have proposed that the Parliamentary statute will deal with the outlines leaving the details to be worked out by Committees sent out to India. It can hardly be denied that those details can only be worked out in this country and in the different provinces. Even if the House of Commons were competent, it would certainly be disinclined, during the continuance of the War, to find the necessary time for such a laborious task. Therefore the surest way of securing the abandonment of the Scheme is to insist on the House of Commons undertaking the complicated task. That is the fate to which the Extremists would consign the Scheme. Meanwhile they would go on fanning the fire of unrest and discontent.

The hollowness of the pretence that India is now fit for full self-government is made manifest by the proposal of the Congress that during the fifteen years' grace the present Government is to look to "all matters affecting the peace, tranquillity and defence of the country."

Some of the speeches made at the Congress are frankly hostile to the Reform Scheme. Here are a few samples :

Mr. Motilal Nehru :—

"In his opinion there was not a single iota of responsible Government in the Montagu Reform Scheme."

Mr. Fazlul Huq :—

"If he followed his inclination he would have condemned the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme."

Mr. B. G. Tilak :—

"The Reform Report was a very artful, skilful and statesmanlike document. The whole literary spirit of

the Report lay in making them believe one anna of responsible Government was better than eight annas of self-government. Fortunately they had discovered it."

Mrs. Besant, quoting an English statesman, said :—

"There was an intolerable humiliation in the yoke of the stranger."

Further quotations are unnecessary to show the spirit and temper of the Extremist Congress. The Extremists would like to destroy the Scheme which the Moderates are anxious to save. Having regard to the irreconcilable attitude of the Extremist leaders, any Moderate attempt in the Congress would have been futile.

CHAPTER IV.

Need for a Moderate Conference.

THE immediate need for an all-India Moderate Conference is the consideration of the Reform Scheme. Moderate organizations in different parts of the country have considered it and formulated their criticisms and suggestions. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the Moderates of the different provinces to meet, exchange ideas in friendly discussion and give final shape to their considered views.

It has been suggested that the Moderates could have done the same in the Extremist Congress. From the previous chapters it is clear that such a venture would have been labour in vain. The Extremists were out for condemning the Scheme. Their suggestions as embodied in the Resolutions of the Congress are calculated to render the Scheme abortive. The absence of the Moderates had the chastening effect of preventing violent outbursts and making the Extremists abandon the bald and blatant cry of rejection. The few Moderates who attended were even received with civility. No compromise, however, was possible between irreconcilable views and objectives. The Moderates, if they attended, could not secure a hearing, nor could they conscientiously submit to Resolutions practically rejecting the Scheme. In any event, they would have been compelled to formulate their own suggestions separately. Mongrel suggestions born of a patched-up union between two entirely conflicting ideals, even if possible, would have been of no assistance to anybody. Independent and untrammelled criticisms and suggestions are likely to be helpful. It should be remembered that what the authors of the Scheme have invited is reasoned criticism and not amorphous resolutions. Therefore, it is incumbent on the Moderates to speak out their minds fully and freely, which they can only do in their own Conference. The talk of a united front is all nonsense. There is no common enemy to combat. The authors of the Scheme have offered it to us as friends and we are expected to assist with

friendly criticism from all points of view. The question of united front does not come in at all.

Besides the immediate need mentioned above, the Moderates owe it to the country to organize their forces against Extremist opposition to the Scheme. The Committees will soon come out to determine the important matters of franchise, electorates, constitution of the Councils, separation of departments, etc. An enormous task is before us all. It is necessary to consider how to set about the work. Various conflicting interests will have to be co-ordinated. Some matters will be provincial, but a great deal will affect India as a whole. The changes enunciated in the Reform Scheme are momentous. Autocracy is to make way for democracy. At a time like this it is essential that the leaders who have created and kept up political life in the country should meet and deliberate upon the future course of action. Hitherto our position in the politics of the country has been that of irresponsible critics; henceforth we shall be our own rulers. Co-operation in the place of criticism is a change of the highest import, fraught with immense possibilities.

Therefore, an all-India Conference is necessary for the Moderates (1) to formulate their criticisms and suggestions on the Reform Scheme, (2) to decide upon the future plan of action with reference to the new form of government about to be introduced into India, and (3) generally to organize Moderate forces in the country in the interests of national development.