



Ambedkar Times

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Dalit Solidarity Network UK Press Release 29 July 2013 Cast Discrimination Legislation

The Government has just published their long anticipated timetable for its consultation and implementation of caste discrimination legislation under Clause 9(5)(a) of the Equality Act <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/caste-discrimination-legislation-timetable>

It is disappointing, but sadly not a surprise to note that the proposed timetable will run through to the Summer of 2015 – and probably after the next general election. This unprecedented prolonged consultation means that the Government can repeal the legislation before it is implemented. At this rate the sunset clause – or review of the legislation as agreed for 5 years hence will take place before the legislation is even implemented. As clearly stated in The Independent article of July 12: „Tory Minister accused of renegeing on pledge to end caste discrimination“¹, it certainly appears that the Government’s intention is to kick this very important piece of legislation in to the long grass.

This is despite the assurance from the Minister Helen Grant MP in her response to the article in The Independent where she states:

„The consultation will focus purely on how we implement the duty, not whether it is implemented. It is vital that we get that right and that requires consultation with all parties. To that end, it is entirely appropriate that I discuss the issue with a wide range of groups and encourage everyone to participate in the consultation

Alongside this the Equality and Human Rights Commission have begun to tender for research “to provide baseline information on the extent of caste discrimination, which would form the starting point for a comparative assessment after five years”³. The result of that research is therefore not needed until that comparison comes to be made. But the plan is to delay the consultation until that process is complete. Discussions with the anti legislation lobby have already taken place – as far as we know at least 3 meetings have (Continued on Last Page)

Tory minister accused of renegeing on pledge to end caste discrimination

Leaked letter reveals betrayal of 400,000 ‘untouchables’ who live in Britain

London- Landmark legislation to ban caste discrimination in Britain is being deliberately scuppered by the Conservative equalities ministers in charge of getting it on the statute book, a leaked document indicates.

Discrimination on the basis of caste was outlawed in April as part of the Equality Act, after Business Secretary Vince Cable secured a last-minute amendment. The Act was supposed to mean the estimated 400,000 Dalits – so-called untouchables – who live in the UK would have legal protection from discrimination by other Hindus. But in a letter to Hindu groups opposed to the legislation shown to The Independent, equalities minister Helen Grant says a safeguard has been introduced so the caste legislation can be removed from the statute book if reviews show it is not appropriate. She urges the groups to submit evidence against the law to an ongoing consultation “as we remain convinced” legislation is unnecessary. Politicians and equality campaigners say the letter appears to be a fishing exercise, designed to gather support for the view that the new legislation is not needed. They also believe it shows that she has “prejudged” the consultation.

In a letter to the Alliance of Hindu Organisations dated 9 May, Mrs Grant says: “I made no secret at our meeting – and nor do I

now – of my disappointment that it has been necessary for the Government to concede to making an order to include caste as an element of race in the Equality Act 2010.

“We remain concerned that there is insufficient evidence of caste-based discrimination to

require specific legislation. We also have concerns that incorporating caste into domestic law – even in the context of anti-discrimination – may send out the wrong signal that caste is somehow becoming a permanent feature of British society.”

The letter outlines ways the law could be watered down and eventually scrapped: “Be-

cause, as I have said, we do not believe or accept that caste and caste division should have any long-term future in Britain – we have introduced an additional safeguard into the Act. This is the ability to carry out reviews of caste legislation to see whether it remains appropriate. If it does not, we have the option of removing it from the statute book.” The issue of caste discrimination divided the Coalition, with Liberal Democrats supporting the addition to the legislation and Conservatives opposed. Liberal Democrat Lord Avebury said: “It’s entirely improper that the minister who’s supposed to be implementing the legislation – and initiating the consultation – is making it clear she’s

opposed to the (Contd. on last page)



Courtesy: INDEPENDENT THURSDAY 11 JULY 2013
Source: Meena Varma, Director, Dalit Solidarity Network UK (www.dsnuk.org)

First Ambedkar Day celebrated in Africa - Africa chapter of Ambedkarism (fight against caste system) begins...

Johannesburg - Here in South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, International House Committee organised "Ambedkar-Mandela" day. Seeking the rare occasion of Madela's 95th and Ambedkar's 122nd Birth Anniversary. International House Committee organised the event celebrating the two heroes that fought for the upliftment of the marginalised sections of societies in two parts of the world. This event was an imperative of South-South co operation where the two human rights champions were celebrated.

The event was presided by the Chairperson of the I-House, Mr Suraj Yengde (India), and Treasurer Ms Ntee Mbhele (South Africa). Par-



ticipants from Europe, Africa, America's and Asia were present in the round table discussion on the issues of Caste and Racism. Everyone shed the light on their experiences in South Africa celebrating Mandela's legacy.

In the Chairperson's address Suraj Yengde provided insights on the India's downtrodden sections

of society introducing the atrocious nature of caste system. Comparing with the world's existing discrimination, he stressed caste system in India is world's oldest surviving discrimination.

This programme was the first event in Africa that celebrated two champions of human rights introduc-

ing Ambedkar's contribution in the fight against discrimination through the caste system. Following the address, there was a question and answer session where participants expressed their interest and curiosity in unveiling the realities of caste system.

Ms Chaimae Charifi (Morocco) provided critical insights on the existing discriminatory practices in South Africa.

Programme concluded with exchange of thoughts and the way forward to end the existing discriminatory practices. I-House Committee Secretary Ms Pokuaa Banson (Ghana), Sports Officer Mr Rafael Kalumbu (Namibia), Entertainment Officer Mr Nepo Moloi (SA), and Exchange Student Rep Ms Tamara (Japan) were present.

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Lahori Ram was one of the first Indo-Americans to become involved in California politics and he encouraged many others to become a part of the political process. His motto was "United We Stand and Divided We Fall." He told all Indians to unite together and realize their political power. He said that until the Indo-American community gets active in the political process, they will have no real power in this country. Taxation without representation is the problem the early settlers of the United States faced and we as Indians were becoming victims of this same problem.

A mentor for Indians wanting to get involved in the American political process, Lahori Ram was the first Indo-American to be appointed to a statewide commission in California. Mr. Ram was first appointed to the California Small Business Commission. He later served on the California Trade, Technology, and Commerce Commission. He also served on the California Transportation Commission.

He was nominated by California State Governor Gray Davis to the highly exclusive California Economic Development Commission in 2003. In this position, he helped out many Indian community members and arranged many meetings for the Indian community to meet with many elected officials. He facilitated a dialogue between the Indian community and many distinguished politicians. The Indian community had an opportunity to tell their story and voice their opinion about the issues that directly affected them.

Lahori Ram served as an inspiration and role model to many aspiring politicians. He opened up many doors for our community. Many politicians have a special respect for the Indian community due to the great work of Mr. Lahori Ram. His contributions to the Indian community and pioneering work in the California political process justify the title of "Indian Trailblazer in California Politics" that is rightfully due to Mr. Lahori Ram.

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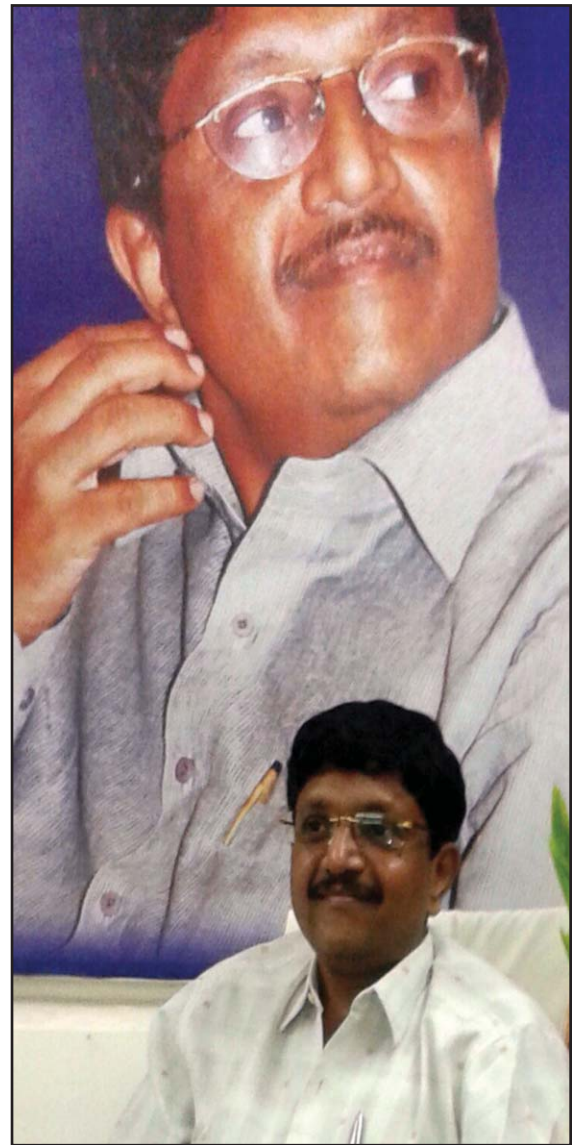
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Cast Discrimination Legislation

taken place with the Minister since the Government agreed to activate the caste clause in the Equality Act. The result of one such meeting was the letter referred to in The Independent article Why does our current Government fear the anti legislation lobby? Do their votes (and money) count for more than those of the potential victims of caste discrimination?

There is no problem with a consultation period – and in fact it is welcomed. The anti-legislation lobby, led by the Alliance of Hindu Organisations have expressed „concerns about the consequences and practi-

city of [the] legislation and about the impact it may have on communities living within the UK.”⁴ They are concerned that anti-caste discrimination is a direct slight on their religion. It is not – and a well-drafted, fully inclusive consultation would expose this and begin to allay fears.

But why is a consultation period of up to 2 years deemed necessary? This Governments’ own guidelines stipulate a 12 week period to be an optimum. Again we are assured that the Minister for Equalities will commit to bringing an end to caste discrimination as she states in her response to The Independent ar-

article; „prejudice and discrimination in any form is unacceptable in modern society – this is as true for caste as it is for race, sex or disability for example – and I remain fully committed to eradicating it.⁵ If so, why is this Government intent on backtracking on its promises and pandering to a Hindu lobby that seems in its turn intent on making this a Hindu issue – it is not. It is one of basic human rights and we urge our

Government to do the right thing – caste discrimination is illegal; it is on the statute books. Please make it enforceable by the end of the year and allow any potential victim recourse to

the justice that many thousands clamoured for in Parliament Square in March and April of this year.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-ministers-accused-of-renegeing-on-pledge-to-end-caste-discrimination-8704049.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voice/s/letters/letters-keep-caste-politics-out-of-uk-law-8732031.html>

http://equalityhumanrights.g2b.info/cgigen/profile.pl?action=view_noticev4&other_user=618895¬ice=67234256&type=CompetitiveContractNotice&oid=6405&ctype=

Tory minister accused of renegeing on pledge to end caste discrimination

whole process.” Meena Varma, director of the Dalit Solidarity Network UK, said: “Until this legislation is passed, the thousands of Dalits who say they are discriminated against will have no recourse to justice. Grant’s tactic seems to be to kick the whole thing into the long grass until five years have passed and the Government can scrap the legislation.” A Government spokeswoman said: “Parliament has said that legislation needs to be passed to make caste discrimination unlawful. We are not just committed to the eradication of any sense of caste discrimination, but to ensuring that caste itself does not become a permanent feature of British society. To prevent this from happening, we have included a measure that will allow for the new caste protections to be reviewed after five years, to see whether they remain appropriate and necessary.”

Case study: Solicitors accused of victimisation

Vijay Begraj, a British-born Hindu from the Dalit caste, is still waiting for a full hearing for his

case of caste discrimination; it began in February but collapsed after the judge was handed information by the police which might prejudice the case.

Mr Begraj says he and his wife Amardeep faced caste-based discrimination, humiliation, victimisation and harassment because of their relationship. His wife is of a higher caste, as are the people who run Heer Manak, the Coventry solicitors where they both worked. He also gave evidence that he had been assaulted by relatives of the firm’s partners and called derogatory names relating to his caste.

The firm told The Independent they would not comment, but have described the claims as “ludicrous” and “outrageous”. Mr Begraj said: “Hindu groups say

there’s no issue of caste discrimination in Britain but it’s nonsense.” END

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