



Vegetarian Movement." He points out that though Gandhi did not become acquainted with Thoreau's work till 1907, Thoreau's thoughts percolated down to him indirectly through the English vegetarians. The well from which he imbibed was thus the one in which the buckets of both the East and the West had often dipped and grated together.

Note by Sir M. Seton

Confidential.

I am not sure that I follow correctly the first page and a half: if I do, several comments might be made, but I need not trouble the Secretary of State with them since they do not affect the incontrovertible points that the right of the Government to make decisions must remain unimpaired and that consequently, the only function that can be discharged by the Oppositions is that of offering advice.

But it rather looks as if the idea of the Conference had taken shape in a good many minds as that of a quasi-international conference between 'England' and 'India'. H.M. Government have carefully refrained from saying plainly that advocates of absolute independence for India shall not be heard at the Conference. Any considerable section of Indian opinion, however hostile and uncompromising its attitude towards the existing form of government, may take part. That being so, the Conference may very well come to appear (not only to the majority of Englishmen, but to a very large and influential (though not very vocal) section of Indian opinion...

In the past the Government of the day have not only consulted but have endeavoured to secure the cooperation of the Opposition in matters of high imperial of international policy as it has always been through desirable, if at all possible to ensure continuity of policy in such matters, however acute may be the differences in domestic politics. This is obviously a very desirable practice and, in the case of India, which has never been a party question, should not be departed from except for the most compelling reasons. The fact too that the present Government, unlike Governments of the past, is not in a position by means of a majority to secure the acceptance of their proposals by Parliament makes it doubly desirable to secure the co-operation of the Opposition. This, indeed, is the dominant factor in the case, for although the Executive Government, even though it be a minority Government, can alone be responsible for proposals laid before Parliament. The consequences of the rejection of those proposals would, in the present case, be so serious that it would be indefensible if everything humanly possible was not done to avoid this. I dismiss as unworthy of serious consideration the suggestion that Government would risk defeat in the expectation that they would be returned to power with a majority sufficient to enable them to carry through their proposals. An immoral gamble of this kind in unthinkable.

From the purely British point of view, therefore, there seems to be an overwhelming case for endeavouring to secure the cooperation of the opposition parties.

From the Indian point of view this, in my view, is no less desirable. It has been urged that the association of the Opposition parties with the conference would lead Indians to suspect that this was a device to prevent an agreement being reached. I confess that I find little real substance in this argument. Provided always that it is made clear that His Majesty's Government honestly intend to implement the assurance recently given by the Viceroy, and undertake that the proposals placed before Parliament would be based on any agreement that the Indian Wing may reach not with the British delegates as a whole but with the delegates who represent the Government.

There is, however, a decisive reason why the British side of the Conference should not be limited to representatives of His Majesty's Government and to make my point clear it is necessary to attempt to forecast the course of the discussions. On many matters, given a reasonable amount of good-will on both sides, adjustment should be possible. But the real clash will come when the Conference comes to consider the constitution of the Central Government. Leaving aside such elusive phrases as "Dominion status" or "Dominion status with safeguards", it may be anticipated that those who come from British India will broadly stand for a Central Executive Government responsible to the Legislature, even though that responsibility may temporarily be limited in certain branches or administration. As we know the Statutory Commission has rejected this in the most uncompromising way.

Let us suppose that in a Conference in which the Opposition did not participate, representatives of His Majesty's government were convinced that the Indian demand should be admitted wholly or in part and that it undertook to present proposals to Parliament on this basis. The Indian delegates would go back flushed with victory and for a time the extreme elements would be subdued. But later if as is not at all improbable, the Government proposals were rejected by Parliament the consequences would be disastrous. Indians would feel, not unreasonably, that they had been tricked; the extreme elements would regain their ascendancy and disturbances much more serious than those of 1921 or 1930 would inevitably follow.

If, however, the Conference contained representatives of all parties and if, as may be expected, the representatives of the Opposition made it clear that, in regard to the constitution of the Central Government they stood by the Simon Report and did not accept the Indian claim, no room would be left for misunderstanding. His Majesty's Government would formulate proposals with full knowledge of the heavy responsibility involved and Indians would have no excuse for not realising that the agreement that had been reached with His Majesty's Government was not the last word but might be rejected by Parliament.

I would strongly urge. Therefore. Not only in British but also in Indian interests, that a strenuous attempt should be made to secure the participation of the opposition parties in the Conference and that negotiations for this purpose should at once be initiated. It would, of course, be made clear that Government intended to implement the assurance recently given by the Viceroy and that it must take full responsibility for any proposals laid before Parliament. Apart from this, however, the Opposition parties must make their own conditions. It is to be hoped that they will agree to send representatives who would take an active part in the discussions. They may, however, prefer to send observers only or they may refuse to participate. But the offer should be made to participate in any manner that they may desire subject always to the conditions stated about. If they refuse the responsibility will be theirs.

