

Mahatma Gandhi in declaring the proceedings of the **Fourth Annual Session** open, addressed the House in Hindi. The following is the condensed translation of Gandhiji's Speech.—

I hope the English friends here will forgive me for addressing you in the national language. I recall on this occasion the War Conference in Delhi which was held in this very hall in 1918 and in which after some discussion with the Viceroy I consented to participate. But when I consented to do so I requested the Viceroy to permit me to address the Conference in Hindi or Hindustani. I knew there was no need to ask for this permission, but courtesy required that I should do so, lest my speaking in Hindi should shock the Viceroy. In this very same hall to-day I propose to follow the same practice. And I would suggest to you, members of the Federation, that it is your duty to carry on your proceedings in the national language, looking to the fact that the members of the Federation are all Indians and that you are allowing yourselves to be influenced by the present national spirit. Whilst I was listening to the President's address with attention, I wondered whether in speaking in a foreign language he would succeed in making on you and on me the impression that he desired. In no other country, dependent or independent, was such an anomaly to be met with. In South Africa, which is a thinly populated country, there has been a long struggle for precedence between English and Taal (a dialect of Dutch) with the result that the English colonists had to yield to the brave Dutch in recognising Taal as the official language on the same footing as English.

Your President has dwelt at length on the insistence of the Englishmen that in any constitution which may be granted to India the rights of Englishmen, especially of the English commercial and mercantile firms in India, should be safeguarded. The Congress has considered this question carefully, and I should like to state its position. It has been said that Indian Swaraj will be the rule of the majority community, i.e., the Hindus. There could not be a greater mistake than that. If it were to be true, I for one would refuse to call it Swaraj and would fight it with all the strength at my command, for to me Hind Swaraj is the rule of all the people, is the rule of justice. Whether under that rule the ministers were Hindus or Mussalmans or Sikhs, and whether the legislatures were exclusively filled by the Hindus or Mussalmans or any other community, they would have to do even-handed justice. And just as no community in India need have any fear of Swaraj being monopolised by any other,

even so the English should have no fear. The question of safeguards should not arise at all. Swaraj would be real Swaraj only when there would be no occasion for safeguarding any such rights.

Not Prejudice but Clash of Cultures

How is it that the insistence on equal rights by Europeans comes to us with a shock of surprise? How is it that it does not strike us as natural and legitimate? The answer puts me in mind of an incident in South Africa. You know that I fought General Smuts in South Africa for a number of years. With reference to the question of race prejudice and colour prejudice there he once told me a story which impressed me very much. "When I was about the same time as you studying in England," he said: "I had no race prejudice or colour prejudice against your people. In fact if we had known each other we should have lived as friends or brothers. Why is it then that now we have become rivals, that we have conflicting interests? It is not colour prejudice or race prejudice, though some of our people do ignorantly talk in those terms, but there is one thing which I want you to recognise. It is this. I may have no racial legislation, but how will you solve the difficulty about the fundamental difference between our cultures? Let alone the question of superiority, there is no doubt but that your civilisation is different from ours. Ours must not be overwhelmed by yours. That is why we have to go in for legislation which must in effect put disabilities on you." I understood what he said and recognised that we could not have any other standard there. I also appreciated the fear of being swamped in these days of swift communications. If, therefore, we wanted to live in South Africa, I said to myself, we must adopt their standard of life, so long as it was not against morality.

Let us try to understand the genesis of this talk of equal rights in the light of what I have said. With all deference I would tell the Englishmen that at the back of their insistence is their insistence on living their standard and civilisation. There is a wide gulf between our way of life and that of the Viceroy however good he may be. Our people, when they go abroad, adopt the manners and customs of those countries, but shed them as soon as they come back home, and if they retain them they become strangers. It is a mercy that the Western way of life has not yet taken deep root in our country. But the

fear at the back of the Indian's mind is lest he should be swamped by the onrush of Western civilisation. In this problem I invite the help of all Englishmen who, if they choose to stay here, must live in conformity with our way of life and as the servants of our country. The same cause has been at the root of the clash between the Chinese and the Europeans and the Chinese and Americans. I want our English friends to understand what I am saying. The whole trouble arises out of the Englishman's insistence on living according to his Western way of life and according to Western standards. I am quite aware that our civilisation has its blemishes,—untouchability is an indelible stain on Hinduism and I have called it satanic,—but I do not want to give Hinduism up, for the simple reason that I was born and bred in it. I would purge it of its blemishes. If then we contemplate examining so-called vested rights in the light of India's interest, it is not because of racial prejudice but because of vital necessity. Their vested rights may not smother nascent indigenous enterprise.

Merchants and Congress

Your President has paid a tribute to the Congress, and suggested that the Congress should confer with commercial experts in economic matters. I welcome the suggestion. The Congress would always be glad of your advice and help. I may tell you that the Congress does not belong to any particular group of men; it belongs to all, but the protection of the poor peasantry, which forms the bulk of the population, must be its primary interest. The Congress must, therefore, truly represent the poor. But that does not mean that all other classes—the middle classes, the capitalist or Zamindar—must go under. All that it aims at is that all other classes must subserve the interest of the poor. The Congress stands for the industrial prosperity and progress of India. The industrial classes are slowly coming within the Congress fold. During the past year they rendered it help for which we cannot be too grateful. In fact your invitation to me, to address you is not due to my name, but because I am a humble servant of the Congress and representative of Daridranarayan. I cannot forget the services rendered by the commercial classes, but I want you to go a step further. I want you to make the Congress your own and we would willingly surrender the reins to you. The work can be better done by you. But if you decide to assume the reins, you can do so only on one condition. You should regard yourselves as trustees and servants of the poor. Your commerce must be regulated for the benefit of the toiling

millions, or, as Pandit Malaviya would put it, you must be satisfied with earning the 'pure cowrie,' i.e., an honest penny. I do not for a moment believe that commercial prosperity is incompatible with strict honesty. I know businessmen who are absolutely honest and scrupulous in their dealings. It is thus easily open to you to take charge of the Congress. You know that there is no constitution more democratic than the Congress constitution, it has worked for ten years without a hitch. It is based practically on adult suffrage.

If we want your co-operation in our task, I want that of the Englishmen too. I want to remind them of the services rendered to the Congress in the past by distinguished Englishmen and Englishwomen like Hume, Yule, Wedderburn, and Dr. Besant. In fact the Congress owes its birth to the genius of a large-hearted Englishman. And I want Englishmen now to join us in our work of serving the poor. It is entirely a matter of goodwill, a matter of the heart. Give your heart to the poor of India. In conclusion I repeat that the Congress seeks to represent all. Our nationalism can be no peril to other nations, inasmuch as we will exploit none just as we will allow none to exploit us. Through Swaraj we would serve the whole world. In this task I invite your greater co-operation so that civil disobedience may not have to be resumed. With your material and intellectual co-operation heartily rendered, our demand for Swaraj would be absolutely irresistible.

Mr. G. D. Birla while moving a vote of thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, said that originally the honour was reserved for Sir Purshotamdas, but since Gandhiji wanted speeches in Hindi the fortunate duty had fallen on him. (Cheers and laughter).

He assured Mahatmaji that the whole merchant community was full of devotion for him. They worshipped him from the core of their hearts. (Cheers).

Merchants had been taking a silent part in the Congress; they could not take more active part as unfortunately merchants were suspected and labelled as "Capitalists."

"We shall continue to do our bit, but we do not seek office or honour because service and not honour is our motto." (Cheers).

Mr. Birla assured that they shall continue to offer their whole-hearted support to the Congress.