

Independence of Travancore

By A. K. Pillai, Barrister-at-Law

I HAVE come with a view to studying the reactions of the different interests and sections in Travancore to the Independence Stand finally taken by the State. As early as May 20 last when the idea was still in a formative process I heartily welcomed the move and publicly expressed my firm conviction that in the given situation Independence would be to the lasting advantage of the people and must eventually prove a tremendous accession of strength to the State in its external relations.

Choice before States

The legal and the constitutional position is now made perfectly clear by the provisions of the India Independence Bill. The States will have automatically regained their sovereignty on the 15th of August when Paramountcy lapses and they will continue to remain independent unless the sovereignty so regained is by a voluntary act of accession or otherwise surrendered. The question of the moment is whether surrendering it or keeping it is more advantageous to Travancore. This choice is open only to a very few States, for in the case of the largest bulk of the Indian States, although law permits, the facts of geography, extent of the population and resources make a declaration of independence impracticable.

Travancore is in a definitely superior position in many material respects, to the other States in India; nay, even to such well-established Sovereign States as Greece, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Ireland and Finland, not to speak of Ceylon, Palestine, F. M. S., Syria and Iraq. Travancore is by no means a small State. It may perhaps be a surprise to many to know

that its population is nearly as big as that of Australia and four times bigger than that of New Zealand, to mention only two States which count among the influential members of U. N. O.

Sum of my Plea

By the declaration of Independence, Travancore will not be left in a state of isolation, any more than any of the other independent Sovereign States. The world has shrunk so much and the different units are brought so close to one another that interdependence is implicit in the modern conception of sovereign independence. Only independence bestows that freedom of action which is so essential a pre-condition of any free union.

It is that freedom and a sense of urgency for it, that constitute the compelling logic of Travancore's declaration of independence. Once freedom of action is accrued and so long as it is not irrevocably alienated, (as it must happen if we join the Indian Union straightaway), we shall be free to come to any arrangement with the rest of India including accession to a future Indian Union, a Commonwealth of Free States. Let us retain that invaluable freedom with a lively sense of its importance and cherish it, instead of writing it off in haste when we do not know even the outline or the shape of the Union in which some of us appear to be so anxious to merge. This in substance is and has always been my earnest plea with my fellow Travancoreans.

Phenomenal Act of Statesmanship

I feel sincerely thankful that the State has taken a decisive stand so manifestly

beneficial and conducive to the prosperity of the people and that too without any public agitation. The future generations will have abundant reason to be grateful to Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar for the bold and timely advice tendered to His Highness the Maharaja on this momentous step. I feel sure that I am articulating the sentiments of a considerable section of the present generation, without forgetting that there exists today unfortunately a wide gulf between them and the Dewan. But the past administration with its signal achievements and its equally signal errors is more than overshadowed by this one phenomenal act of statesmanship, the declaration of Independence.

Proposals

The declaration itself is yet to be made and when the proper time comes, it will, I dare say, be made with the grandeur and gravity which the historic occasion demands. I fondly hope, and it is my fervent and devout wish, that the State will with appropriate strides move forward towards the event which may well mark the beginning of a new era. Let me also hope that those strides will be attended with the same resolution and boldness of conception, as the declaration of Independence has been conceived and consummated. To be more specific and to make my meaning clearer, I beg to formulate two or three suggestions for the earnest consideration of His Highness's Government.

(i) The release of all the detenues and others now in prison convicted of political offences. I should submit with all earnestness that the release should be unconditional in order that the transcendental moral effect of the act may not suffer in the bargain.

(ii) The declaration of Independence, marking, as it will, a new era constitutionally and otherwise (and especially in view of the totally altered set-up in India as a whole), should have a distinctly liberal content. It will be in the fitness of things if the declaration is accompanied by an announcement about fresh constitutional changes, an announcement adequate and capable of dispelling any possible apprehensions there might be that the fuller sovereignty of the State would not mean any corresponding freedom for the people. The pace and the measure of the reforms may be appreciably advanced, in so striking a manner that in this respect as well, Travancore shall be duly acknowledged *the first among her equals*. It will then have not only left behind many of the States and the Provinces but may also make the Congress-sponsored and thrice-blessed Reforms of Udaipur look ridiculously meagre and miserable.

(iii) I do realise that between the announcement of any proposed reforms and their actual inauguration, the preparations must consume time. It is essential to provide for the gap if only because the State accustomed so long to having representative Assembly and Legislative Council will appear rather bald without them, and the lacuna cannot but become distinctly noticeable with the declaration of independence.

A Privy Council

The new era with its plenitude of sovereignty must wear the appropriate modern clothes. Having regard to all these weighty considerations, I would hazard a suggestion that the Sovereign of Independent Travancore might well have, as nearly as possible and practicable, a representative body, say, a small Privy Council

which can serve the purposes of an Interim Government with the Dewan as its President.

If found useful in its actual working it may perhaps be allowed to continue with new functions, as part of the future constitution. What is important at present is to recognise the need for some such an interim arrangement; the exact name, form and powers can then be determined.

Change in Tone

In conclusion, I wish to refer to the recent statement of Sardar Patel on the States. It is noteworthy that the familiar threats and warnings and attempts at intimidation are absent therefrom. And if this moderation is indicative of the present temper of the Congress High Command there is still some hope. If all that the Congress really desire is only the States' co-operation on the three subjects of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications, that co-operation being a matter of mutual advantage could easily be secured on a treaty basis. I cannot therefore understand why Sardar Patel should ask for *accession* instead of a treaty. Even Sardar's refreshingly sober language fails to carry conviction when he says "it is not the desire of the Congress to interfere in the *domestic* affairs of the States." But, we are accustomed to hear a bureaucratic Government using the same language in respect of a municipality.

The suspicion is heightened by Dr. Pattabhi's subsequent statement which,

again, is agreeably free from violence. But Dr. Pattabhi is quite definite that it will be impermissible for Travancore to enter into any agreement with Pakistan. This means that the Congress demands of the States an exclusive alliance with the Indian Union. And so far as Travancore is concerned this is manifestly an interference in "domestic affairs" because Travancore has to depend for her rice on territories forming part of Pakistan.

A Disturbing Factor

The recent order of the Government of India disallowing licence for a number of articles including motor lorries, motor cars, vans, cycles etc., unless they are imported *in parts* shows a dangerous tendency to restrict trade exclusively in favour of British Indian industries; for we know that parts of motor vehicles and cycles imported from abroad are assembled in India. But, Travancore, which has got to depend for cycles, motor cars, lorries etc., on outside markets, will be under similar restraints compelled to buy them exclusively from the Indian Union at the prices dictated by them. This will adversely affect the vital interests of the State. Travancore therefore cannot accept Sardar Patel's proposals unconditionally, for freedom of contract must vest with Travancore and her sovereign rights cannot be surrendered except to the extent she voluntarily parts with specific subjects on a strictly treaty basis.