

Note on Himachal Pradesh

I regret that I am unable to subscribe to the recommendations which my esteemed colleagues propose to make about Himachal Pradesh. In my judgment, this State should continue as a separate unit and should be under the direct control of the Central Government.

2. The opinion which I have expressed is not very different from the opinion which appears to have been formed by the States Ministry of the Government of India shortly after the State of Himachal Pradesh came into existence. This is clear from certain letters issued on behalf of the Ministry defining the objective it had in view in regard to the future of this State and from a note prepared after Sardar Patel's death incorporating his views in regard to the Part C States. This note shows that while Sardar Patel contemplated the ultimate merger of the majority of the Part C States in the neighbouring areas, his intention was to continue Himachal Pradesh under "Central guardianship and tutelage" as "any merger with the Punjab was bound to be locally unpopular".

3. It is true that we are not bound by the opinion of the States Ministry, but I think that we should not completely disregard it. In any event, as a result of my own independent investigation, I have, for reasons which I am about to state, come to the conclusion that it will not be wise to merge Himachal Pradesh in the Punjab.

4. I am convinced that there is a great deal of uneasiness among the people of Himachal Pradesh over the question of its being merged in the Punjab and that this feeling is both genuine and widespread. As I have already mentioned, shortly after the creation of Himachal Pradesh it was sensed by Sardar Patel that the proposal to merge it in the Punjab would be locally unpopular. Further, it appears that early in 1950 there was a proposal that the jurisdiction of the East Punjab High Court should be extended to Himachal, but no action was taken in regard to this suggestion because it seems to have been recognised that "the sentiment of the hill people was opposed to the extension of the authority of any of the administrative organs of the East Punjab to Himachal". It would thus be seen that long before the Commission came into existence it was known that any attempt to merge Himachal Pradesh in the Punjab would cause

considerable dissatisfaction in the area. That the attitude of the people has not changed since, is apparent from the fact that with the exception of two small groups, all the political parties—the Congress, the Praja Socialists and the Communists—as also the great majority of the persons who appeared before the Commission have strongly opposed the merger proposal.

5. What seems to account for the great anxiety of the people of Himachal Pradesh not to be associated with the Punjab is their deep-seated distrust of the men of the plains. It is just possible that this feeling of distrust is to some extent a legacy of the pre-Independence princely regime which employed a large number of retired officers from the Punjab who, for some reason or other, were not able to win the confidence of the local people. It may also be partly due to advantage being taken, in the past, of the ignorance and poverty of the people of Himachal Pradesh by persons from outside the State. However that may be, it seems to me that the forcing of a permanent arrangement, such as is envisaged in the merger proposal, on an unwilling and unequal party will be extremely unpopular and will not provide the mutual good-will and co-operation so necessary for the successful functioning of democracy.

6. The extremely backward and exploited people of this State have, since their emancipation from feudal regime, gained a keen awareness of their new status and opportunity. It is highly important that no step is taken which may damp their new-found enthusiasm and eagerness to progress and to catch up with the more advanced sections of the Indian population. From this point of view, placing them in a position of subordination—which merger will amount to at this stage—would, in my opinion, instead of contributing to their progress, greatly retard it. Obviously, the voice of this hill area in the common legislature would be an extremely feeble voice and the sheer weight of numbers would drown even this voice.

7. It seems to me that in the interests of the Punjab itself it is desirable that the two areas should be kept separate. A somewhat disturbing feature of the political life of the Punjab today is the existence of certain differences—based on grievances, real or imaginary—among its three well marked regions. To bring another region with a distinctiveness, individuality and problems of its own into the picture will only complicate matters and add considerably to the difficulties of the Government of the Punjab. Punjab will have to face a new minority problem, as the people of Himachal

Pradesh feel that they have not much in common with the people of the Punjab.

8. A weighty argument in favour of merger is that there will be saving on expenditure by providing for a common legislature, a common High Court, a common Head of the State and a common administrative set-up. But administrative economy by itself will be of little value, if sufficient attention is not paid to the much more important consideration of administrative convenience and efficiency. A common legislature will not adequately meet this requirement because, as I have already stated, the influence of the members of Himachal Pradesh will be hardly felt in the legislature wherein representation is based on numbers. The system of judicial administration now in force in Himachal Pradesh, under which the Judicial Commissioner visits every district, seems to me admirably to suit the requirements of her people who need cheap and expeditious justice. The expensive and time-consuming formalities involved in taking the appeals to the Punjab High Court, which is not so easily accessible, will rob the hillmen of the advantage which they enjoy today. Nor will a common head of the State serve the purpose adequately, because what is needed in the hills is the intimate and personal touch of the head of the State with the common man. Having regard to these disadvantages consequent on merger, the saving that will be effected will not be of much significance. The extra cost that a separate administration under the Central Government might entail will be amply compensated by the advantages of a sympathetic and intensive administration.

9. I am also greatly impressed by an important argument presented in one of the memoranda submitted to us, which is quoted below:

"The Punjab has two very great problems to solve (1) the communal problem and (2) the law and order problem. The deteriorating relations between the Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjab have caused concern not only to the Punjab Government but to the Government of India.....The disease runs very gravely (even) in the services.....Himachal Pradesh, fortunately, is spared all this malady; for it is a State predominantly of the Hindus and no communal problem whatsoever exists here. Even the language problem, which has baffled the administrators in Punjab is non-existent in Himachal Pradesh. People speak Pahari, the more educated being influenced by chaste Hindi. Hindi alone is taught in

schools and other institutions. Thus the State is not troubled at all by the complicated communal and language problems of the Punjab... Any merger of the two would completely upset the present social order in the hills and is bound to result in a very strong reaction from the people."

10. The advocates of the amalgamation of Himachal Pradesh with the Punjab lay some emphasis on the economic links between the two areas, and they particularly refer to the advantages to be derived from the orderly implementation of the Bhakra project. I am, however, unable to see how this fact by itself should lead inevitably to the inference that the two areas must be integrated. Apart from certain other over-riding considerations favouring retention of Himachal Pradesh as a separate unit, attention may be drawn to paragraph 186 of the report wherein we have stated:

"India's development plan may increasingly take the shape of a centrally-directed effort to locate and implement projects which are intended to give the highest return within the shortest periods, the benefits accruing to the country as a whole and not merely to any particular areas or regions in it."

With the Centre controlling and administering Himachal Pradesh, I do not visualise any difficulty whatsoever in the way of the orderly implementation of plans regarded vital for the development of the plains. On the other hand, I should think that a Central administration in Himachal would, instead of interfering with, help the task of preserving the catchment area of the Sutlej and the Beas and of undertaking the necessary soil conservation measures. The amalgamation of the two States may understandably be advantageous to the Punjab in certain respects; but it is somewhat doubtful whether Himachal Pradesh would be substantially benefited by it or, at any rate, the benefit which will accrue will be such as to out-weigh the undesirable consequences of a forced amalgamation. As for the argument that the Punjab needs the transfer of some area of Himachal Pradesh in connection with the Bhakra project, I would leave the matter to the Central Government which might take a decision after fully considering the report of the Hejmadi Committee and the feelings of the local people. On my part, I refrain from making any suggestion in respect of this question as we had no occasion to hear the parties concerned.

11. One of the arguments against small units is that for manning their services they do not usually attract or retain talent, since they have few opportunities and rewards to offer. There is also a tendency in such small units for the Government to undertake detailed and direct administration, and thereby deprive the services of their initiative, drive and sense of responsibility. These considerations will not, as far as I can see, have much force in the case of Himachal Pradesh. As a centrally-administered unit, its administrative personnel would be drawn from the All-India Services who will not have to work under the suggested handicaps and can be expected to place national interests above parochial interests and bring to bear on their administrative work the perspective and breadth of outlook so necessary for a successful administration.

12. Himachal Pradesh is a backward area on the development of which considerable outlay is obviously called for, at least for some time. It is extremely doubtful if the Punjab can shoulder the burden and develop the area in as rapid a manner as would seem desirable in this strategic northern border state. In any case, it being admitted on all hands that the Centre would have to spend large sums of money on the development of the area for some time to come, even if it were merged in the Punjab, I do not see why in these circumstances the area should not be under the direct control of the Centre. We have a special responsibility in keeping the people of the border areas like Chini and Pangri and also those of the rest of the Himachal Pradesh contented and happy and in guarding against any feeling being created in them that they are not so well looked after as the people across the border. With this special responsibility and with the imperative need for guarding the frontier exposed to infiltration, the national interests will, in my opinion, be best served by the Centre directly controlling the area. In my opinion, having recourse to such palliatives as the appointment of a Minister belonging to Himachal Pradesh in the Punjab Cabinet and the setting up of a Special Development Board will neither satisfy the people of Himachal Pradesh nor meet their needs. The appointment of a local person as Minister has not given satisfaction in other areas, the complaint being that since his selection rests with the Chief Minister the Minister concerned is sometimes apt to overlook the true interests of the region in his anxiety to maintain good relations with the rest of the Cabinet. The Development Board, however carefully constituted, will after all be a poor substitute for direct Central administration which will exclusively devote itself to the rapid progress of this region.

13. The Commission has been told that after some years Central aid would not be necessary. It may be that this is too optimistic a view, but, however that may be, it appears to me that any expenditure that may be incurred by the Central Government in developing this backward area and bringing the people living in it to the level of the more advanced sections to be found in the rest of the country will be fully justified in so far as it will serve the larger interests of the country.

14. Himachal Pradesh is a typical instance where the arguments in favour of small units outlined in paragraph 212 of this report can be applied with advantage. As a separate unit, it may be able to provide an intensive programme of social welfare measures which would not be possible if it is merged in the Punjab. In so far as the need for such a programme is pressing in this backward area, the case of Himachal Pradesh for separate existence need hardly be emphasized.

15. In paragraph 285 of this report it has been recommended that wherever the vital, strategic and other considerations are involved, the areas have to be administered by the Centre. I believe that Himachal Pradesh is one of such areas and, therefore, I would strongly recommend its being treated as a centrally-administered territory.

S. FAZL ALI,

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Dated 30th September 1955.