

15th February 1943

# THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY DEBATES

## Official Report

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## SEVENTEENTH SESSION

OF THE

FIFTH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,

1943



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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

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# CONTENTS.

VOLUME I.—10th February to 10th March, 1943.

PAGES.	PAGES.
<b>WEDNESDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Members Sworn . . . . .	1
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	1—21
Unstarred Questions and Answers . . . . .	22—29
Statements laid on the Table . . . . .	29—30
Deaths of Sir Muhammad Yakub and Mr. J. Ramsay Scott . . . . .	30—32
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> —	
Failure to devise suitable system of Food Control—Not moved . . . . .	32—33
Sale of Government of India Silver in England to the British Government—Ruled out of order . . . . .	33—34
Food and Standard Cloth position and lack of Atebrin and Sulphathiazole—Not moved . . . . .	34
Shortage of small Coins—Negatived . . . . .	35, 52—68
Nomination of the Panel of Chairmen Committee on petitions . . . . .	35
Publicity of the proceedings of the Meetings of the Select Committee . . . . .	35
H. E. The Governor General's Assent to Bills . . . . .	35—36
Amendment to the Insurance Rules . . . . .	36
Amendments to certain Motor Vehicle Rules . . . . .	36—45
The Indian Railways (Amendment) Bill—Presentation of the Report of the Select Committee . . . . .	45
Paper connected with the Ceylon Government's request for Additional Indian labour for Ceylon . . . . .	45—46
Election of a Member to the Committee on Public Accounts . . . . .	46
Election of a Member to the Standing Committee for the Posts and Air Department . . . . .	46—47
The Criminal Procedure Amendment Bill—Introduced . . . . .	47
The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill—Introduced . . . . .	47
The Government Savings Banks (Amendment) Bill—Introduced . . . . .	47
Report of the Public Accounts Committee . . . . .	47—49
Demand for Excess Grants for 1940-41 . . . . .	49—51
<b>THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Members Sworn . . . . .	69
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	69—93
Unstarred Questions and Answers . . . . .	93—100
Death of Professor C. B. Johri . . . . .	100
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> —	
Supply and distribution of foodstuffs—Not moved . . . . .	100
The Paper Control Order—Adopted . . . . .	100—101, 122—33
The Hindu Marriage Disabilities Removal Bill—Motion to continue adopted . . . . .	101
The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill (Amendment) of Sections 162, 483 and 496)—Referred to Select Committee . . . . .	101—11
The Delhi Muslim Wakfs Bill—Presentation of the Report of the Joint Committee . . . . .	111
The Abolition of Whipping Bill—Circulated . . . . .	111, 113—21
Election of a Member to the Standing Committee for the Posts and Air Department . . . . .	112
Statement of Business . . . . .	112
The Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Bill (Amendment of section 299, etc.)—Introduced . . . . .	121
The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill (Amendment of sections 378 and 429)—Introduced . . . . .	122
The Indian Merchant Shipping (Amendment) Bill—Introduced . . . . .	122
The Durgah Khawaja Saheb (Amendment) Bill—Introduced . . . . .	122
<b>FRIDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Members Sworn . . . . .	135
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	135—64
Unstarred Questions and Answers . . . . .	164—65
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> —	
Refusal of permission to Mr. Bajagopalachari for interviewing Mahatma Gandhi—Not moved . . . . .	166
Legislation by Ordinances—Ruled out of order . . . . .	166
High Rates demanded by the Tongawallas of Delhi—Ruled out of order . . . . .	166—67
Removal from Service of Railway Staff by the Divisional Personnel Officer, Moradabad—Not moved . . . . .	167—68
Prices of Necessaries of Life—Not moved . . . . .	168
Imposition of Financial Burdens for War Purposes without consulting the Assembly—Ruled out of order . . . . .	168
Announcement <i>re</i> grant of inadequate dearness allowance to Workers—Negatived . . . . .	169, 161—202
Election of a Member to the Committee on Public Accounts . . . . .	169
Resolution <i>re</i> Committee for Enquiry into the alleged Military and Police excesses—Discussion not concluded . . . . .	169—91
<b>MONDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Members Sworn . . . . .	203
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	203—12
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> —	
Sugar Problem—Not moved . . . . .	212
Provision of Rupee Finance for the Government of the United Nations—Ruled out of order . . . . .	212—7
Fast by Mahatma Gandhi in Jail—Talked out . . . . .	213—6, 247—6, 21—
Messages from H. E. the Governor General . . . . .	214—23
Presentation of the Railway Budget for 1943-44 . . . . .	214—23
Motion <i>re</i> The situation as regards food and other necessaries—Discussion not concluded . . . . .	223—47
<b>TUESDAY, 16TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	267—86
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> —	
Maltreatment to Sikh Military Prisoners in Indore Jail—Not moved . . . . .	286
Inability of a Member of the Legislative Assembly to attend its Session due to detention in Jail—Ruled out of order . . . . .	286
Maltreatment to Mr. C. B. Johri in Jail—Ruled out of order . . . . .	286—87
Failure to terminate Martial Law and restore normal conditions in Sind—Ruled out of order . . . . .	287
Restrictions on the <i>Hindustan Times</i> <i>re</i> Publication of news about Mahatma Gandhi's fast—Negatived . . . . .	287—88, 296—302
Election of Members to the Standing Committee for the Department of Information and Broadcasting . . . . .	288—89
The Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Bill—Introduced . . . . .	289
The Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill—Circulated . . . . .	289—90
The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill—Passed . . . . .	291
The Government Savings Banks (Amendment) Bill—Passed . . . . .	292—95
<b>WEDNESDAY, 17TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Members Sworn . . . . .	303
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	303—21
Unstarred Questions and Answers . . . . .	321—22
Statements laid on the Table . . . . .	322—24
Dispensing with the Question Hour on the General Budget Presentation Day . . . . .	324
Motion <i>re</i> the Situation as regards Food and other necessaries—Discussion not concluded . . . . .	324—64
<b>THURSDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Members Sworn . . . . .	365
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	365—70
Unstarred Questions and Answers . . . . .	370—73
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> Necessity of releasing the Congress Working Committee Members—Not moved . . . . .	373
The Receipts Bill—Presentation of the Report of the Select Committee . . . . .	373
Resolution <i>re</i> —	
Committee for Enquiry into the alleged Military and Police Excesses—Negatived . . . . .	373—77
Implementing the Federation of India—Negatived . . . . .	377—99
Prohibition of Export of Textile Goods—Negatived . . . . .	399—410
Grievances of Officials and Secretariat Assistants employed in Railways—Discussion not concluded . . . . .	410—12
<b>FRIDAY, 19TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
Starred Questions and Answers . . . . .	413—26
General discussion of the Railway Budget . . . . .	426—54

	PAGES.		PAGES.
<b>MONDAY, 22ND FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>		<b>The Indian Army and Air Force (Military Prisons and Detention Barracks) Bill—Introduced</b>	609
Members Sworn	455	<b>Demands for Supplementary Grants—Railways</b>	609—15
Starred Questions and Answers	455—66	<b>The Indian Railways (Amendment) Bill—Passed</b>	615—20
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> Failure to release Mahatma Gandhi unconditionally—Ruled out of order	466	<b>The Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Bill—Passed</b>	620—22
Correspondence between the Government of India and the Ceylon Government	466—74	<b>The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Bill—Passed</b>	622—23
Election of the Standing Finance Committee	474—76	<b>SATURDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>	
The Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Bill—Introduced	476	Member Sworn	625
The Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Bill—Introduced	476	Presentation of the General Budget for 1943-44	625—49
Motion <i>re</i> the Situation as regards Food and other necessaries—Talked out	476—503	The Indian Finance Bill—Introduced	649
<b>TUESDAY, 23RD FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>		The Tobacco (Excise Duty) Bill—Introduced	650
Members Sworn	505	The Vegetable Product (Excise Duty) Bill—Introduced	650
Starred Questions and Answers	505—10	<b>MONDAY, 1ST MARCH, 1943—</b>	
Unstarred Questions and Answers	510—12	Death of Dr. F. X. DeSouza	651—52
Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> Publication of a Review of Congress responsibility for disturbances—Ruled out of order	512—13	<b>TUESDAY, 2ND MARCH, 1943—</b>	
Election of Members to the Standing Committee for the Department of Information and Broadcasting	513	Starred Questions and Answers	653—64
The Railway Budget—List of Demands—Demand No. 1—Railway Board—Policy of Wagon allotment and Distribution	513—51	Transferred Starred Questions and Answers	664—73
Reduction in Rates and Fares	514—20	Transferred Unstarred Questions and Answers	673—77
Curtailement of Passenger Trains	520—28	<b>Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i>—</b>	
Post-War Reconstruction	528—32	Alleged insult by Soldiers to Mr. M. S.aney at Nagpur Railway Station—Not moved	677—78
Grievances of Railwaymen <i>re</i> conditions of Service	532—48	Latest restrictions on supply of Newspaper—Ruled out of order	678—79
<b>WEDNESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>		Election of Members to the Standing Finance Committee	679
Starred Questions and Answers	553—59	The Hindu Code, Part I (Intestate Succession)—Introduced	679
The Railway Budget—List of Demands—contd.		The Hindu Code, Part II (Marriage)—Introduced	679
Demand No. 1—Railway Board—Grievances of Railwaymen <i>re</i> conditions of Service	559—600	Election of the Standing Committee on Emigration	679—80
Inadequate and illusory provisions for Appeals from Railway Employees	565—73	Resolution <i>re</i> Revision of the Convention in respect of Contribution from Railway to General Revenue—Adopted	680—716
Recognition of Railway Muslim Employees Unions and Associations	573—88	The Indian Canal Code (Amendment) Bill—Passed	716—17
Extensions given to employees in Railway Services	588—94	The Coffee Market Expansion (Amendment) Bill—Passed	717—18
Need for fixing quota for Muslims and Other Minorities in the Selection grades in Railway Services	594—98	The Indian Army and Air Force (Military Prisons and Detention Barracks) Bill—Discussion on the motion to consider not concluded	718—21
Imperative need of Allotment of Wagons for transport of Rice to deficit Areas of the Madras Presidency	598—600	<b>WEDNESDAY, 3RD MARCH, 1943—</b>	
Demand No. 2—Audit	600	Member Sworn	723
Demand No. 3—Miscellaneous Expenditure	600	Starred Questions and Answers	723—25
Demand No. 5—Payments to Indian States and Companies	600	The Delhi Muslim Wakfs Bill—Passed as amended	725—41
Demand No. 6-A—Working Expenses—Maintenance of Structural Works	600	The Reciprocity Bill—Passed as amended	741—52
Demand No. 6-B—Working Expenses—Maintenance and Supply of Locomotive Power	600	The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill (Amendment of Sections 269, 272, etc.)—Discussion on the motion to refer to Select Committee not concluded	752—64
Demand No. 6-C—Working Expenses—Maintenance of Carriage and Wagon Stock	600	<b>FRIDAY, 5TH MARCH, 1943—</b>	
Demand No. 6-D—Working Expenses—Maintenance and Working of Ferry Steamers and Harbours	600	Member Sworn	765
Demand No. 6-E—Working Expenses—Expenses of Traffic Department	600—01	Starred Questions and Answers	765—70
Demand No. 6-F—Working Expenses—Expenses of General Department	601	Unstarred Question and Answer	770
Demand No. 6G—Working Expenses—Miscellaneous Expenses	601	General discussion of the General Budget	770—809
Demand No. 6-H—Working Expenses—Expenses of Electrical Department	601	<b>MONDAY, 8TH MARCH, 1943—</b>	
Demand No. 7—Working Expenses—Appropriation to Depreciation Fund	601	Members Sworn	811
Demand No. 8—Interest Charges	601	Starred Questions and Answers	811—17
Demand No. 10—Appropriation to Reserve	601	Motion for Adjournment <i>re</i> Failure to prosecute the European passenger resisting occupation of the reserved seat by Dewan Bahadur A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliyar—Ruled out of order	817
Demand No. 11—New Construction	601	Amendment of the Coorg Motor Vehicles Rules	817—18
Demand No. 12—Open Line Works	601	The General Budget—List of Demands—Demand No. 12—Executive Council	819, 842—58
<b>THURSDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY, 1943—</b>		Grievances of the Personnel and Students of the I. M. D.	842—45
Starred Questions and Answers	603—05	Government attitude towards the Press in India and the working of Press Censorship	845—51
Declarations of Exemption under the Registration of Foreigners Act	606—08	Dearness Allowance	851—58
Summaries of the Proceedings of the Fourth Labour Conference and of Meetings of the Standing Labour Committee	609	Demand No. 15—Home Department—Repressive Policy of the Government	819—32
The Coffee Market Expansion (Amendment) Bill—Introduced	609	Demand No. 21—Finance Department—Utilisation of the Sterling Balances	832—42
		<b>TUESDAY, 9TH MARCH, 1943—</b>	
		Member Sworn	859
		Starred Questions and Answers	859—66
		Nominations to the House Committee	867
		Election of Members to the Standing Committee on Emigration	867

	PAGES.		PAGES.
The General Budget—List of Demands— <i>contd.</i>	867—81	Demand No. 25—War Transport Department	963
Demand No. 12—Executive Council— Means whereby by people may have better Opportunity to place their Views before the Government re War Activities and the future Position of the Country and of the future needs for the Prosperity of the Country	867—81	Demand No. 26—Food Department	963
Demand No. 14—Legislative Assembly and Legislative Assembly Department— Necessity of holding more Sessions of the Legislatures in view of the War and the future position of the Country in the great developments that are taking place in the World at large	881—89	Demand No. 27—Central Board of Revenue	963
Demand No. 22—Commerce Department— Exports from India and Trade relationship with other Countries	881—89	Demand No. 28—India Office and High Commissioner's Establishment Charges	963
Demand No. 23—Department of Labour— Position of labour including Indian Seamen	889—91	Demand No. 29—Payments to other Governments, Departments, etc., on account of the Administration of Agency Subjects and Management of Treasuries	963
Demand No. 56—Broadcasting— Grievances of Muslims with regard to Services, Language and Programmes of the Broadcasting Department	892—93	Demand No. 30—Audit	963
	893—910	Demand No. 31—Administration of Justice	963
		Demand No. 32—Jails and Convict Settlements	963
		Demand No. 33—Police	963
		Demand No. 34—Ports and Pilotage	964
		Demand No. 35—Lighthouses and Lightships	964
		Demand No. 36—Survey of India	964
		Demand No. 37—Botanical Survey	964
		Demand No. 38—Zoological Survey	964
		Demand No. 39—Geological Survey	964
		Demand No. 40—Mines	964
		Demand No. 41—Aerology	964
		Demand No. 42—Meteorology	964
		Demand No. 43—Other Scientific Departments	964
		Demand No. 44—Education	965
		Demand No. 45—Medical Services	965
		Demand No. 46—Public Health	965
		Demand No. 47—Agriculture	965
		Demand No. 48—Imperial Council of Agricultural Research	965
		Demand No. 49—Agricultural Marketing	965
		Demand No. 50—Imperial Institute of Sugar Technology	965
		Demand No. 51—Civil Veterinary Services	965
		Demand No. 52—Industries	965
		Demand No. 53—Scientific and Industrial Research	965
		Demand No. 54—Aviation	966
		Demand No. 55—Capital Outlay on Civil Aviation Charges to Revenue	966
		Demand No. 56—Broadcasting	966
		Demand No. 57—Capital Outlay on Broadcasting Charged to Revenue	966
		Demand No. 58—Emigration—Internal	966
		Demand No. 59—Emigration—External	966
		Demand No. 60—Commercial Intelligence and Statistics	966
		Demand No. 61—Census	966
		Demand No. 62—Joint Stock Companies	966
		Demand No. 63—Imperial Dairy Department	966
		Demand No. 64—Miscellaneous Departments	967
		Demand No. 65—Currency	967
		Demand No. 66—Mint	967
		Demand No. 67—Civil Works	967
		Demand No. 68—Central Road Fund	967
		Demand No. 69—Superannuation Allowances and Pensions	967
		Demand No. 70—Stationery and Printing	967
		Demand No. 71—Miscellaneous	967
		Demand No. 72—Miscellaneous Adjustments between the Central and Provincial Governments	967
		Demand No. 73—Civil Defence	967
		Demand No. 74—Delhi	968
		Demand No. 75—Ajmer-Merwara	968
		Demand No. 76—Panth Pipoda	968
		Demand No. 77—Indian Posts and Telegraphs	968
		Demand No. 78—Indian Posts and Telegraphs—Stores Suspense (Not charged to Revenue)	968
		Demand No. 79—Delhi Capital Outlay	968
		Demand No. 80—Commutated Value of Pensions	968
		Demand No. 81—Interest-free Advances	968
		Demand No. 82—Loans and Advances bearing interests	968
WEDNESDAY, 10TH MARCH, 1943—			
Starred Questions and Answers	911—16		
Unstarred Questions and Answers	916—17		
Motion for Adjournment	917		
The General Budget—List of Demands— Demand No. 12—Executive Council— <i>contd.</i>	917—60		
Administration of Martial Law in Sind	917—30		
Grievances of Muslims in regard to their meagre share in the Services of the Supply Department and in the Contracts given by the Department	917—30		
Means whereby the present prosperous Agricultural conditions might be used for the permanent rehabilitation of Agriculture in India	930—36		
Demand No. 1—Customs	936—60		
Demand No. 2—Central Excise Duties	960		
Demand No. 3—Taxes on Income including Corporation Tax	960		
Demand No. 4—Salt	960		
Demand No. 5—Opium	961		
Demand No. 6—Provincial Excise	961		
Demand No. 7—Stamps	961		
Demand No. 8—Forest	961		
Demand No. 9—Irrigation (including Working Expenses), Navigation, Embankment and Drainage Works	961		
Demand No. 10—Indian Posts and Telegraphs Department (including Working Expenses)	961		
Demand No. 11—Interest on Debt and Other Obligations and Reduction or Avoidance of Debt	961		
Demand No. 12—Executive Council	961		
Demand No. 13—Council of State	961		
Demand No. 14—Legislative Assembly and Legislative Assembly Department	962		
Demand No. 16—Civil Defence Department	962		
Demand No. 17—Department of Information and Broadcasting	962		
Demand No. 18—Legislative Department	962		
Demand No. 19—Department of Education, Health and Lands	962		
Demand No. 20—Department of Indian Overseas	962		
Demand No. 21—Finance Department	962		
Demand No. 22—Commerce Department	962		
Demand No. 23—Department of Labour	962		
Demand No. 24—Department of Posts and Air	962		

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Monday, 15th February, 1943.

The Assembly met in the Assembly Chamber of the Council House at Eleven of the Clock, Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim) in the Chair.

## MEMBER SWORN:

Mr. Venilal Tribhovandas Dehejia (Government of India: Nominated Official).

## STARRED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

### (a) ORAL ANSWERS.

#### BREACHES ON NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY LINE IN SIND DUE TO FLOODS.

78. \*Mr. Lalchand Navalrai: (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways be pleased to state how much loss the North Western Railway has suffered on account of breaches consequent on the recent floods in Sind?

(b) What was the immediate cause of the breaches on the lines? Was it due to the absence of outlets underneath the line to facilitate the passage and progress of flood water, or was it on account of the lower level of lines? If so, what future precautions do the authorities propose to take to prevent similar recurrences?

(c) Have the Railway authorities made inquiries to satisfy themselves if there was any negligence on the part of the Provincial authorities of the Sind Government? If not, do Government propose to make inquiries in order to claim damages in case of negligence? If not, why not?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) Approximately Rs. 10,78,000 which is exclusive of loss in traffic which it is not possible to estimate.

(b) Attention is invited to the reply to parts (b) and (c) of short notice question asked by the Honourable Member on the 22nd September, 1942. In case there should be a recurrence of the failure of the marginal bunds, investigations are in progress regarding the construction of more waterway in the embankment and raising the line between Ruk and Jamra and also for a possible diversion of the line from Arain Road or Bagarji to Ruk.

(c) No. This is a matter for the consideration of the Sindh Government; it would not be appropriate for the Railway Administration to make such enquiries.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Does the Honourable Member know that a special court has been actually appointed presided over by the Chief Justice of the Sind Court to inquire into all these matters and will the Honourable Member be in communication with him to consider these points raised in this question?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** I am aware that such a court is now sitting and we propose to await the findings of the court.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Will the Honourable Member be in communication with him on the points involved?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** I have no doubt that all the points involved in these questions will be thoroughly investigated.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Will the Honourable Member send a copy of these questions and answers? There will be no harm done.

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** I see no objection to that at all.

**BURMA POSTAL DEPARTMENT EVACUEES AND GRIEVANCES OF THE POSTAL EMPLOYEES.**

**79. \*Mr. Amarendra Nath Chattopadhyaya:** (a) Will the Secretary of the Posts and Air Department be pleased to state the number of people in the services of the Postal Department of Burma who have come to India as evacuees? Have they been absorbed?

(b) Has he received representations from postal employees for the redress of grievances (i) regarding the fixation of salaries of the new entrants under the new service rules and (ii) dearness allowance? If so, what has he decided on both these items? If he has not yet decided, when is he expected to come to a decision?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** (a) The total number of officials of the Burma Posts and Telegraphs Department evacuated to India is 2,028. Of these, 292 have been employed by the Burma Posts and Telegraphs Department now functioning in India and 342 have been employed in other offices in India. The remaining 1,394 are on concession leave.

(b) A certain number of representations have been received asking that employees on the new scales of pay should be given the old scales of pay in force prior to 1935 and that the dearness allowance should be increased. Government do not propose to revise the scales of pay which have been in force since 1935. As regards dearness allowance, enhanced rates were sanctioned only recently with effect from the 1st January, 1943.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Are the staff satisfied with what the Government has done about the dearness allowance or do they require a revision of it, and will the Honourable Member reconsider the question, just as the railways are doing?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** Sir, the matter was discussed on Friday at great length.

**Maulvi Muhammad Abdul Ghani:** May I know whether there was paucity of Indians for the postal services, so that Burma men have been taken in?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** No; it is not a question of paucity of Indians. We had certain experienced men from Burma like telegraph and telephone engineers, operators, etc., and in view of the very considerable demand for such people, we have taken some of them on a temporary basis. The whole of these 342 have not been taken in the Posts and Telegraphs Department: they have been employed in other offices in India, i.e., in the various Government offices.

**Maulvi Muhammad Abdul Ghani:** What is the period of temporary service?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** There is no fixed period; they can be recalled by the Burma Posts and Telegraphs Department when they re-occupy Burma.

**Maulvi Muhammad Abdul Ghani:** But in case Burma is not recovered?

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): That is a hypothetical question.

**Sardar Sant Singh:** Will the Honourable Member let us know whether these evacuees from Burma are Anglo-Indians or Indians or Burmans or Anglo-Burmans or Europeans?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** I think they belong to all the classes which the Honourable Member has mentioned.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** How many are Anglo-Indians or Europeans?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** I am afraid I have not got the information here at present.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** In view of the fact that the new entrants to Government service have been greatly affected by the increased cost of living, have Government applied their minds to their case?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** The increase in the cost of living is covered by the dearness allowance.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** I am asking about the case of the new entrants.

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** It makes no difference. The scale of pay was fixed about eight years ago; the dearness allowance is given on account of the increased cost of living since the war broke out; there cannot be any question of revising the scales of pay in the abnormal circumstances of the present time.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Is it not a fact that before the present increase in the cost of living the new entrants had been agitating for the restoration of the old scales of pay and this increased cost of living has imposed on them an additional burden? Has Government considered that aspect of the question?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** Government have considered that aspect of the question also.

#### PREFERENCE TO ANGLO-INDIANS, EUROPEANS AND FOREIGN REFUGEES IN ORDNANCE FACTORIES.

**80. \*Mr. Ananga Mohan Dam:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Supply be pleased to state how many supervisory staff drawing over Rs. 100 per mensem have been recruited in connection with the munition work and of these how many are Anglo-Indians and Europeans?

(b) Is it a fact that in most of the railway workshops and Ordnance Factories, Anglo-Indians have been and are systematically given preference over Indian candidates? Were these appointments made through the Public Service Commission or were the posts advertised? If neither of the two methods were adopted, what was the reason therefor?

(c) Is it a fact that a number of refugees from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Yugoslavia, etc., have been recruited in connection with the munition works? If so, what is the number of such refugees?

(d) Do Government propose to assure the House that the services of such refugees will be terminated after the war to make room for Indians?

(e) Is it a fact that many of them possess indifferent qualifications and are in a few cases, e.g., die-casting experts, drawing salaries without having to do regular work at all?

(f) Is it a fact that in some cases the Government of India have borne the passage money of the families of such refugees?

(g) Before appointing such refugees did Government arrange to have their qualifications examined by a competent body? If not, why not?

(h) Did the Government fully explore the possibility of finding Indians with requisite qualifications before appointing these refugees? If not, why not?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** (a) The information is being collected and will be laid on the table of the house in due course.

(b) *First part.*—No.

*Second part.*—Recruitment to temporary war posts is not being made through the Federal Public Service Commission. The posts were generally advertised. Some of them were filled through the agencies of National Service Labour Tribunal and National Service Advisory Committee.

(c) Twenty Czechoslovaks and two Poles have been recruited for work in Ordnance Factories and Directorate General (Munitions Production). Information in regard to Railway workshops is being collected and will be laid on the table of the house.

(d) All appointments have been made for the duration of the war

(e) No.

(f) Yes; only in one case.

(g) and (h). Yes.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** What was the answer to part (c) of the question?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** Twenty Czechoslovaks and two Poles have been recruited for work in Ordnance Factories and Directorate General (Munitions Production). Information in regard to railway workshops is being collected and will be laid on the table of the House.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** When these refugees from outside were appointed to these posts, what was the test laid down for their appointment?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** That they were suitable for appointment.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** How could that be known? Was there any qualification prescribed or were applications invited for these posts mentioning those qualifications?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** Their past record and considerations such as that they were employed on similar work before.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** May I take it that their respective countries forwarded a recommendation to the Government of India?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** I do not think so; but I am not in a position to give definite information.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Is the Honourable Member in a position to tell us who took the initiative in appointing these people? How did they come to know that these posts were vacant and how did they apply for the posts?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** There are records of all these people with their qualifications; in view of the fact that there is a great scarcity of technically-trained men, we try and recruit as many suitable people as possible, whether they are Czechoslovaks, Poles or any other. I can only give this assurance to my Honourable friend that so far as Indians are concerned, if there is a suitable Indian found for any of these posts, or for that matter any other posts, every possible chance is given to him.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** May I take it that in the filling of these posts the Honourable Member satisfied himself that no suitable Indian was available for them and as such they have been filled by the evacuees?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** Yes.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Is it a fact that the Government maintains a sort of register of evacuees so as to absorb them in Government service whenever opportunities present themselves before them?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** I cannot give an answer to that. I would not be able to say.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** I only wanted to know if the Honourable Member's Department maintains any register of evacuees as such?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** No. My Department does not.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Does it emanate from any other Department?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** I cannot tell. All that I can say quite definitely is that every possible enquiry is being made before any man is appointed to any job in my Department.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Did the Honourable Member invite individual applications?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** I have already answered that question in my answer to part (b) of the question.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** May I know if these posts were newly created, or they were there already, that were filled by these outsiders?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** Most of these posts were newly created as there was a considerable expansion of the ordnance factories.

**Mr. Lalchand Navarai:** Am I to take it that the Honourable Member has satisfied himself that there were no Indians capable of holding these posts?

**The Honourable Sir Homi Mody:** I have answered that question.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Next question.

#### GRIEVANCES OF THE AMALGAMATED ASSAM BENGAL RAILWAY STAFF.

81. **\*Mr. Ananga Mohan Dam:** (a) Will the Honourable the Railway Member please state why different rules regarding the grades, leave, pay and travelling allowance should obtain in the Eastern Bengal and the Assam Bengal zones, while all the employees belong to the one and the same system, viz., the Bengal and Assam Railway?

(b) Have the employees of the Assam Bengal Railway been re-appointed in the Bengal and Assam Railway? If so, were the employees settled up as regards their Provident Fund?

(c) If, however, the services were considered as continuous, will he give the reason for the reduction of salary when the staff were kept at the same post with the same responsibility attached thereto?

(d) Is it a fact that the Establishment Rules for the temporary munition staff in the railways differ from those in the Ordnance Factories? Do Government propose to enquire into the matter and see that the same rules do apply in both the cases?

(e) Is it a fact that munition workers in the Kanchanpara shops only do not enjoy the Passes and the Privilege Ticket Orders while those in other railway workshops are allowed this favour? Do Government propose to consider the case of Kanchanpara staff sympathetically?

(f) Is it a fact that the Deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer, Shops, Kanchanpara, Assam, requested the higher authorities to allow the munition staff Passes and Privilege Ticket Orders as other railway staff? If so, why was this not acceded to?

(g) Is it a fact that the minimum pay of an Anglo-Indian in the Railway is Rs. 55 per mensem, while that of an Indian may be anything so low as Rs. 13 per mensem?

(h) Do Government propose to discontinue such discriminations?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) The differences referred to exist because the employees of the late Assam Bengal Railway Company continued to be governed by the Company's rules in respect of pay, allowances and leave on re-employment by the State as is customary on such amalgamations.

(b) The answer to the first part is in the affirmative. As regards the second part, the answer is in the negative, since the Assam Bengal Railway Company transferred its assets in its Provident Fund to the State.

(c), (e) and (f). I have called for information and a reply will be laid on the table of the House in due course.

(d) The reply to the first part is in the affirmative. As regards the second part Government see no reason to alter the present position.

(j) The minimum wage of an Anglo-Indian in categories in which the community has a special reservation has been fixed at Rs. 55 per month. The minimum pay of Indians employed in the same categories is usually about Rs. 30.

(h) I would refer the Honourable Member to the reply given on the 22nd February, 1941, by the Honourable the Home Member to Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad's starred question No. 123.

**DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN ANGLO-INDIAN AND INDIAN APPRENTICES IN KANCHANPARA SHOPS.**

**82. \*Mr. Ananga Mohan Dam:** (a) Will the Honourable the Railway Member be pleased to state the expenses borne by the Government for each Anglo-Indian Railway Apprentice and Indian Apprentice working at Kanchanpara Shops?

(b) Is it a fact that in the Kanchanpara Shops the ration allowance of an Anglo-Indian apprentice is much higher than that of an Indian apprentice?

(c) Will such discriminations between the Anglo-Indians and the Indians continue or be put an end to now?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) On the average an Anglo-Indian Apprentice Mechanic at Kanchrapara costs the Railway Rs. 78/7/- per month and an Indian Apprentice Mechanic Rs. 52/4/- per month.

(b) The Apprentices live in hostels provided by the Railway and are given no ration allowance. The messing charges of the Apprentices are, however, paid by the Railway direct to the Caterers and these come to Rs. 35 per month in the case of an Anglo-Indian Apprentice Mechanic and Rs. 20 per month in the case of an Indian Apprentice Mechanic.

(c) The difference in the messing charges is doubtless based on the expenses incurred by the Caterers, but the Railway is being asked to examine the question of eliminating the difference if it is possible to do so.

**GRIEVANCES OF THE AMALGAMATED ASSAM BENGAL RAILWAY STAFF.**

**83. \*Mr. Ananga Mohan Dam:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways be pleased to state whether the amalgamation of the Assam Bengal Railway Company and the Eastern Bengal Railway was done in consultation with the authorities of both the Railways? If not, what principle was followed?

(b) Is it a fact that the pay and prospects of the officers and subordinates of the Assam Bengal Railway only have been adversely affected by this amalgamation?

(c) Have the pay and prospects of any of the Eastern Bengal Railway staff been affected by reason of this amalgamation? If not, why not?

(d) Is it a fact that since the amalgamation, only the officers and subordinates of the Eastern Bengal Railway have been promoted to higher positions?

(e) Is it a fact that several staff of the Assam Bengal Railway whose pay and prospects have been adversely affected by the amalgamation have appealed to the higher authorities for reconsideration of their case? If so, do Government propose to go through each and every such case?

(f) Is it a fact that a number of the staff of the Assam Bengal Railway have resigned since the amalgamation owing to the reduction of their pay as a result thereof?

(g) In view of this, are Government prepared to appoint a small committee consisting of two non-official Assembly Members and a representative of the late Assam Bengal Railway and the Eastern Bengal Railway to review in detail the cases of such staff?

(h) Is it a fact that though the Assam Bengal Railway and the Eastern Bengal Railway have been amalgamated to form the Bengal and Assam Railway, yet the Establishment Rules differ in the Eastern Bengal Zones and the Assam Bengal Zones?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) When it was decided to take over the management of the Railway, it was also decided to amalgamate it with the Eastern Bengal Railway. Government obtained the advice of the officers most competent to tender such advice before reaching the decision.

(b) No.

(c) Yes, in respect of prospects only, in some cases; the second part does not arise.

(d) No.

(e) Some representations from officers have been received and are being dealt with. As regards non-gazetted staff, I have called for information and reply will be laid on the table in due course.

(f) I have called for information and a reply will be laid on the table in due course.

(g) No.

(h) There are differences in the conditions of service of staff of the Eastern Bengal Railway and of staff who were taken over from the late Assam Bengal Railway Company as the latter have been permitted to retain in certain matters like pay, allowances, etc., the conditions by which they were governed while serving under the Company, irrespective of where they are working.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** As regards the answer to part (e), may I ask the Honourable Member if the applicants got any redress?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** The matter is still under investigation.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** After the amalgamation of the Assam Bengal Railway, such cases are likely to crop up and I want to know whether there is any agency set up by the Honourable Member's Department to investigate this matter?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** No special agency has been set up. Individual cases are most carefully enquired into.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Individual cases are enquired into by the Honourable Member's Department, or by the administration of the B. & A. Railway?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** By both, if necessary.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Does the Honourable Member realise that when a new railway is amalgamated with another, the agency for going into these matters should be an independent one?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** No. The existing organisation is perfectly competent to examine all these cases.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Did the Honourable Member say that such cases are already investigated by the General Manager of the B. & A. Railway as constituted at the present moment?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** Certainly. They are examined by the B. & A. Railway, and the Railway Board, of course, takes that examination into consideration.

#### INDIAN DELEGATION TO THE PACIFIC RELATIONS CONFERENCE.

**84. \*Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** Will the Foreign Secretary please state:

- (a) if the Government of India either wholly or partly paid the expenses of the Indian Delegation to the recent Pacific Relations Conference in Canada;
- (b) if they selected the delegates for this Indian Delegation themselves, or whether they co-operated with any political organisation in this country;
- (c) if the delegates received any salary or honorarium; if so, how much had Government to pay; and
- (d) what was the mission of this delegation? Apart from its regular mission, did the members carry on any propaganda either independently or jointly? If so, what was the nature of such propaganda?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** (a), (b) and (c). The Honourable Member is referred to the answer given to starred question No. 20 asked by Mr. Neogy on the 10th February which covers all the points in these portions of the Honourable Member's question.

(d) The mission of the delegation was to represent India at the Conference. Apart from the Conference some of the members were asked by various institutions in the United States to undertake lecture engagements and Government understands that they did so. Such engagements were undertaken in their individual capacity.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** May I ask whether it was Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar who selected the delegates?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I understand that he, as Chairman of the Indian Branch of the Institute, had, at any rate, a large part in selecting the delegates.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** May I know whether Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar received the invitation during his stay in India or in England?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** All the members who are chosen to go to the United States received invitation from the Secretary General of the Institute of Pacific Relations.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** When was he asked to select the delegates?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I cannot tell the Honourable Member exactly. It was during the latter part of August or the beginning of September, just before he went away.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** In view of the fact that Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar was in India when he received the invitation, did he consult the Committee of the Institute of International Affairs?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I cannot tell the Honourable Member. I am not a member of the Committee myself. As far as Government understand, it was done, the whole thing was done, according to the rules of the Indian Branch of the Institute.

**Mr. K. C. Neogy:** Has the Honourable Member satisfied himself that the procedure followed in the selection of these delegates was quite regular and in accordance with the rules to which he has just made reference?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** Government is not responsible for the conduct of business in the Indian Branch of the Institute.

**Mr. K. C. Neogy:** Has the Honourable Member's attention been drawn to the comments on this subject, namely, that the election was wholly irregular?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I have heard it said, I have seen it in the press.

**Mr. K. C. Neogy:** In view of the fact that Government decided to finance this delegation, did not the Government think it necessary to go into this question to find out whether a fraud was committed on the procedure?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I think it would be a most graceless thing to do, to go over past history of that kind, in view of the extraordinarily high and good impression which the Indian Delegation created while they were in the United States.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** May I ask whether all the delegates chosen were members of the International Institute?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I believe some were and some of them were not. It was not necessary as I understand that they should all be members of the Institute.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** May I ask whether the Government of India is aware that one of the Members of the Institute of International Affairs, Pandit Kunzru, protested against the method followed by the President in selecting the delegates?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I have heard that statement. To go over things like that, after the choice, seems to me again, if I may say so, a graceless way of doing things and suggests that certain members feel that they would have been better choices themselves.

**Mr. K. C. Neogy:** Apart from the reports of high tributes to the "passionate eloquence" of the delegates, do the Government expect to get any report of the proceedings?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** Yes, Sir. A complimentary report has already been received.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** May I ask the Honourable Member to repeat what he said about some other Honourable Members not having been chosen?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I said that I thought that suggestions of this kind by other members leave a feeling that some of the discontented members thought they might have been better choices.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** May I ask whether the Government of India consider that whenever there is a protest against the action of one of the Members of the Government, the Government is justified in attributing improper motives to the Members?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I do not know if they are necessarily improper.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Next question.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** Sir, this is a very important matter.

**Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** Sir, I want to ask one supplementary question.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member ought to have taken the opportunity long ago. Sufficient supplementary questions have been asked on this question. Next question.

**Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** But not the one which I wanted to ask, Sir.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): No more supplementary questions. Next question.

#### DISCUSSION OF THE "ATLANTIC CHARTER" AT THE PACIFIC RELATIONS CONFERENCE.

85. **Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** Will the Foreign Secretary please state if at the recent Pacific Relations Conference in Canada, the 'Atlantic Charter' formed the subject of discussion? If so, was its applicability to India discussed? What was the nature and substance of the discussion?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** As stated in my answer to question No. 20, asked by Mr. Neogy on the 10th February the proceedings of the Conference were strictly private and Government are unable to divulge their substance without the permission of the Secretary-General of the Conference.

**Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** We were told that the Congress point of view was put by two gentlemen. May I ask what was the statement made on behalf of the Congress which the Government considers was from the Congress point of view?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I am not at present in a position to inform the Honourable Member or the House of the substance of the proceedings of the Round Table Group on India at this Conference and I am not able, I regret to say, at the present stage to give the Honourable Member the answer that he would like to have. I hope it may be possible to do so later.

**Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** But what was the Congress point of view which was placed before the Conference?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** I have only got information from one who attended the Conference that the Congress Party's point of view was placed before them.

**Maulvi Muhammad Abdul Ghani:** May I ask whether the point of view of the Muslim League was also placed before the Conference?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** Yes, I think so.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** May I ask if the Report has been placed in the Library of the House?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** No, Sir. If the Report had been placed in the Library of the House, it would have been the public property.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** May I ask if the viewpoint of the Scheduled classes was also placed before the Conference?

**Mr. O. K. Caroe:** One of the delegates, I believe, belonged to the Scheduled castes and no doubt he took opportunities of placing their viewpoint before the Conference.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi** (Nominated Non-Official): Sir, I rise to a point of order. I would like to ask you whether it is proper and in order for a Member of Government to attribute unworthy motives to Members of the Assembly who are doing their duty?

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): I do not think any motive was attributed in connection with the Members of the Assembly. Was it in connection with the Members of the Assembly?

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** Yes, Sir. He attributed unworthy motives to the Members of the Assembly while replying to a question.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): What motive was attributed?

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** The motive was that the question was put by Members who felt that they should have been chosen instead of other persons, a motive of selfishness. He did say that.

**Mr. O. K. Caroe** (Secretary, External Affairs Department): I said that certain people who had made criticisms in public and in the Press about this choice of others by the Institute were laying themselves open to the feeling that they themselves might have been better choices. I only referred to the members of the Institute of the Indian Branch of the Institute of International Affairs and not to the Members of the Assembly. The last thing I would do would be to attribute unworthy motives to the Members of the Assembly.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): That is what I thought; he did not refer to the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

#### MOTIONS FOR ADJOURNMENT.

##### SUGAR PROBLEM.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The next motion for adjournment is in the name of Mr. Jamnadas Mehta who wishes to discuss regarding sugar. That subject will come under discussion during the two days that have been allotted regarding food problem.

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta** (Bombay Central Division: Non-Muhammadan Rural): All right, Sir.

##### PROVISION OF RUPEE FINANCE FOR THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE UNITED NATIONS.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The next motion for adjournment is also in his name. He wishes to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the imminent economic disaster, facing the country, due to the action of the Government of India, in providing rupee finance required for His Majesty's Government and for the Governments of the other United Nations in India and thereby indirectly compelling the Reserve Bank of India to issue huge volumes of currency notes out of all proportion, to the needs of the country, as reflected in the growth of population, the expansion of industries and the increase in production, thus leading to a chronic state of inflation.

I want to know when this rupee finance was provided for His Majesty's Government and the Governments of the United Nations? When did this take place?

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta:** The thing which led to the acute position by inflation was found out in December last.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): What happened in December last?

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta:** Practically, every day one crore worth of rupees currency notes were issued.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Since what date?

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta:** The exact date I do not know.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Some date in December?

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): I should like to know what the Honourable the Finance Member has got to say.

**The Honourable Sir Jeremy Raisman** (Finance Member): There has been no change whatever in the method by which these transactions by which the war effort in India is financed have been carried out. The only imminency arises from the adjectives used by the Honourable Member in his motion. The position is one which, in essence, is exactly the same since the beginning of the war. It is true that there is a change in degree but the whole policy in regard to this matter is one which would naturally come under discussion at the time of the Budget, and it cannot be said at any particular point of time that some new and urgent question has arisen. I submit that the matter is not urgent within the meaning of the Standing Orders.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): I suppose the Budget discussion will take place shortly.

**The Honourable Sir Jeremy Raisman:** Yes, Sir, within a few days.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): I rule that the matter is not urgent and that it is a matter which will be discussed shortly during the Budget debate. I declare the motion out of order.

#### FAST BY MAHATMA GANDHI IN JAIL.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The next motion for adjournment is in the name of Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra who wishes to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the hunger strike or fast resorted to by Mahatma Gandhi in jail.

I think there is another motion also in the name of the same Honourable Member to the same effect.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra** (Presidency Division: Non-Muhammadan Rural): Yes, Sir.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Which of these two motions does the Honourable Member wish to discuss?

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** Whichever you like, Sir.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): I do not want to discuss any one. It is for the Honourable Member to choose and then I shall decide. The second one is to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the situation created by the fast undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi in jail from today.

What is the nature of the situation created?

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** That, Sir, I will indicate when the motion is admitted.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member ought to have mentioned it clearly. But there is another motion in the name of Sardar Sant Singh relating to this matter.

**Sardar Sant Singh** (West Punjab: Sikh): That does not relate to hunger strike by Mahatma Gandhi, but to the hunger strike resorted to by Sikh military prisoners now confined in the Central India Agency, of which notice was given by me a few days ago.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member has given notice of a motion today.

**Sardar Sant Singh**: I have given notice today of a motion relating to the restrictions placed on the publication of the news about Mahatma Gandhi without precensorship on the *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, by the Chief Commissioner, Delhi.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): All right, I understand that. Has the Government Member any objection?

**The Honourable Sir Reginald Maxwell** (Home Member): No, Sir.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The motion will be taken up at 4 O'clock, unless the business of the House is finished earlier.

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan** (Agra Division: Muhammadan Rural): Sir, may I suggest that in view of the fact that two days have already been fixed for the debate on food-stuff, discussion on this motion for adjournment be postponed for tomorrow.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): No. That is the look out of Honourable Members themselves who give notices of adjournment motions. The motion will be taken up at 4 O'clock unless the business on the agenda is finished before that, and in that case, if it is the desire of the House and I take it that that is the general desire—it will be discussed earlier.

#### MESSAGES FROM H. E. THE GOVERNOR GENERAL.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Two messages have been received from His Excellency the Governor General. The first message reads as follows:

*"In exercise of the powers conferred by rule 2 of the Indian Legislative Rules, I, Victor Alexander John, Marquess of Linlithgow hereby appoint the Honourable Sir Edward Benthall to perform the functions assigned to the Finance Member under rule 46 of the said rules on the occasion of the General Discussion appointed for Friday, the 19th February, 1943, of the statement of the estimated annual expenditure and revenue of the Governor General in Council in respect of Railways.*

(Sd.) LINLITHGOW,  
Viceroy and Governor General"

NEW DELHI;  
The 25th January, 1943.

The second message runs thus:

*"In pursuance of the provisions of sub-section (3) of section 67A as set out in the Ninth Schedule to the Government of India Act, 1935, I hereby direct that the heads of expenditure specified in that sub-section, other than those specified in clause (v) thereof, shall be open to discussion by the Legislative Assembly when the Budget for the year 1943-44, is under consideration.*

(Sd.) LINLITHGOW,  
Viceroy and Governor General"

#### RAILWAY BUDGET FOR 1943-44.

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall** (Member for Railways and War Transport): Sir, I have the honour to present the Railway Budget for 1943-44. In war time, the success of railway operation must be measured not in rupees but in service. A year ago, my predecessor, Sir Andrew Clow, warned the House that there was little prospect of meeting more than a proportion of the demands made upon the railways, even if the tide of battle came no nearer our shores. Since then, not only has the tide of battle lapped our shores and thrown upon the railways much traffic which would normally have been seaborne, but the

railways have had to face an organised, malicious and determined internal attack designed primarily to put them out of action and, on top of all this, a series of almost unprecedented floods and cyclones. Now that the breaches have been repaired, I can safely tell the House that through traffic on no less than three lines of first class strategic importance was interrupted by nature for periods of five months, four months and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  months respectively, and other serious delays have also been involved. Apart from these abnormal incidents, the difficulties of obtaining materials for maintenance of, and repairs to, track and rolling stock have owing to war conditions, become progressively greater, while we are now feeling severely the absence of a number of our trained staff who have been released for military service and for war work in other departments. In the face of these factors it is only natural that the railways should have been severely strained in their effort to meet the increasing demands made upon them.

2. For the Army, we are running more than 400 special troop trains every month, and we estimate that in the current year we shall carry 15 million tons of military traffic, compared with 500,000 tons in peace time. The average distance which this tonnage is carried is considerably greater than for public traffic. Included in this is a large volume of materials for the construction of airfields, which had to be transported swiftly and efficiently, and the railway administrations can look with satisfaction to the part they have played in building up this large network of defence assets. The railways have provided a considerable number of vehicles, specialised and otherwise, including ambulance trains for use in India and on other fronts, and also a very large mileage of sidings and a number of locomotives and wagons for army depots, while 19,000 men in railway workshops have made a notable contribution on the munitions front. We have the assurance of the military authorities that the requirements of the Army have been met satisfactorily. The Army, on their part, have shown an enthusiasm for co-operation, which has materially eased the problem of superimposing this vast military traffic upon an already extended civilian demand, and it is hardly necessary to add that we shall neglect nothing to render efficient service to them, whatever burdens the future may lay upon us.

3. As regards civilian goods traffic, we are, of course, carrying very little indeed of what can be called luxury traffic. Practically everything carried on the railways is, under the priority system, of direct or indirect value to the war effort. It has been the subject of comment that we are loading fewer wagons daily this year than last, and at first sight, this is difficult to reconcile with the increased earnings. But while the number of wagons loaded has decreased, the ton mileage has, on the whole, been well maintained. The wagons loaded have therefore for a variety of reasons been carried greater distance. The average wagon load has increased and the policy of curtailing short distance traffic has resulted in a reduction in the time spent in loading and unloading and has therefore added to the earning power of the wagon. The smaller loadings of coal, which is, of course, a low rated commodity, has meant that a larger quantity of higher rated traffic has been moved. But this is not a matter of particular gratification to the railways since the movement of coal is a matter of first importance, and the supply of wagons to the collieries is at all times one of the major preoccupations of the railway administrations. The broad fact is, however, that the railways have succeeded, in the difficult circumstances described in my opening remarks, in maintaining the life of the country, whilst meeting the demands of the military and of every essential industry. We are grateful to those merchants and industrialists, particularly of the larger organised industries, who, by programming and strict attention to wagon economy, have played their part in this result.

4. When it comes to passengers, statistics show that, in spite of the vigorous campaign to induce passengers to travel only when they must, there was an

[Sir Edward Benthall.]

increase of 3,000 million passenger miles last year, as compared with 1938-39, while this year these figures have been exceeded. Reductions in passenger train services amount to a saving in train miles of approximately 37 per cent. of the pre-war figure, and this curtailment has been necessary to provide for military and goods traffic and to conserve coal stocks. I can offer no hope at all of any improved comfort or speed in passenger travel so long as such priority demands continue, but, if it is any solace to passengers in this country, I may mention that I was informed recently by a prominent American railway official that in the United States passenger trains are on certain lines, subject to as great delays as in present-day India.

#### *Staff*

5. Although, therefore, the system has creaked again and again, it has stood the strain. Essential traffic has been moved. In this achievement, there is one fact which cannot be too freely recognised. This vast organisation covering in the State-owned railways a larger mileage and a larger staff than any single railway administration in the world, is not a soulless machine, but a thing of flesh and blood. Seven hundred and fifty-eight thousand persons, 99·7 per cent. of them Indians and Anglo-Indians, eat the salt of the Indian railways, and it is their loyalty to their work which enables the people to be fed, the factories to operate and the services to function. Inspired by the example of their officers, no less than 126,000 of them in the danger areas have voluntarily enrolled in the Defence of India Railway Force. In Assam, East Bengal and Calcutta they have had their first taste of bombing and, fortified by the excellent arrangements made for their security through the A. R. P. organisation of the railways, have carried on. Under what we must all recognise to have been the most difficult conditions of all during the open rebellion of last autumn, they were almost to a single man true to their salt. They have therefore deserved well of India. The thousands of railway workers who have made a special effort this year and whose work cannot all receive individual recognition, will be glad at least to know that it has been appreciated by the Government of India and by this House. I am sure, therefore, that the House will join me in offering sincere and hearty congratulations to Sir Leonard Wilson, the Railway Board and the officers and men of the railways, from General Manager to gangman, on a splendid year's work.

6. Good though the record is we have to ask more of them before we can put this nightmare of war behind us. We have yet to load more wagons, speed up the traffic, and eliminate delays to a far greater extent than heretofore. If we are to do this, it is our duty to see that the workers are properly cared for in these difficult times and that nothing that is fair shall be left undone to mitigate their hardships. In addition to a dearness allowance, numerous other arrangements have been made to assist them, such as family evacuation concessions and allotments, emergency allowances, educational concessions, war injury relief and so on. Increased money payments help, but what is of importance to staff today is not so much money but what money can buy, and above, all, the necessaries of life such as foodstuffs, clothing, kerosene and fuel, which, mainly on account of sheer hoarding or profiteering, have become so costly and difficult to obtain. The grant of additional dearness allowance will be of no avail if the articles are not forthcoming.

7. There are two ways of dealing with this problem, either to continue to give the lower paid staff increased dearness allowance to meet the rising cost of living, or to see that the rise in the cost of living of the railwayman is, as far as possible, stabilised by ensuring that the necessaries of life are made available to him at reasonable prices. On the railways we are combining the two courses. We have given a dearness allowance, and we have opened grain shops. It is our policy to supply through these shops, on an increasing scale, not only food grains but also other necessaries of life at prices which will go

far to stabilise the cost of living of the workers, the difference between these prices and the actual cost being borne by railways. This will not only afford some relief to the class of workers to whom dearness allowance does not apply but,—and this is a matter of supreme importance,—by creating a check on the rising spiral of wages and prices in one important sphere, will tend to retard the process of inflation in the country as a whole. The organisation necessary cannot, of course, be conjured up in a night, but all railway administrations have been asked to treat this matter as one of urgency. On some railways a good beginning has already been made, and it is hoped that the effects will make themselves felt shortly over a wide area. In the meantime special arrangements have been made to secure priority for the necessary supplies of foodgrains.

#### *Rolling Stock.*

8. If, however, we are to continue to meet in future the high level of demand which is made on railway transport, we must have material to help the human effort. A large programme of wagon construction in India is in hand, and none too soon. The augmentation of our broad gauge stock is a matter of increasing urgency. So far, we have placed orders for 9,973 broad gauge wagons, of which we have received 265 and expect to receive about 6,207 by end of 1943-44. Of metre gauge wagons we have ordered 736, all of which we expect to get. Pressure has been maintained on the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States for the supply of broad gauge locomotives and, although some of the outstanding orders on England have been suspended, arrangements have now been made for the supply of 40 heavy goods engines from America. Deliveries of these are expected to commence in June, 1943. Indian railways are also to receive 12 metre gauge heavy goods engines from England and 80 from America. It is hoped that the 40 heavy goods engines for the broad gauge will be followed by 145 more goods engines but the date, when these may be expected, has yet to be settled. It has been requested that arrangements be made for the supply of a further 150 broad gauge locomotives during 1944. The House will be interested to know that plans are already actively being prepared to set up a locomotive construction shop in India during the war if physically possible, although this is unlikely owing to the difficulty of securing the plant and raw material, and, if not, as part of the immediate post-war reconstruction plan. Special attention is being given to locomotive repair, in order to secure that the maximum number of locomotives are at work on the line at any given time. The target of engines under and awaiting repair at which we aim, is four per cent. in shops and eight per cent. in sheds, or a total of 12 per cent., a figure which the L. M. & S. Railway in England attains. Our latest figures show a percentage of 16.5 on the broad gauge and 13.6 on the metre gauge against an overall figure in the United Kingdom of 15.46 per cent. Since some of the railways already show very creditable figures, further improvement will have to come mainly from those with the highest percentage of locomotives under and awaiting repair. In order to make it possible for the railways to achieve this, it may be necessary to take back certain of the locomotive repair shops hitherto diverted to the production of war material. In the meantime, locomotives are constantly being transferred from one line to another as traffic demands.

#### *Transport of Food.*

9. At the moment, the question of food supply is uppermost in the public mind. But we are not facing a new situation. The railways and the departments of Government concerned with food had precisely the same problem to face during and after the last war with this difference that in 1918-19 there was a failure of the harvests to the extent of 20 million tons. This time the actual shortage of foodstuffs in the country is not of large dimensions but the effect of the comparatively small shortage which exists, combined with serious

[Sir Edward Benthall.]

maldistribution, raises a difficult problem. In the first six months of the current year the railways transported approximately the same tonnage of grains and pulses as in the previous year, over five million tons. Movements of sugar and salt by rail were in considerable excess of the previous year. The Railway Board have been alive to the urgency of the problem of transport of essential food supplies for civil population and, in close consultation with the Priorities Organisation of the War Transport Department, have for the last six months been giving special priority to the movement of foodstuffs. Generally speaking, whenever foodstuffs have been offered for transport, they have been moved without undue delay. Particular attention has for some time been given to the expediting of special consignments to deficiency areas and this will continue. So long as the need arises, foodstuffs will be moved in high priority, and if bumper *rabi* crops eventuate, as seems reasonably likely, and if confidence is restored, the railways must be prepared to meet exceptionally heavy grain movements which will tax their resources severely. But in all events the food will be transported.

10. I will now turn to financial results, as achieved last year and as far as we can now foresee for this and the next year.

#### *Accounts for 1941-42.*

When presenting the current year's budget, my predecessor estimated that the year 1941-42 would end with a surplus of 26.20 Crores, out of which 19.12 crores were to go to general revenues. In the event, the actual receipts proved to be much better, and this in spite of the railways having reduced their passenger services and undertaken publicity to discourage travel. Our earnings reached an unexpectedly high level in the last quarter of 1941-42, and the gross receipts for the year were 2.27 crores above our revised estimate. Our ordinary working expenses were 36 lakhs more and payments to worked lines 16 lakhs more. The net miscellaneous receipts were 4 lakhs less, but a slight reduction in the rate gave us a saving of 17 lakhs under interest charges. In the net result, the surplus was 28.08 crores, out of which 20.17 crores were paid to general revenues, 4.80 on account of the 1 per cent. contribution for the year and 15.37 towards payment of arrears of contribution. The railways' share of the surplus, 7.91 crores, was devoted to repayment of the debt to the depreciation fund.

#### *Revised estimate for 1942-43.*

11. In February last, when my predecessor presented the budget for the current year, he placed the estimate of gross traffic receipts for this year at 130.27 crores. This estimate too, is likely to be greatly exceeded. The anticipations now are that the receipts will be 149.25 crores, i.e., 18.98 crores more, which means improvement over last year of 14 crores. This large increase has occurred again in spite of the publicity campaign against unnecessary travel, reduced passenger services to conserve stocks of coal, and considerable curtailment of non-essential goods traffic. The causes are increase in military traffic and upper class passengers, withdrawal of reduced rates and third class fares quoted by certain railways in the past to meet road competition, increase in the basis of fares on the North Western and East Indian Railways, withdrawal of concession fares, additional charge on parcels and luggage, involving an increase from 2 annas to 4 annas in the rupee, withdrawal of special goods rates, imposition of additional charge of 12½ per cent. on fodder and food grains booked in small consignments. The increase in earnings has been almost continuous, though varying in extent, practically from the beginning of the year, except during the periods affected by political disturbance and widespread sabotage, when the decrease occurred only in goods traffic. Taking goods and coaching together, our monthly earnings have never been below those for the previous year.

12. While we expect our gross traffic receipts to exceed the original estimate by 19 crores, we expect our ordinary working expenses to be 10.84 crores more than we originally estimated. This increase is due to the dearness allowance sanctioned at enhanced rates and for a larger number of our staff with effect from the 15th June 1942, loss incurred in supplying foodgrains to staff at less than purchase price, increased consumption and cost of fuel, air-raid precautions, militarisation of the Bengal and Assam and certain sections of the East Indian, Bengal Nagpur, Madras and Southern Mahratta and South Indian Railways, additional staff, overtime allowance, additional expenditure on repairs caused by intensive use of rolling stock, rise in prices and repairs to damages due to floods, cyclones, and sabotage and preventive measures against sabotage. The scheme of dearness allowance sanctioned in August 1942 is estimated to cost five crores a year.

13. Payments to worked lines will be 20 lakhs more than our original estimate, while there will be a small saving of five lakhs in the appropriation to the depreciation fund. The miscellaneous transactions show an improvement of 15 lakhs while, on account of a slight reduction in rate, our interest charges will be 19 lakhs less. As the net result of all these causes, we expect now the current year to close with a surplus of 36.28 crores against the original estimate of 27.95 crores. In the budget, we provided for a payment of 20.13 crores to general revenues against the then expected liability of 18.82. Owing to a larger payment in 1941-42 than we originally expected to make the liability to general revenues for the current year has been reduced to 17.77 crores. But, with the unprecedented surplus which we are expecting now and which we should attribute in a large measure to traffic connected with the war, Government consider that the general tax-payer has a legitimate claim to the full relief originally expected. We have accordingly decided, subject to the approval of the House, that the payment to general revenues should be the original figure of 20.13 crores. This will involve seeking the approval of this House to the outright payment of an extra-conventional amount of 2.36 crores to general revenues, to bring the total contribution to 20.13 crores. The railways' share will then be 16.15 crores, of which we shall devote 16.08 crores to repayment of debt to the depreciation fund and the balance, which is very small, to the railway reserve. With these payments, all the outstanding liabilities to general revenues for arrear contribution and to the depreciation fund for loans taken in the past to meet deficits will be fully cleared, if the transaction which I am about to propose is approved.

It is worth noting that, for the first time in the history of the railways, the strategic lines are likely to show a profit which is estimated at  
 12 Noon. 29 lakhs.

14. In 1940-41, when, with the moratorium, we divided the surplus in a particular manner with the approval of this House between general revenues and railways, the amount falling to the share of railways was credited to their general reserve. Last year, with the approval of this House, all payments made to general revenues from railway surplus, since the declaration of the moratorium, over and above one per cent. contribution of the year concerned, were treated as discharge of the liability for arrear contribution due to them. A logical corollary to this is that the allocations from surplus, which fell to railways' share, should be similarly treated as repayment of debt to the depreciation fund. Government have therefore decided that the sum of 6.30 crores, credited to railway reserve in 1940-41, should now be transferred to the depreciation fund. This amount, along with the 16.08 crores I have mentioned above, will clear the present outstanding debt of 22.38 crores to the depreciation fund. If the anticipated surplus does not materialise, any liability which may remain uncleared, will be a first charge on the next year's surplus. On the contrary, if the year closes with a larger surplus, the excess will go to the railway reserve.

[Sir Edward Benthall.]

*Estimates for 1943-44.*

15. Ever since the outbreak of the war our actual earnings have considerably exceeded our estimates because of factors which we could not possibly anticipate. It would seem that railways have approached their maximum carrying capacity, though it may not be beyond the powers of the railwaymen to get even more out of the existing equipment, if everything were to go with perfect smoothness. To base estimates on any substantial further increase would, in our view, be unwise. On the contrary, should there be any reduction of internal activity or of imports, the current year's figures might not be reached by many crores. After weighing all the factors and taking into consideration 40 lakhs for the extra day in February, 1944, which will be a leap year, we have decided to place the estimate for 1943-44 at a figure slightly above our revised estimate for the current year, that is, at the round figure of Rs. 150 crores, fully conscious that any estimate that we make must be highly speculative under war conditions. Before leaving the subject of receipts, it is proper to mention that we are not contemplating any general change in the existing fares and freights next year.

16. Coming now to ordinary working expenses for the next year, we place the estimate at 2.58 crores more than this year's revised estimate, mainly on account of the loss we anticipate next year in supplying food grains and other necessities to the staff at less than purchase price. Increases and decreases under other heads balance each other, including a large increase in the cost of coal. There is a slight increase under appropriation to the depreciation fund owing to the purchase of the Bengal and North-Western and Rohilkund and Kumaon Railways. For the same reason mainly, we expect to have to pay 1.22 crores less to worked lines, while, on account of the increase in our depreciation and railway reserve fund balances, our miscellaneous receipts are expected to be 46 lakhs more. We shall also save 17 lakhs under interest charges.

In the result, our net surplus is estimated at 36.04 crores, only 24 lakhs below the current year's surplus. The surplus of commercial lines is estimated at 35.75 crores and of strategic lines at 29 lakhs.

*The division of the surplus.*

17. I have already explained to the House that, according to our present anticipations, railways will, by the end of this year, have completely cleared their liabilities to general revenues and to the depreciation fund. Under the existing Convention, the distribution of the next year's estimated surplus of 36.04 crores will be 14.59 crores to general revenues and 21.45 crores to railway reserve. Such an apportionment to general revenues will not only fall short of the amounts which they have received in the recent past, but will, in the opinion of Government, give inadequate relief to the general tax-payer in the present situation. We are, therefore, proposing, subject to the approval of the House, to abandon so much of the existing separation convention as provides for contribution and allocation of surplus to general revenues and to distribute the estimated surplus of 1943-44 on commercial lines between general revenues and railways in the proportion of 3 to 1, general revenues receiving also the anticipated gain on strategic lines. Under this proposal, the share of surplus which will go to general revenues next year, including the profit on strategic lines, will be 27.10 crores, while 8.94 crores will be transferred to railway reserve. We further propose that, till a new convention is adopted, the distribution of each year's surplus should be decided after duly weighing the respective needs of general revenues and railways, and the proportion of 3 to 1 must not be regarded as setting a precedent for future years.

18. In considering the proposed allocation of surplus, we have had to bear in mind two conflicting interests, the necessity of building up railway reserves and the need for assisting general revenues from railway surplus which, after

all, has accrued largely out of the expenditure of the general budget. Even if the Acworth Committee had not passed stringent comments upon the policy followed in the last war, the dictates of common business prudence, based on the experience of the last two decades, would impel us to take steps now to place railway finances upon a sound footing. It is also a duty which we owe to our successors, who in any case will be faced with extremely difficult conditions in the post-war period. The main question is whether the proposed allocations to railway reserves are adequate. In an attempt to assist general revenues, are we being generous at the expense of railways? On the one hand, we must consider particularly the provision of adequate funds to cover post-war rehabilitation and to meet our interest charges in periods of depression and, on the other, the plight of the general tax-payer. I am of the opinion that the measures, which we are proposing now, represent, for the present, a reasonable mean between the claims of railway and general finance.

19. Two vital considerations have weighed with the Railway Department in agreeing to the proposed method of allocation of surplus for the present. First, in the opinion of the department, it would be, from a financial point of view, thoroughly unsound to allocate such a large percentage of railway surplus to general revenues unless railways are relieved of the burden of a fixed contribution which, under the existing convention, is hanging over their heads, regardless of whether a surplus is actually earned or not. It is hoped that this wholesome principle will be fully recognised in any future revision of the convention approved by the House. Secondly, for the reasons which were so fully and ably expounded by Sir Frederick James and other Members of the Assembly in the Budget session last year, the Railway Department consider that the canons of sound railway finance dictate that, apart from contributions to the Depreciation Fund, at least eight crores per annum should be set aside annually to railway reserves.

*Resolution regarding the Convention of 1924.*

20. If the House accepts in principle the proposed allocation of the surpluses in the current year and in 1943-44, it will be necessary for the House to pass a resolution, setting aside certain terms of the Convention of 1924 to enable general revenues to be credited with an additional Rs. 2.36 crores in the current year and with 75 per cent. of the surplus on commercial lines in 1943-44. A draft resolution for this purpose, of which I am giving notice to-day, will accordingly be laid before the House shortly.

21. Experience, since 1924, has shown that the Separation Resolution of 1924 has not achieved its object in certain important respects. It is true that, in the first five years of the Convention's life, the railways earned a sufficient surplus to pay the fixed contribution to general revenues and to accumulate a reserve of 18.43 crores, but the deplorable effect of the settlement on railway finances is shown by the fact that, at the end of 1939-40, no less than 17.96 crores had been drawn from the reserve, the contribution to general revenues had fallen into arrears to the extent of 35.71 crores, and loans, aggregating 30.29 crores, had been taken from the depreciation fund to meet interest charges. It is not unfair to say that the failure to adopt a sound financial policy had brought railway finances into a most parlous position, from which they have only been rescued, for the present, by the abnormal conditions of a world war. Equally the Convention has failed in war time, since it has been necessary to introduce a moratorium from time to time in order to secure that general revenues might receive an extra share of the surpluses, which undoubtedly arise to a large extent from the expenditure incurred from general revenues.

22. It is proposed therefore at this juncture when for the first time for many years railway finances may be described as straight, to take the initial step towards a fresh settlement by setting aside so much of the 1924 Convention as relates to contribution and apportionment of surplus to general revenues and

[Sir Edward Benthall.]

providing for *ad hoc* settlements in each year until the House has decided upon a revised Convention. From 1943-44, therefore, it is proposed that, until a new convention is adopted by the Assembly, the allocation of the surplus on commercial lines between the railway and general revenues shall be decided by the House each year on consideration of the needs of the railways and general revenues, the latter being also credited, or debited, with the gain, or loss, on strategic lines.

23. It may be asked why Government propose to abolish the relative clauses of the Convention instead of merely suspending them for the time being. I have already given the answer when dealing with the division of the 1943-44 surplus. If the railways are to contribute generously to general revenues during the war crisis, it is essential that they should be freed from the burden of a convention which involves contributions to general revenues, even if there is no surplus. For this reason, a mere suspension would be an unsatisfactory expedient and would obviously necessitate larger amounts being set aside as railway reserve in the present prosperous times in order to meet contingent liabilities which are almost certain to accrue in the future.

24. I should perhaps make two other points clear at this stage. First, it is not intended to set aside any terms of the convention other than those relating to contribution and apportionment of surplus although, when the time comes, the House will doubtless wish to review the convention as a whole. Secondly, it is not proposed that the House should be asked immediately to consider the terms of a new convention, since it would not be appropriate to undertake this very important and arduous task, until it is possible to foresee, with greater certainty than is possible during a world upheaval like the present, the future trend of railway earnings, while the House and the public generally will certainly wish for ample time to consider all the implications. The policy proposed for the war period is designed to provide a flexible arrangement which, while relieving the railways of the necessity of making heavy provision out of the surpluses of prosperous times to meet future fixed contributions to general revenues, will enable them to make some substantial provision to meet post-war contingencies and, at the same time, make large contributions, when most needed, to general revenues for the benefit of the taxpayer. The general effect of the proposal is to relieve the railways of what amounts to a kind of debenture charge, which has weighed very onerously indeed on railways during bad times, and to enable general revenues to participate more liberally in the equity profits of the business during prosperous times. Government therefore confidently recommend this settlement to the House.

#### *Capital and depreciation fund position.*

25. The dismantlement of branch lines in connection with war requirements practically came to a close last year. Only 42 miles of track have been lifted this year, but a fair amount of rolling stock was sent overseas. The reduction in our capital from these transactions will be over two crores.

26. Our fresh capital expenditure on existing open lines is estimated at 3½ crores. We have, in addition, purchased the Mirpurkhas Khadro, Tapti Valley, Bengal and North Western and Rohilkund and Kumaon Railways, at a total cost of 19.92 crores, out of which 4½ crores representing the balance of the price of the Bengal and North Western and Rohilkund and Kumaon Railways will be paid next year. We have also reduced our capital by 43 lakhs by allowing the Baroda Government one-fourth financial interest in the Tapti Valley Railway. They had been holding shares, representing one-fourth of the total share capital in the Tapti Valley Railway Company from the time the line was constructed, and one-fourth of the line passes through Baroda territory. We have also sold to them, purely for administrative reasons, 72 miles of a narrow gauge branch

line of the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway, from Broach to Jambusar, with branches to Kavi and Dahej, for 23½ lakhs. The result of all these transactions is a net addition of 15½ crores to the capital at charge. The expenditure from the depreciation fund is five crores.

27. For the next year, our programme does not provide for either the construction, or the purchase, of any line or for any dismantlement but only for the payment of the balance of the purchase price of the Bengal and North Western and Rohilkund and Kumaon Railways. The rest of the capital expenditure will be on rolling stock and open line works, the most important of which will be locomotives and boilers (8 crores), wagons (3½ crores), carriages (1 crore) and track renewals (5½ crores). On the whole, we expect to spend 24 crores, 11 from the depreciation fund and 13 crores from capital.

#### *Depreciation Fund.*

28. The balance in the depreciation fund at the end of 1941-42 was 51·84 crores, and the outstanding debt which railways still owed to the fund, was 22·38 crores. During the year 1942-43 all this debt will have been repaid, and there will be a further accretion to the fund of 7·97 crores. The balance in the fund at the end of the year will be 82·19 crores. During 1943-44 the appropriation to the fund will be 12·84, and withdrawals 11 crores, resulting in an accretion of 1·84 and raising the balance in the fund to 84·03 crores.

#### *Conclusion.*

29. The foregoing review discloses an unparalleled activity and prosperity on the railways. The prosperity is illusory but, although critics will give the railways little credit for it, I would remind the House that it has been earned not as in other industries by a heavy increase in the price of what we offer, transport, but mainly by making the best of available equipment. As I said at the beginning of my speech, in war-time it is not the profits but the service rendered which must be the measure of success in railway operation. In the coming year, I pray, to use Mr. Churchill's words, that the railwaymen may escape blood and tears but, come what may, we will dedicate ourselves to another year of sweat and toil in the service of the nation and to the cause of Victory.

### MOTION *re* THE SITUATION AS REGARDS FOOD AND OTHER NECESSARIES.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Before I call upon the Honourable Mr. N. R. Sarker to move the motion that stands in his name regarding food supply, I should like to know whether any agreement has been arrived at as regards time limit for the speeches that may be delivered. I explained to the House what happened on a similar occasion, that is to say, the Government Member for his first speech takes 45 to 60 minutes. Will that satisfy on this occasion?

**The Honourable Mr. N. R. Sarker** (Member for Commerce and Food): Yes: I won't take more than 45 minutes.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): For Leaders of Parties, 30 minutes.

**Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Other speakers, 20 minutes.

**Honourable Members:** Yes.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Mr. Sarker.

**The Honourable Mr. N. R. Sarker:** The motion that stands in my name runs as follows:

"That the situation in this country as regards food, fuel, drugs and the production and distribution of standard cloth, be taken into consideration."

I sincerely welcome this debate as it gives me an opportunity to place the actual facts of the food situation before the House and to describe the measures which the Government of India have taken or propose to take to tackle it. I am also eager, Sir, to derive the utmost benefit from the varied experience which Honourable Members can, I am sure, bring to bear on this subject.

The food problem has indeed become the foremost issue in the country for some time past and has given cause for anxiety to the public. The Government of India fully share this anxiety of the public and are determined to take effective measures to bring a speedy relief to the situation. I would admit that not all the control measures taken by us in the past have been free from defects. There has, however, been no conscious laxity or lack of will on the part of the Government to tackle the problem effectively. I would appeal to the House not to lay too much stress on the past and to give us instead their constructive help and support for the future. It is in this spirit that I approach this debate and I trust that the combined wisdom of this House would enable us to repair all admitted deficiencies and to improve, where necessary, the food policy as evolved by the Government of India.

I shall now present before you, first, the food situation. Though an agricultural country, India, it should not be overlooked, is not self-sufficient in her food supply. Until recently, she used to import wheat from Australia. Her dependence on Burma for rice was more marked, the imports averaging at 14 lakh tons a year. While imports have now been cut off, our requirements have gone up owing to several factors. Defence needs have increased. Some neighbouring countries like Ceylon, Arabia and others which formerly depended on Burma rice, have now come to look upon us as the only possible source of their grain supply.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra** (Presidency Division: Non-Muhammadan Rural): What is the figure for import from Australia?

**The Honourable Mr. N. R. Sarker:** I will give that later. There has been an influx of evacuees, and lastly, with better employment and more money in the pockets of the public in general, some increase in demand has taken place though it is difficult to indicate its precise extent. Until the last quarter of 1941 the food question had caused us no anxiety. Prices had shown a slightly upward trend, but after the unprecedented slump in agricultural prices in the thirties, this was welcomed and viewed with a sigh, not of grief, but of relief. Our real trouble began with the fall of Burma. With imports from Burma completely cut off, we were faced for the first time with a gap in the supply of one of our principal food grains. But the collapse of Burma came with an unexpected suddenness. Nobody could have made any provision against a contingency which nobody could have foreseen. The situation suddenly became acute. It was at this stage that the Government of India started the "Grow More Food" campaign. The short-run possibilities of such a campaign are no doubt limited, but the results achieved up till now must be considered as satisfactory. According to the latest statistical information there has been an increase in rice and wheat areas of 14 lakh and 16 lakh acres respectively, as compared with figures of previous years. As much as four million acres have been diverted from short staple cotton to millets. The total increase in millet acreage has been estimated to be no less than 40 to 50 lakh acres. Unfortunately, agriculture in this country is largely a gamble in monsoons. The failure of rains in the Bombay Province has adversely affected the millet crop and a cyclone in Bengal has partially damaged the rice crop while the Indus floods

have halved the exportable rice surplus of Sind. Increase in production has therefore not been proportionate to the increase in area. I need not, however, tell the House that but for this timely initiation of the campaign, we would have been very much worse off now.

I wish I could give the Honourable Members an exact picture of our present statistical position. Our figures of production and consumption are, however, neither complete nor free from defects. The machinery for collecting and compiling these figures is not well developed. It is palpably inadequate in the permanently settled areas which produce nearly half of our largest staple crop, namely, rice. There are no estimates of stocks carried over from one year to another. Steps have now been taken by the Education, Health and Lands Department to improve the statistics in certain respects, but, of course, it will take time before results are achieved. In spite of these difficulties, however, I would try to give the House a rough idea about the present position.

The rice crop in some areas like the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Bombay has been considerably above normal, though the total crop was affected by the damage done to the crop in Bengal and Orissa by the recent cyclone. As at present advised, the all-India total rice crop would be short by ten lakh tons this year as compared with the average for three pre-war years, but we confidently expect that a further improvement would be revealed when the final forecast figures are published by the end of this month. As for millets, the crop has been in excess of normal, the 1942 *bajra-jowar* crop being estimated at 92.4 lakh tons as against the pre-war average of 91.8 lakh tons. I am also glad to announce that according to the latest reports the prospects of the *rabi* crop are most encouraging. To draw a final balance sheet, the net gap in our total supply of foodgrains during 1943, after taking into account the increase in our requirement, will not exceed two million tons. This means a deficit of no more than four per cent. in our total annual production of principal foodgrains. I should like to point out here that in some of the years immediately preceding the war we pulled through equal or bigger shortages without feeling much strain. The carry-over from previous years might no doubt have stood us in good stead, but even after allowance has been made for this, the House will agree that the estimated deficit as such is certainly not of an order as would warrant any panic or alarm.

The scarcity of which we hear so much at present, is confined almost entirely to the urban centres of the country. Nearly 75 to 80 per cent. of the population are agriculturists who consume the food which they themselves grow. Save for a few tracts, mainly those which have suffered from the failure of October rains, they have rarely, if ever, had a level of income they now enjoy, thanks to the favourable season and high prices. When therefore we think of the food situation in the country we should always remember that the great proportion of our population is left practically unaffected by the present difficulties. The places where the shortage is most acute are the urban and industrial centres, which depend for their supply of foodgrains on the rural areas of their own provinces as well as those of others. For reasons which I shall presently discuss, the flow of foodgrains into the urban market has considerably slowed down with the result that food has become scarce and prices have risen high. While judging this problem we must therefore keep our perspective right. We must realise that there is no suggestion of a famine in the country, but of a stringency which we hope will be temporary, in the urban centres of the non-agricultural population.

Before proceeding further I may briefly refer to one or two misapprehensions. Our difficulties have at times been attributed to excessive exports. I have already given and shall have further occasion to give, figures of exports in answer to questions in the House. I may now mention that the present quantity of foodgrain exports to our neighbouring countries would hardly come to  $\frac{1}{4}$  per cent. of our total foodgrain production. As soon as the food position

[Mr. N. R. Sarker.]

in India began to cause anxiety, Government took prompt steps to control all exports of foodgrains and has since then restricted them to a bare minimum. In recent months quantities of foodgrain exports allowed to Ceylon and Arabia have been reduced still further. The Government are taking all measures open to them to relieve this country of as great a part of this responsibility as possible and to reduce the external demands on India's foodgrains to the lowest possible limit.

Sometimes our shortages are attributed to excessive demands on the part of the Defence Forces. I have gone into the matter carefully and can assure the House that though the demands of the Defence Forces have risen with the increase in their numbers, the prevailing notions are exaggerated. Naturally I cannot reveal the exact quantities of grains which are purchased for the Army, but in this connection I wish to stress the fact that consumption of Army supplies is restricted to the members of the Defence Forces and they are not used, as is sometimes believed, for feeding the civil population as well in the Middle East. Deviations from this rule are very rare, and it is only in exceptional circumstances when it has proved impossible to feed the civilian labour engaged on Defence Works from any other source, that Army supplies are used for them.

Thus, neither the volume of our present exports nor that of military demand can, by themselves, explain our present difficulties. To some extent, they may be attributed to the stoppage of Burma rice imports. But, by and large, the factors which are responsible for our present difficulties may be traced to the impact of the fall of Burma on the confidence of the people. The Honourable Members are fully aware that, not so long ago, the country was apprehensive of a Japanese attack or of a possible invasion and a dislocation of the transport. A sense of uncertainty gripped the minds of the public. In such an atmosphere of universal nervousness every one—from Governments to individual—was more alive to his own immediate interest than to that of the country as a whole. Cultivators thought it wise to hold back their surplus stocks either as an insurance against want or in the hope of a rise in prices. The consumers resorted to panicky purchases and laid up stocks far in excess of normal requirements. Speculators with the sure prospects of higher prices and larger profits, piled up stocks. Even Provincial and State Governments were not immune from the general nervousness and took steps to safeguard the interests of their own administrative regions. Thus an anomalous situation developed. The normal channels of supply were largely choked and whatever quantities appeared on the market were snatched away by the first-comers. And while the deficit areas clamoured for supplies, surplus areas betrayed a marked reluctance to part with their surpluses. As a result of all these factors there developed acute regional shortages, especially in urban areas which were out of all proportion to the actual deficit in our total supply. Thus, the fact that there is enough or almost enough in the country, is in itself no guarantee that, at a particular time, there will be enough at every point. Even if supplies are adequate, the question how they are spread over the country is all-important. In short, procurement of the available surpluses and their equitable distribution constitute the crux of the problem.

I may point out here that price control by itself does not ensure an effective distribution, nor can it be maintained without the control over demand and supply. The food situation became acute so suddenly that Government had to improvise measures to keep it under control. Maximum prices were therefore fixed in certain cases. The drawbacks of the policy became clear when stocks were diverted to the black market. One of the first tasks of the new Food Department is therefore to rectify certain admitted deficiencies of the existing control and, as I shall soon mention, steps are now being taken in that direction.

It may be argued that if Great Britain has to a large extent successfully controlled the prices of necessities, there is no reason why India should not be able to do the same. A little reflection will reveal the vital difference between British and Indian conditions. Great Britain is a small country under one homogenous administration. The bulk of her cereals is imported and immediately on arrival passes under the control of the Government. The internal supplies come from a comparatively small number of substantial farmers who conduct their agriculture on commercial lines and grow their produce primarily for sale. In addition, there are even in normal times, large nation-wide Associations of producers and traders, many of whom are under Government or semi-Government supervision. In such circumstances, the task of bringing the whole of supply under Government direction and control, though formidable, is not impossible. The situation in India is entirely different. The country is vast and her communications are not well developed. Her foodgrains are produced by millions of small subsistence farmers who retain for their own consumption the greater part of what they grow. Nor are there any nation-wide producers' or commercial organisations which could be taken over by Government for securing and controlling the food supply. Government control of all supplies and general rationing are now universally acknowledged to be the twin pillars on which an effective food control rests. I am sure the House would recognise that under Indian conditions neither of these measures can be regarded as within the bounds of practical politics in the peculiar circumstances of the country.

The first and foremost task before the Food Department is to counteract panic and to revive the normal flow of grain to the market. For only then would the Government be in a position to procure available surpluses and distribute them on an equitable basis amongst the deficit areas. If confidence can be restored and the normal channels of trade opened, the opportunities for commercial hoarding will be reduced and the individual consumer will have less inducement to carry excessive stocks. With a view to inducing grains to the market, the Government of India have recently decided to remove the maximum control price which they had prescribed for wheat. As a second line of defence, they have arranged for the import of substantial quantities of wheat from overseas. The effect of these two measures has been seen in the past few days. The Government Agents operating in the Punjab have been able to purchase over 60,000 tons of wheat as against the 8,000 odd tons which was all that they could purchase during the month previous to the lifting of the control price. These purchases have no doubt been effected at a price considerably above that fixed by the recent control measures. It is, however, an encouraging sign that the price despite the heavy purchases of the last few days is still falling and there is good reason to hope that it will fall still further.

Government do not, however, propose to relax all control over the trade in grain. While their policy is to free the primary wholesale markets from price control, they contemplate that the retail prices for grains will continue to be controlled on the basis of the prices in primary wholesale markets. They also consider it essential to retain and intensify the control over inter-provincial movements of grain. The situation is not sufficiently normal and it would not be safe to leave the movement of grains to the free play of economic forces. We have still to reckon with the loss of Burma rice; we have also to make allowance for the fact that transport facilities are not as easily arranged as in times of peace. To secure an equitable distribution of the available supply, the Government of India intend to retain their control on movements. If left completely uncontrolled, grains would flow to places where the ruling prices are the highest, and not to places where the need is the most urgent so that the necessity for adjustment will continue to persist. Moreover, grains in transit could be easily diverted into 'black markets'. For this purpose the

[Mr. N. R. Sarker.]

Government policy is to set up buying agencies which will work under the direct control of Provincial Governments but on lines laid down by the Central Government. The grains purchased for the Central Government will be utilised for supplying deficit areas and the requirements of the Army. No one other than the Government Purchasing Agencies will be allowed to export foodgrains beyond a Provincial boundary. In my account of this scheme I have so far referred only to Provincial Governments. It is hoped, however, that the States also will fall into line, in which case similar arrangements will, *mutatis mutandis*, apply in their case also. The distribution of the exportable surpluses will be made by the Central Government in accordance with the general requirements of the country. The distribution of the grain thus made available will be solely the responsibility of the Provincial and State Governments, subject to such supervision by the Centre as may be found necessary.

In order to ensure that the quotas allotted to the deficit areas actually reach the consuming public and are not diverted on the way into the black market, all consignments effected through the Government purchasing scheme will be despatched to officers or nominees of the importing Administration. It will then be the duty of that Administration to ensure that the goods come into the possession of the consumer by whatever means—Employers' grain shops, Government grain shops, Licensed retail dealers—are considered most suitable in the circumstances prevailing in each case.

It is only to the extent explained above that the Government propose to interfere with the normal movement of trade. They, by no means, want to oust the established traders altogether from their business. The Government Purchasing Agencies are expected to utilise the services of the established grain merchants in effecting their purchases. Practically the whole of the business of supplying the internal markets of a Province will be left to the ordinary trade activities. Government, however, is taking entire charge of the grain export business. We are confident that given the co-operation of Provincial and State Governments as well as of the producers, the traders and the consumers, the problem now facing India can be solved without any serious interference with the normal habits of life.

I am aware of the feeling that the food problem should be treated on an All-India basis and, if necessary, the Government of India should not hesitate to consider a revision of the basic powers of the various administrative units in this respect. Let me assure the House that there is no reluctance or hesitation on the part of Government to take every measure that on its own merits may be deemed necessary for tackling the food situation. I would, however, emphasize that whatever policies are ultimately adopted will have to be enforced through the established administrative machinery of the Provincial Governments. Cordial co-operation and understanding between the Centre and the Provincial Governments are therefore ever so vital for the formation and putting into operation of an effective food policy. In a country where the administration is shared by more than one Government, there are inherent limitations on the uniform enforcement of common policies and common measures. The House would also realise that the position of Indian States makes it imperative that the measures and policies connected with the food problem have to be enforced through understanding and agreement with the States. The Government of India are trying to get the Indian States to accept the common policy adopted for the country as a whole and I have every hope that a uniform and co-ordinated policy will be followed by all the Provinces.

I can now briefly sum up the Government's present food policy.

First, *improvement of the supply position*: For this purpose, Government are intensifying further the "Grow More Food and Fodder Campaign". They have arranged for imports of wheat from overseas and are scaling down their

exports to neighbouring countries. To the same end there will soon be a drive to cut down all internal wastage in food consumption.

Second, *a freer flow of grains*: To attain this we have to restore confidence among the public and the trade and with that end in view price ceiling on wheat has been removed and steps are being taken against speculative hoarding by middlemen.

Thirdly, *an equitable distribution of the available supplies*: To implement this, Government have taken over full control of the inter-provincial movements of grains.

Finally, *protection of the interests of the consumer*: To achieve this purpose, all supplies to deficit areas will be on Government account or that of the nominees of such Government. The respective Provincial and State Governments will have the main responsibility for distributing grains among the consumers. They will take effective steps to prevent hoarding and to make the grains available at reasonable retail prices.

These, then, are the major features of our present policy. I do not in the least claim that this policy is free from limitations. But, I do submit to the House that these limitations are inherent in the peculiar conditions in India, under which we have to work. I can assure the Honourable Members that nobody would be happier than I to work towards a more perfect national food policy. Every constructive suggestion from the Honourable Members will receive the closest attention from me and it is in keen expectation that I am looking forward to the forthcoming discussion.

Now, with regard to the Standard Cloth, I very much regret that the Standard Cloth has not yet been placed on the market. There has, however, been no lack of initiative on the part of the Government in this particular matter. Indeed for now well over a year the Government have taken all possible steps to expedite the execution of the scheme. The delay has been entirely due to difficulties which they could not, in spite of all the good will, overcome earlier. The present position has been fully explained in a press note which has recently issued on the subject. I shall therefore be very brief in my present statement.

Last year the Government of India reached an agreement with the industry, the broad features of which were: (a) 5 per cent. of the productive capacity of the industry should be set apart for standard cloth production, which would give about 200 million yards a year, (b) the Provincial Governments should either buy the cloth from the mills or give a guarantee to any agency undertaking the distribution against risks of loss through unsold stocks and (c) Provincial Governments should set up an adequate machinery for distribution to prevent profiteering and to ensure that the cloth would reach the consumers at the lowest possible price.

Most of the Provincial Governments, however, did not evince any interest in the scheme. Even some of those who accepted it could not fulfil the specified terms on which the industry agreed to produce standard cloth. Moreover, just at the time when some provinces were veering round to accept the scheme in all its implications, political disturbances broke out in the country. The Ahmedabad Mills remained closed for a long time. All this naturally caused further delay in the execution of the scheme.

Meanwhile, there were indications that the public demand would be much larger than had been previously anticipated. It was felt that 200 million yards represented too small a quantity and would not touch more than a fringe of the problem. On the basis of further consultations held with the industry, a revised scheme has now been evolved. According to the arrangements now made, the financial responsibility will, in the first instance, devolve on the Central Government. The Central Government will allocate the cloth to Provinces and States on a population basis. 1,500 million yards of Standard Cloth will be available every year while 50 million yards will be produced in

[Mr. N. R. Sarker.]

the first quarter of the current year. It is hoped that the cloth will reach the market by April next. All necessary arrangements both for production and distribution are being made.

Sir, I move.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Motion moved:

"That the situation in this country as regards food, fuel, drugs and the production and distribution of standard cloth be taken into consideration."

**Sir Henry Richardson** (Nominated Non-official): First of all let me express to the Honourable the Commerce Member our gratitude and satisfaction for the ready manner in which he has met the obvious desire of the House to discuss a subject which, I venture to submit, holds a place of importance second only to the actual war itself. The problem of food supply together with all the other equally important questions such as price control, dearness allowances, hoarding, black-markets, provincial policies, propaganda, crop planning, etc., which are inseparable from the main problem, these have all been brought home in an ever increasing pressure to rich and poor alike during the past few months. But, as far back as March last year, when the House discussed an Adjournment Motion on the shortage of wheat and wheat flour in Delhi, the Government were made aware of the anxiousness prevailing at that time. The then Commerce Member, Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, in the course of the debate said:

"We are living in dangerous times. It is obvious that food shortage is one of the most serious things that any Government will have to deal with. It is also obvious that any question of such serious food shortage would have repercussions not so much even on the administrative machinery as on the whole society."

That, Sir, was Government's admission nearly a year ago.

Then, Sir, Government were given a second warning during the debate on the situation in India in this House last September. My colleague, Mr. P. J. Griffiths in his speech on that occasion attributed the food situation and the feeling that Government were not tackling this problem with sufficient earnestness, as one of the causes of the disturbances. Mr. Griffiths told Government quite plainly that every Party in this House and every party in the country demanded that Government should apply its mind, with greater vigour in the future than it had done in the past, to settling and solving this problem of providing foodstuffs and essential commodities for the people of this country. The situation went from bad to worse and it was not until the middle of November that a separate Department of Food was established, a step which in our view should have been taken at least six months earlier and I do not think it is an overstatement to say that Government's failure to deal with the situation has not only done much to lower Government's prestige, but has also, to a large extent, offset the improvement in the general condition of the country which was becoming evident. For the fact that things are not even worse than they are, Government owes a debt of gratitude and acknowledgment of the initiative of the commercial community who organized supplies of foodstuffs at their own expense and arranged for their workers to buy these supplies at reasonable rates, in order to save a rapidly deteriorating situation in which there was grave danger of labour leaving mills and factories forcing them to close down. Had not commercial interests assisted in this manner, I dread to think what might have happened or to imagine what untold harm might have been caused to the war effort.

I believe the new Department commenced work from 2nd December last and we have seen from the press announcements that it has taken over administration of all measures for control over prices, supply and distribution of foodstuffs and for the procurement and purchase of the requirements of the army which were the concern of the Commerce and Supply Departments

respectively. Two and half months have elapsed and we have heard this morning from the Honourable the Commerce Member some of the steps which his Department has taken. We have heard that the price of wheat is now uncontrolled, that imports of wheat are going to be made and that large purchases of wheat have been made on a falling market. We have heard that Government will retain grain control of movement, that they are going to set up buying agencies under the control of Provincial Governments, but on lines laid down by the Central Government. We have heard of steps by which he hopes the consumers will get foodstuffs and that there will be no reluctance on the part of the Central Government to take every measure for the operation of his Department on an all-India basis. This House, during the course of this debate will no doubt judge of the adequacy of these steps, but it is really too early to say very much at the present time.

In the time at my disposal, I can only deal with two questions, namely, hoarding and the attitude of Provincial Governments both of which we regard as of primary importance in the successful operation of the new Department. Taking hoarding first in which is connected black market sellers, I think it is here that Government's reputation has suffered most and in making that remark I include Provincial Governments. During December, especially as regards rice in Bengal, the situation was allowed to get completely out of hand. No attempt was made to punish speculators and hoarders or to seize their stocks, although it was officially admitted that the soaring prices were mainly due to their activities. Government communiques were couched in such weak terms that their effect could only be to encourage rather than deter profiteers. The imposition of petty fines in those cases which were brought before Courts made Government a laughing stock. What is wanted is firmness in dealing with hoarders for profit and I was very surprised that amongst the recommendations made by the Central Food Advisory Committee at its meeting held this month not a word was said on this subject.

I admit one recommendation said that "all measures be taken by the Central Government that would operate to restore public confidence" but instead of giving its support emphatically to measures against hoarders, the Committee's recommendation merely went on to say "in particular, the true facts concerning Army consumption of food stocks should be made known" and so on. Sir, no Government can by itself defeat the hoarder, the profiteer and the black market. Public opinion alone can do that and I sincerely hope that during this debate, Government and the country will be left in no doubt whatsoever of the very strong feelings which exist against the hoarder for profit and of the whole-hearted support which will be theirs in any measures which may be taken to punish these enemies of society. I believe the Defence of India Rules and the Food Grains Control Order have recently been amended so that for the first time confiscation of commodities will be added to imprisonment and fines as a deterrent penalty for hoarding. This is all to the good but the question is will Magistrates have the courage to make the punishment fit the crime? Will Governments see to it, that Courts stop playing with what the Honourable the Commerce Member himself admitted at the recent Central Food Advisory Council Meeting was a cause of lack of public confidence, namely, large-scale hoarding? That is what he said himself. Sir, speculation, hoarding and profiteering must be put a stop to. The time has come when the public demands that these crimes must be severely punished and that penalties of long term imprisonment and fines, which will act as a deterrent, must be imposed. If it is necessary to do so, a specific rule dealing with these offences should be issued.

I will now deal with the other question, namely, the attitude of Provincial Governments. It is quite evident from Press reporters that certain unresolved conflicts between certain Provincial Governments have seriously handicapped the Central Government and will continue to do so unless they are persuaded to realise that the solution of this question can only be effected by its being

[Sir Henry Richardson.]

handled as an All-India problem. Provinces which, because they happen to have surpluses, take up an attitude of isolation and regard their favourable position as a heaven-sent money-making opportunity can seriously interfere with the position in other Provinces and can, by such action, assist and encourage black-market dealers. I am aware that there are certain cases of past history which affect this question and I know that it may be considered present high prices are not unreasonable where unduly low rates were prevailing for long periods in the past. But these are matters which, in these times of danger and stress, must not be allowed unreasonably to interfere with any general scheme for the need of the country as a whole which the new Department and the Government of India may deem necessary. I hope, Sir, in his reply the Honourable the Commerce Member later on will tell us what powers, if any, have been taken to control the Provinces remembering that the all important and vital problems of crops planning and statistics come very largely within this question.

Finally, Sir, obviously what is needed most of all is a return of public confidence. The Honourable the Commerce Member comes from the same Province as myself, and I may perhaps therefore be permitted to say to him, as one Bengali to another, show us that this new Food Department has the ability to do its job, convince the Provincial Governments of their responsibility to All-India, bring the Native States and their secret reserves into co-operation, and declare here on the floor of this House that it is the firm intention of this Government to see to it that the people of India will not starve. Both Provincial Governments and private interests must be made to realise clearly that the food which India produces will reach its normal consumers wherever they live whatever the difficulties. Once it is realised that the Central Government will exercise the authority that it has every right to assume, opposition will decline but "too late and too timid" will never make this clear. I personally believe that provided Government acts promptly and vigorously the situation will right itself within the next two or three months. This I say because present and future prospects indicate no vital shortage and because general confidence is steadily returning. But this House and the public outside require to be re-assured that the Central Government is fully decided upon resolute action, action moreover which will for once have behind it the full approval and support of all the peoples of India.

**Mr. Muhammad Nauman** (Patna and Chota Nagpur *cum* Orissa: Muhammadan): Sir, I have no desire to detain the House in discussing this issue on a very wide scale although the Resolution before us is wide enough for anybody to talk for hours and hours together. But I would just like to make. . .

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member knows that time has been fixed at twenty minutes.

**Mr. Muhammad Nauman**: That is why I said that within the time limit at my disposal I will not be able to survey the entire situation, but I would confine my comments to what the Honourable the Commerce Member has just said. He said that the food situation in his opinion was only serious in urban areas, and not in the rural areas, because he thought that 75 per cent. of the Indians were engaged in agriculture and agriculturists were not at all hit by any acute food problem. May I inform the House, Sir, that this is an absolutely erroneous idea which the Honourable Member has got. Probably he does not realise that although 75 per cent. of the people in the country are engaged in agriculture, the average individual holding is so small probably not more than three acres each which would not allow even one family to survive with the entire production of crops, and that average acreage which the individual farmer has is not only not sufficient to give him the necessary food but is not enough to give him any other necessities of life. And so I feel to tell the House that the Government is working on wrong premises and is

moving in a vicious circle. The actual position is that the people in rural areas are more miserable than the people in urban areas. The Honourable the Commerce Member may think that this is probably limited to towns because he mixes in a circle which will probably not feel the pinch even if rice were selling at 1 seer or even half seer to a rupee. Does he know that in this country even at the normal times when wheat was being sold at 18 seers to a rupee, probably half or one-third of the population went without food and he can imagine what may be the condition of the average Indian in this country when wheat and wheat flour is being sold on the average of three seers to a rupee.

Now, Sir, there are other aspects on which the Honourable Member did not touch, and I do not know why. The real explanation which we wanted on this issue was that during the years between 1930-1937, when the Lyallpur wheat was being quoted at  $2/4$  and  $2/8$ , the flour in Indian markets was being sold at about 14 seers to the rupee. Now the Lyallpur wheat is being quoted at about Rs. 6/8, Government have never quoted Lyallpur wheat at more than Rs. 6/8, and I would like to have the reply of the Honourable Member as to when was the Government control at any higher rate than Rs. 6/8 which means only two and half times of the old rate but the flour in Delhi and other markets is being sold at 3 seers to the rupee or five times over the old rate. I moved an adjournment motion in this House on this issue in April of 1942 and Government then said that they were alive to the situation and that they were taking all precautions which were necessary and possible to ease the situation. The Honourable Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, the Member incharge then, assured the House that Government was needfully alive to the situation. But in spite of this what has happened? Many Honourable Members of this House before me have said that it has been deteriorating and deteriorating every day, and nothing has been done so far. The entire Commerce Department and the control officers are only sitting at their tables and preparing their statistics or paper reports without doing anything useful in this direction. Certainly with the portfolio having been given to an Indian Member of this country, we thought that he would be in a better position to realise the miseries of the people and relieve them in a better manner than we would have expected Members from England to do this. But we find that nothing has been done and probably the Indian Member is as good or as bad as the European Executive Councillors who neither claim knowledge of the conditions of the Country nor can have that feeling of sympathy with the inhabitants of this Country. That is the unfortunate position in which we stand and that is what I want to impress on the Indian Member of Commerce. We expected something better, at least a better speech from the Honourable Sir N. R. Sarker than what he has given us.

The resolution refers to many other commodities of essential life, but he only referred to two things—the food problem and standard cloth. Of course, I do not want to make my comments on standard cloth. I will leave it to my other colleagues to deal with that. What I want to say is this. Does the Honourable Member realise that the question of coal, kerosene oil, sugar and a few other things have been equally intense, and the situation has been correspondingly tragic? In hundreds and thousands of villages—I know personally so many of those villages—people have had to go without any light and were exposed to all sorts of robberies because no kerosene oil was available. The Honourable Member then referred to the campaign started under the name of "Grow More Food". That theory will not probably apply to collieries. What about the coal? Why have you not been able to make a readjustment or redistribution? "Grow More Food" was referred to by the Honourable Member of the Government without any substantial result at all, or, as a matter of fact without any result yet. The Honourable the Commerce Member has confessed, that even in spite of his best efforts, there is a deficit of 4 per cent., and that there will be a greater deficit, which he cannot calculate on paper.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member may continue his speech after lunch.

The Assembly then adjourned for Lunch till Half Past Two of the Clock.

The Assembly re-assembled after lunch at Half Past Two of the Clock, **Mr. Chairman**, Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang (one of the Panel of Chairmen) in the Chair.

**Mr. Muhammad Nauman**: Sir, I would like to resume my speech from where I left it off this morning, but it is somewhat surprising and even strange that the Honourable the Commerce Member in charge of this motion is not in his seat. I do not suppose it is the parliamentary practice that the Minister in charge should be absent when an Opposition Member is on his legs and criticising his policy. I trust the Chair will take steps and see that the Government is represented on the Treasury Benches before I address that Government which I want to address. Sir, I find to my surprise further that not even a quorum is present and perhaps, Sir, you will . . . . .

**Mr. Chairman** (Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang): The Honourable Member will kindly resume his seat.

(The bell was rung and the quorum obtained.)

**Mr. Muhammad Nauman**: Sir, I was just referring to the coal position and saying whether the Honourable Member could give any figures to show that there was dearth of coal in India or that the Indian collieries had exhausted themselves. If not, why has not the Commerce Department of the Government of India taken proper steps for coal distribution? The Honourable the Commerce Member is pointing to the Transport Member and probably is pleading that it could not be done on account of transport difficulties. Sir, when I am addressing the Government, I mean the entire Government—whether it is the Commerce Department or the Transport Department or the Supply Department or any other. It is the duty of the Government of India as constituted today to make all the departments co-operate in their work in order to give facilities to the people. Plea can be found and arguments can be advanced by one department that such and such a thing could not be done owing to the failure of the Transport Department to provide sufficient wagons; but can that argument hold good at all? Does it take us anywhere or take away from the Government's shoulder responsibility for the proper distribution of commodities? It only shows that the Government has failed in having proper distribution and proper control of essential commodities which are in the country in abundance, and coal is one specimen.

The Honourable the Commerce Member did not make any reference to kerosene oil and the failure of the Government in this respect. Perhaps the responsibility here also might be shifted to the Transport Member and the argument may be advanced that there were not enough wagons for proper distribution. Whatever the arguments may be, my position is that the Government has not done what it should have done. When I moved the adjournment motion on "Wheat situation" about a year ago, the reply of the then Commerce Member, Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, was that everything will be done and Government would see to it that destitution does not exist. Conferences after conferences for price control and regulation of food supplies and all kinds of essential commodities are being held every now and then, but they have probably resulted only in putting a burden on the public exchequer in the shape of travelling and other allowances to government officials and their satellites, without in any way improving the general situation in the country in any direction.

I have referred to three commodities. I come to a fourth one, which is of no less importance—sugar. The Honourable Member did not mention this one also when he was making his speech. The province from which I have the good or ill fortune to come has so many sugar mills and claims to have the best productive areas for sugar cane; but what happened? Even in Bihar sugar was

not available, except in the black market, at the rate of 8 or 10 annas a seer when the fictitious control rate was five annas per seer. In the Calcutta market, till so recently as December or the early part of January, 1943, it was not available at all unless for 10 annas a seer in the black market, whereas the controlled price used to be 6 annas a seer. What is the use of having a fictitious control price, I want to know, when you are allowing things to go on in this fashion? The Honourable the Leader of the European Group speaking just before me said there was no question of deterrent punishment; it was encouraged by high Government officials who allowed traders to make money in the black market, thinking probably that their life's opportunity had come to exploit the people in this manner. From the reply which the Honourable Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar then gave, we only understood that wheat, which was selling in the normal days or the depression days at Rs. 2-2-0. Lyallpur was raised to Rs. 4-6-0 a maund, although actually at that time wheat flour was being sold at about 10 rupees or 12 rupees a maund. What was the sense in having a controlled price of Rs. 4-6-0 which was entirely fictitious? The Honourable Member himself knew that it was fictitious and had no bearing on the real position. I, therefore, want to say that conferences will not help us, but Government should adopt a comprehensive policy in consultation with people who have experience; and the Commerce Member being an Indian himself, he probably can know more than many others; and if he makes an honest effort, I have no doubt that he can do much better than what he has done up till now, if he is sincere. My concrete suggestion is that there should be Central control, of course with the co-operation of the Provincial Governments. But whatever you decide, you decide once in consultation with others; it is no use holding conferences after conferences and going round the length and breadth of the country making a false propaganda amongst the people to the effect that you are going to give them some relief, while no relief is contemplated and probably there is no intention of giving any relief against the miserable conditions in this land. Why make such pretensions when there is no sincerity of purpose. They are under delusion and can be compared to a promise to a dying patient, who is always told that the best doctor is being imported from abroad, so that probably he may live up to this hope and the patient will die before the doctor is imported or has any opportunity to reach the place of the patient at all. That is the position. According to Government representative's own statement the situation was bad, a year ago, and it is deteriorating. We find that so far no improvement has been made, and we can come to no other conclusion except than that you want to keep us in "Make-belief". The time has come when the Honourable Member and all the other Members of the Government should co-operate to devise a scheme of centralised supervision and control. They should license all the merchants or  $\frac{1}{4}$ th of merchants in different areas and tell them definitely at what rates and prices they are required to sell, wholesale and retail and if any deviation is found there should be deterrent punishment, not only with fine but imprisonment. What has been the practice hitherto? The practice has been that if any merchant was found hoarding or selling in the black market he was fined Rs. 200 or so. The fellow did not mind Rs. 200 when he had made, say, Rs. 20,000. On the other hand, it would seem a sort of encouragement as the previous speaker, the Leader of the European Group said and it is absolutely true, it has been true in every big and small place, and is more true of the rural areas. The Honourable the Commerce Member should come out with a concrete suggestion and a cut and dried scheme which would be worked on the lines on which they are working in England and elsewhere.

**Mr. Chairman** (Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang): The Honourable Member's time is up.

**Mr. Muhammad Nauman:** With these words I resume my seat.

**Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh** (Nagpur Division: Non-Muhammadian): With the war not only the scarcity of food comes in, but the question of scarcity of drugs and medicines also arises. Just as the question of food scarcity faces the Government and faces the public, similarly the question of drugs also faces the country. In the last war the question arose about the supply of medicines. In 1914—18 war, the question of supply of quinine as well as of serums and drugs also arose. In those days also prices had gone up so high that ordinary medicines which were of every day use were outside the purchasing power of the ordinary citizen. In these days also things have recurred. History repeats itself. The price of quinine has gone up. Quinine which used to be sold at Rs 20 per lb. is now being sold for Rs. 250 per lb., and yet it is not available in the market. I have seen cases in my own province where doctors have sent back patients because they had not quinine with them. They prescribed some other substitute drugs, but themselves said that the remedy would not be so effective. This shortage arises because imports are stopped, that is one thing; for the army, medicines are commandeered, that is another thing; and the country is not allowed to manufacture drugs.

I say so deliberately because the policy of the Government has not only been not to help the manufacture of drugs, but to obstruct it. I will give you some instances. For instance, Tincture Digitalis is an important drug. In the days of the last war certain persons like Dr. Chopra and others wanted Tincture Digitalis drug to be manufactured in India. They found out one herb in the Himalayas out of which the drug could be manufactured. The drug was manufactured and sent to England for being examined, to see whether it would answer the tests. And the tincture was certified to be good, it was even stronger. But why was it not manufactured on a large scale? Because the sole monopoly of this drug belonged then to Burroughs Wellcome, a British Firm, and evidently, as that company was interested very much in this drug, i.e., making huge profits, no permission was given to manufacture this drug in this country. India's exploitation by the Foreign firm was allowed. The same policy persists even now.

Malaria takes a big toll in this country by thousands, and quinine is not available. What is to be done? There is one German patent by name Atebrin. As we are at war with Germany, the patent has lapsed, it ought to lapse. That being so, Government should have allowed its manufacture, but they did not. Trials were made for manufacturing this in Bombay in the Haffkine Institute and they manufactured this drug. This drug could be manufactured for Rs. 20, and they wanted to manufacture it on a larger scale. But the Director General of the Indian Medical Service said, "No. You cannot do it. It is not your business to do. It is only a research institute. You cannot take to selling the medicine." Yet, strange to say, vaccines are being sold by the Institute, and it is not a wrong thing to do. When people are wanting medicines, that Government or persons connected with Government should put spokes in the wheel to stop the manufacture of those medicines is disgraceful for them. If, there are any such rules, they should be wiped out and a stimulus given for the manufacture of Atebrin which would be a substitute for quinine and conduce to the welfare of the country. There is another drug of which I must speak, and that is sulphathiazoll.

**Mr. J. D. Tyson** (Secretary, Department of Education, Health and Lands): On a point of order, Sir. I am afraid I must ask that the Honourable Member should not refer to the case of sulphathiazoll, which has been referred by the Government to the Calcutta High Court. I think that the issues which my Honourable friend is bound to raise here are exactly the issues which are under discussion in the Calcutta High Court. The matter is *sub judice* in the High Court and I submit you ought not to allow it to be discussed.

**Mr. Chairman** (Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang): There can be no objection to a matter *sub judice* being referred to in the course of a speech. All that the

rules require is that there should be no resolution or adjournment motion about a *sub judice* matter. It can be referred to in the course of a speech. We are not bound to give any finding of decision over that *sub judice* matter.

**Mr. J. D. Tyson:** I bow to your ruling. I have no objection if the Chair thinks that the House will not be exceeding its bounds.

**Mr. Chairman** (Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang): No.

**Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** As you will observe, I was not going to refer to the proceedings in the High Court. I submit that the Government of India should move in the matter and give motion to the wheels which are obstructed to secure the manufacture of this drug. In England sulphathiazoll is used for a particular purpose. In the United States researches were made and it was found to be useful for gonorrhoea and other illnesses, and in India when researches were made it was found that it was good against plague, another epidemic which carries thousands and lakhs of people of this country whenever it breaks out. Why should the manufacture of this drug not be allowed here in India? The interests of thousands of persons are concerned in its manufacture and it is scandalous that persons are trying to make profit out of it. Sir, this drug also can be manufactured in India. It has been found that it can be manufactured here. We require some raw material for it which can be imported. It won't take more than half a wagon load. Why that facility is not being given by this Government? Therefore, I submit that in the interests of the population of this country, particularly the middle classes—the rich and the wealthy are in a princely position and they can afford to buy any drugs and medicines—it is very essential that things should be made easy for the manufacture of these drugs.

Having finished with the drugs—I wanted to touch only on the essential drugs—I wish to say a few words about some other foodstuff and not only the foodgrains which we seem to emphasise very much. Is there no other aspect of the food materials? I submit there is, for instance, fish and vegetables. Let me say something about the fish. During the time of the Congress Government, I think it was in Bombay that they were trying to increase the supply of fish as food.

**Sir Cowasjee Jehangir** (Bombay City: Non-Muhammadan Urban): It was long before the Congress Government.

**Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh:** It may have been long before the Congress Government; it does not matter which Government it was. What I submit is this. Experts, marine biologists and others, were sent for from England and they did come. The Bombay Government spent money on it and a report was made. No further steps were taken and the whole scheme was dropped by the Government. In these days when people are crying for food, I do not see any reason why Government is not doing anything in this direction. People seem to think as if we are all vegetarians, as if there is nothing else to eat except foodgrains. I submit this is one thing which the Governments of Bombay, Madras and Bengal ought to inquire into and do all that is possible.

Then, there is another thing which I wish to refer to. I have learnt that there is a great demand from foreign countries, from South Africa and the Middle East, for certain vegetables which are used by the American or European armies and not only potatoes and onions which are used by the Indian armies. It is very essential that these foreign armies should have those vegetables which are grown in their countries. No efforts are being made in India to grow those vegetables and no subsidiés are given to those persons who wish to grow those vegetables. Australia now grows all sorts of vegetables which it was not doing before this war just as it is now manufacturing all sorts of ammunitions and airships after the outbreak of the war. It has become a self-contained country in every way. It is the misfortune of this country that we have not got a Government which can take initiative and which can move with the times just as other independent countries can do. We have always been hanging on to the

[Mr. Govind V. Deshmukh.]

apron of the superior Government which sits so many thousands of miles away from us. It is really painful to see that every time we want to do something, it comes in our way. I only wish that our Government should rise to the occasion and when such questions of life and death are involved they should do everything possible.

I have not seen it being mentioned by the Honourable Member who moved this motion that any subsidies are being given as one of the means to encourage people to grow more food. If you merely give them one rupee per acre, if land under short staple cotton is brought under food crop, it does not really help the farmer to grow food. Why does not the Government subsidise Associations? Why does it not make efforts to bring the Associations of cultivators into existence which will grow more food? In England and in America and in every other country they are subsidising the farmers to grow more food. They do not say merely "Grow more food" or they will give them something if they bring more land under cultivation of food crops. As a matter of fact, this advice by itself counts for nothing. Please do not imagine that you are going to get more food because the acreage under food crops has really extended. I can tell you as an agriculturist and from my own experience that though the land under food crops has increased in acreage, the Jowar crop in my province has been ruined absolutely. We did not get the rains when they were required and we got them when they were not needed. As a matter of fact, if you make inquiries from the Central Provinces and Berar you will find that the Jowar crop is absolutely gone. The only fortunate part of it is that we have got a very good rice crop, but if that is going to be exported, then nothing will be left for us. I submit that subsidies on a very generous scale should be given to the cultivators in order that they may have a temptation to grow more food. Then, they should be given a guarantee. If the agriculturists give up the sowing of monetary crops and reserve their land for sowing foodgrains, then there should be a guarantee that after the war the prices shall be maintained and that there shall be no slump in the market. Whenever slump prices came in England or in America, the prices were guaranteed. Inquiries were made into the cost of production and what was the reasonable profit that a cultivator should have. In those countries there are Associations of farmers which are fighting the Government to maintain the level of economic prices. It is unfortunate that in this country we have not got the co-operative societies amongst the farmers. I hope that this question of guaranteeing prices will be seriously taken up and the cultivators not exposed to slump conditions after war. I thank you, Sir, for giving me time and allowing me to have my say.

**Pandit Nilakantha Das** (Orissa Division: Non-Muhammadian): Sir, the Honourable Mr. Sarker has practically appealed to the House not to enter into what has been done in the past. This is practically admitting in a sense that what ought to have been done has not been done. But if our discussions are really to serve any useful purpose, it is no good crying over spilt milk. Then, he made a reference to the rural and urban population and I am afraid the distinction that he made was rather dangerous. His impression is that the rural population, that is, the cultivators themselves, will somehow muddle through this scarcity of food as he is the producer of food stuffs. The real difficulty, according to him, is in urban areas.

Almost all his life he has been living in palaces in the cities. But I am a real villager, a peasant and a cultivator myself. I have no house in any city or town, nor do I like to have one. I know, as a matter of fact, that in cities in these war times money, whatever its character, whether it is paper or whether it is metal, is being poured out.

If the poor people in the cities do not get enough to eat, they can be made to get more money, if not by Government, by people like my friend, Mr. Mehta. The difficulty is probably of transport. If you have supply of sugar in Bihar, it cannot go to Calcutta and Lahore. I

and not quite certain whether my Honourable friend, Sir Edward Benthall, is in charge of the entire transport. The other day I read in a paper that he is the Member for war transport. I do not know if he is in charge of civil transport as well.

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta** (Bombay Central Division: Non-Muhammadian Rural): As Railway member he is in charge of transport.

\* **Pandit Nilakantha Das**: Then the question of scarcity of food in cities can well be solved, because there the people can pay for food as well as for the wages. They have got money to do all that. In rural areas conditions are just the opposite. Now, what is happening in my own parts. This is the harvest time. What is happening to the poor peasant. He must purchase every thing by selling his rice. He has not got enough rice. I do not know how these statistics are collected or averages are taken and how it is ascertained that there is so much excess. I do not know the process, nor do I propose to criticise them. My other friends, who know the subject well, probably may criticize. But I know that this is the time for the peasant to sell paddy for every thing, even for the marriage of his daughter. Perhaps he will starve after four months. That is his ordinary lot, and today it is not otherwise. It is rather more acute. He has to purchase kerosene and things other than food stuff. He does not want sugar so much, but he has to purchase *gur*. He has to purchase fish which in our part is now dear, and for that he will sell paddy. Paddy will bring him money that he wants now. There is no question of hoarding. Villagers, peasants and cultivators really take pride in the land, but they seldom get two square meals daily throughout the year. It is a fact which is admitted by all. Who hoards? Now, I find in this season in spite of all attempts from the side of Government to go into conferences and to do this and do that, what is happening there in the villages? All the paddy is being drawn out of villages by the middlemen and mill-owners. Of course the peasant gets unexpectedly more than he would ordinarily have got. That price will not come to him. The rice is being hoarded in mills. There are rice mills in Orissa. Suppose Government have prohibited the export of rice even to other Provinces. What is happening to that rice. The rice is being milled by millowners. From Kharagpur to Waltair there are so many rice mills. Suppose these mill-owners have got thousand maunds of rice. Milled rice is never eaten by villagers, but it will go to cities. These mill-owners know some time or other they will have to send it out and will make fabulous profits. This profit does not go to the poor man. It will go to these Millowners and partly to some middle man. In hard times the poor peasant has to starve. It is the mill-owner who hoards in spite of your inter-provincial or central, whatever you may call it, control arrangement. Whosoever hoards stocks, you say you will punish him. Do you really punish him? You allow hoarding, you know that he hoards. This should be stopped.

If this rice is to be purchased it should be purchased by Government for export mainly inter-provincial or by any agency of the Government. It should be purchased directly from the man who produces it. In that case the peasant will get something more.

Cities can be managed by transport, and it is only the village where you must have to provide the villager with food in bad times and you will please see to it, that he gets his money, the entire money of selling his paddy and not the middle-man. Of course the middle-man may be given a part of the profits for his labour.

Then again in this control system, I wish to tell my Honourable friend the Government Member in charge of the subject, there is another difficulty. I shall at once tell him, to please see to it that neither the Central nor the Provincial Government should allow their civilian administrators or other

[Pandit Nilakantha Das.]

officers to collect any war fund or any other fund. There is a grave danger in that. You cannot control prices, nor can you punish hoarders; for your officers will come to these very people for subscriptions and these are the persons who actually hoard. I know many instances, but I do not like to mention them, for it is no good mentioning such things. All the same I tell the Honourable Member in all sincerity not to allow officers in any way connected with the administration to realize any fund for war purposes. I know of cases where people gave five hundred to five thousand rupees to war funds to be allowed to do even black market profiteering. They will give more subscriptions to the war fund and to the Red Cross Fund and other funds to which they have been asked to subscribe. Things are managed and manipulated in this way. We the public are unable to counteract and control these things. The Government are in a position to manage things in a proper manner. We are coming to the House for discussion and are going into conferences in the Chamber and in other places, whereas these very things eat into the vitals of the entire system. So I am not going to say many things. These are the two things which I should like to impress upon the Honourable Member in charge of the motion. I repeat them categorically. One thing is:—In the city it may be managed by transport and the villagers, whatever the nature and conditions of their stock, should be made to get the full profit of their produce. Then, again, secondly, no officers connected with the administration of the country in any way should be allowed to handle war subscription or raising any other subscription.

**An Honourable Member:** Why?

**Pandit Nilakantha Das:** The reason is obvious. They allow the black-market profiteer to go scot free for the reason of the subscription they have got or they may get from him. Again if a man is hoarding and sells the stuff in the black market, if he is detected and prosecuted under the Defence of India Act, then if he offers a substantial sum as war fund subscription, then he is let off. That is why I insist that nobody who is connected with the administration should collect war fund subscriptions. This is what is happening every day in the country. With these two suggestions, I resume my seat.

**Sir Cowasjee Jehangir:** Mr. Chairman, suffered as we have from lack of food in the City and in the Province of Bombay, I cannot but sympathise with the remarks of the Leader of the European Party. But as my Honourable friend who has just now sat down said, it is no use crying over spilt milk. Let us look to the future. I must readily acknowledge the services that the Honourable the Commerce Member and the Government of India have rendered to the Province of Bombay, though after the mischief was done. I must also acknowledge with thanks that their efforts have relieved the situation to a certain extent. But even today I believe we have not yet got wheat and I am told that it is on the way. I trust that we shall be successful in receiving some.

Now, Sir, I am led to the conclusion that the Government of India were in the preliminary stages misled by the statistical position of food in India. These statistics, as the Honourable the Commerce Member told us, show that there is sufficient food in the whole of India. The Honourable the Transport Member told us on more than one occasion that food is now receiving a high priority and that he is ready to transport it if there is food to transport. These are conflicting facts. Statistics show that there is food in India, the Transport Member is ready to transport it. But I believe he said on one occasion that trains were ready to take the food but there was no food. How are you going to solve this problem? You must come to the conclusion that it must be hoarding. I believe that this hoarding has been going on and the Honourable the Commerce Member has given some reasons for it—apprehensions of scarcity in the future

fear of invasion of India by Japan. Even in the beginning of the war, I know, as a matter of fact that several of my friends recommended me to store for my domestic servants a year's supply, which I regret to say I did not do. But some of them did it. Therefore there was apprehension of scarcity of food from the very beginning and as speculators came on the field, they took full advantage of this apprehension and bought up whatever they could to sell in the future at exorbitant rates. In Bombay, I am glad to say that Government are now taking drastic steps with regard to hoarding; prosecutions are taking place every day. But I should like the Honourable the Commerce Member to tell us what steps the Government of India are taking in surplus Provinces with regard to hoarding. If there is hoarding in surplus Provinces, the Government of India will themselves not be able to buy and distribute to Provinces like Bombay where there is scarcity. Therefore it is no use prosecuting men for hoarding in Provinces where there is scarcity. It is more necessary to see that hoarders in Provinces where there is surplus do not hoard. If the Honourable the Commerce Member can give this House some assurance that he will insist on hoarders being prosecuted in Provinces where there is a surplus, a quantity of grain may come to the surface for him to buy. This may perhaps to some extent solve the problem.

Then, we have heard a great deal about Provinces which have a surplus, the Governments of which have not helped to allow it to leave those Provinces. May I suggest to the Honourable the Commerce Member that he has a weapon in his hand against such Provinces. He will have a large quantity of standard cloth. Well, to those Provinces that will refuse to part with their surplus food, he should not give standard cloth. If Provinces are independent of the Centre to the extent that they will not take the advice of the Centre, then measures must be formulated to show the Provinces that there are commodities, necessities of life which they will not get. It is all a question of give and take and I firmly believe that if Provinces, whether they be under a Governor or under a Ministry, will see reason and will be prepared to help those in much worse position than themselves. The very fact that the Government of India were to some extent able to come to the relief of a Province like Bombay shows that they have the power to do so. My Honourable friend the Leader of the European Party has urged on the Honourable the Commerce Member to take the bull by the horns even now, and make this Department of Food, an active, energetic and live Department, and when the position is a bit relieved to see that they do not go to sleep again. It is for the head of the Department to see that the Department works throughout the year and not only during times of crisis.

I should like to say just a word with regard to atebirin, a drug that was mentioned by my Honourable friend, Mr. Deshmukh. The facts so far as he gave them were perfectly correct. I brought this question of atebirin to the attention of the Department a year ago but the Government of India did not allow the Province of Bombay to make this drug when they were in a position to do so. It is no use now repeating the arguments that were put up on that occasion. They struck me to be rather tame. I would even now urge that the Government of India should allow atebirin to be made in India and to set aside all these questions of patents and rights of other manufacturers in times of war. This question of shipping, the question of bringing raw materials to India appear to me to be a lame excuse. If atebirin can be made in India at a cost at which the poor people can afford to buy, then nothing should stand in the way of the Government of India allowing it to be made in India. This question which has been discussed for the past one year should now be brought to a conclusion.

With regard to fish, my Honourable friend Mr. Deshmukh raised the question of the Government of Bombay's experiment with fish. Those experiments were made some 15 years ago and cost the Bombay Government something like

[Sir Cowasjee Jahangir.]

15 to 20 lakhs. They failed because the fish that was got in very large quantities from the deep sea had no market. The people insisted upon having well-known fish, and refused to eat the fish which I am told was perfectly good but unknown, and the experiment failed. But so far as Bombay is concerned, I am glad to say even in these days of scarcity we have not yet heard that there is a scarcity of fish and those who can eat fish are very lucky indeed in the city of Bombay for they may not get bread, but they have been able to get fish.

**Pandit Nilkantha Das:** Not very dear, I suppose?

**Sir Cowasjee Jahangir:** It is quite dear enough for the poor people, and in order to make it cheap this experiment was carried out, but unfortunately it failed.

All I can say in conclusion is, Mr. Chairman, that while having thanked the Honourable the Commerce Member on what he did for the province of Bombay, I trust that he will not come to the conclusion that we are at the end of our troubles—we are not—and that he will see to it, as he has done within the last month or two, that we at least get sufficient to keep body and soul together. He has seen with his own eyes the troubles we have been through. He has had the experience of grain shops—he has been to them personally—and I trust he has learnt from his own inspection that we were in real trouble and that it was not for merely complaining that His Excellency the Governor had to come all the way to Delhi, but he came because he found his Province in a really bad way. We were hit in two directions: We were hit by nature—we had a famine in certain parts because the crop failed—and naturally we had to send a large amount of grain to these two parts of our province where famine conditions prevailed, thus depriving others who might have been able to get through these bad times had it not been for famine conditions in the two parts I have mentioned. And, therefore, having been hit in two directions, we deserve the sympathy and assistance not only of the Government of India, but of other provinces who have a surplus to spare.

**Maulana Zafar Ali Khan (East Central Punjab: Muhammadan):** Sir, the most serious situation has arisen in the country as a result of the shortage of food-grains, cloth and fuel. Government do not realise the seriousness of the situation. Any day the volcano may burst in full fury. They are standing on the edge of a precipice and that precipice may fall down any day. Hunger knows no laws. Revolutions are the creation of hunger and with the millions of hungry mouths in this country at the present moment I am surprised why there is no revolution already.

The Commerce Member during the course of his speech pointed out that the Government admitted their faults in the past, but they should be ignored, and he expected the House to co-operate with it in any measure that may be taken to relieve the most dangerous situation with which we are confronted. I quite agree with him, and I am not going to take the Government to task for all its past sins of commission and omission although they are numerous. The Government in this country is always in the habit of looking upon India as an agricultural land destined by the fates to produce raw materials for England and her imperialistic Allies. For that very reason they have never industrialized it. Had India been industrialized, had she her own industries, she would not have been in the sorry plight in which she finds herself at the present moment. Other countries have solved their problems. Russia, for instance, has done so. Russia is also a very great country, larger than India in some respects geographically, but she has solved her economic problems, and India, if she wants salvation, will have to follow in the footsteps of Russia in a modified form. You know, Sir, this is a machine age. One machine does the work of ten thousand men and the need of the present age is to turn out supplies in excess of demand. They are doing it in Europe. India can do it if only she had a Government of her own: but, unfortunately, she has not. They may say the

Viceroy's Executive Council consists of twelve Honourable Indian Members, but they are what they are, and we know them for what they are worth situated as they are. If only we had our own Government in full sympathy with the aspirations and sentiments of the people we would have very easily found a way out of our difficulties. In Russia they have turned the country into a highly mechanised agricultural realm and agriculture is developed there in a scientific form. Thousands and thousands of miles are sown in a scientific manner till the supply is coming near the demand. We can do it also in India, but, unfortunately, we have not got the necessary paraphernalia to do it.

At the present moment, as I have pointed out, the two main staple grains are rice and wheat. Rice is not to be had for love or money, because our Government happen to be very generous. The children of the soil are starving and they are exporting thousands and thousands of maunds of rice to Ceylon. Then, they are sending it to Arabia. The Commerce Member has not mentioned other countries but I am sure there are other countries also which are being supplied with rice and wheat. India, the land of plenty flowing with milk and honey, has been reduced to the condition when wheat has gone down to two and a half seers to a rupee, coal four annas a seer, cloth is not to be had at all. Gandhiji was reduced to the necessity of wearing a *largoti*. The Mussalman could not go so far. He had to wear a *tehmat* but he has not got standard cloth to meet his requirements. So wheat is not to be found. Rice is not to be found. They are sent out of the country. The Commerce Member assures us that the quantity exported is a very small one. But why should even a small quantity of wheat or rice be exported to other countries when the children of the soil are starving? Will England do it? England has got her boards of food. Will she export her foodstuffs to her friends? She will not. Why should India do so? We may be very charitably disposed, but when we are faced with a life and death struggle, why should we be so generous as to export our foodstuffs to other countries? There are other Dominions also. There is Canada, there is South Africa, New Zealand and others, having all the rights and prerogatives of self-government. Why are not their Governments called upon to send their foodstuffs to the starving countries? If the Middle East is starving, or Egypt, or Arabia, let Canada give her share. Let the help be sent from South Africa. But they will not do it. We have to bear all the burden. Then they say that self-government in India is in the making, and you have your own Ministers who take very good care that all your requirements are met. The assurance is of no value and does not satisfy us.

Centralise the Government for food control, in consultation with the Provincial Governments. But for the love of mike, please bring in the Defence of India Act, as you have done in political cases, in the case of those who hoard foodstuffs and do not bring them out. You have been very lazy. You have not done anything to thwart their criminal activities. So buy up all the foodstuffs: buy up all the grain: ban all exports. Not a single grain of rice, not a single grain of wheat should go out of the country as long as the starving conditions are prevailing in India. Similarly, I should like the Government to put a ban on the export of standard cloth. Even before the war India used to produce cloth in very large quantities, but still she had to import from other countries: what to talk of the present times when prices have shot up like a rocket! To sum up foodgrains should not be exported: cloth should not be exported till conditions are better. If this is not done, and if active steps are not taken to meet the needs of the country, I am afraid, there will be a terrible revolution and the Government will one day wake up to find everything oozing out of its imperialistic hands.

**Babu Baijnath Bajoria** (Marwari Association: Indian Commerce): Sir, I have listened with great attention to the speech of the Honourable the Food Member. I know that his intentions are quite good. There is no difference in the intentions of the Commerce Member and of the Members on this side of

[Babu Baijnath Bajoria.]

the House. But here we are not concerned with intentions but with actions by the Central and Provincial Governments, actions which will give us food and food to the required areas where it is very scarce. Sir, he has only dealt with two things—wheat and rice—but has not touched at all on sugar and other necessities. I should like to say a few words on the important necessities of life.

As regards wheat, coming as I do from Calcutta, I know what a scarcity of wheat we are feeling there. You may be interested to learn the wheat flour (*atta*) is being sold in Calcutta at 0-14-0 a seer. Flour is being sold at over Re. 1 per seer. Whether this *atta* or *maida* is purely made of wheat is very questionable. Invariably it is adulterated stuff. Sir, what has made the position so acute and these necessities so scarce in Calcutta? Well, there are several reasons for it. Firstly, the Punjab Government, which are in a favourable position, are fortunately placed to have a surplus of wheat. They are very jealous and wish to conserve as much wheat in their own province as they can possibly do. Sir, here we are getting the fruits of provincial autonomy. The Central Government finds itself helpless to induce the Punjab Government adequately and equitably to distribute the wheat in all the provinces of India. There is no co-ordinated action between the Central Government and the Provincial Governments. The Central Government may have a head, but it has got no legs or hands. It cannot do anything directly. It has to approach, request and beg a Provincial Government to give it wheat or other necessities which may be surplus in that particular province. Sir, this is a very queer state of affairs and ought to be remedied as soon as possible. The Central Government must have the power to allocate and distribute all the foodstuffs, which are in this country, equitably in all the provinces to the best advantage of the people of the whole country. Sir, Government has imported recently considerable quantities of wheat from Australia. I understand that several thousands of tons have been imported, but that they all been taken away for military requirements. None has been given for civilian consumption. Though wheat has been imported in Calcutta, still the people of Calcutta have not got one grain of this imported wheat. If I am wrong I shall be glad to stand corrected. Sir, you will realise that this is a state of affairs which cannot be tolerated. Again, Sir, as regards hoarding of wheat, I will say without fear of any contradiction that Government is the worst culprit in this respect of hoarding. As regards the Military Department, that Department is hoarding wheat in very large quantities at several places, and it has hoarded so much that the wheat has become spoilt and it is being thrown away.

**The Honourable Mr. N. R. Sarker:** This is not true.

**Babu Baijnath Bajoria:** Yes, in places this has been done. Military wheat has been thrown away because insects have got into it.

**Maulana Zafar Ali Khan:** Not thrown away, but sold at a lesser price because it was unfit for human consumption.

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall** (Member for Railways and War Transport): How much?

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta** (Bombay Central Division: Non-Muhammadan Rural): 15,000 bags in Bombay.

**Babu Baijnath Bajoria:** This is the state of affairs as regards wheat. As regards rice, price control has been the main factor which has resulted in this acute shortage. It is a queer state of things that when price control is put on a commodity, the first result is that the price goes up to the heavens and the goods go down to the abyss—the goods cannot be found at all. What happens? It is only the Government who know about this. There is a sinister circle working about. I am not in the habit of accusing officers; but in this case I cannot refrain from doing so. This price control business, either at the centre or in the provinces, is a regular scandal. The permit system has gone now, but

it is an open secret that permits were being sold regularly and those who paid the highest prices for the permits got them.

About rice, the Bengal Government have appointed agents for purchasing rice for them. The Honourable the Food Member has said that they do not want to oust the people in the trade from the trade; but what have the Government of Bengal done? They have appointed three agents for purchasing rice for them and none of them was in the rice trade at all. It was on political consideration pure and simple that they gave those contracts to those firms . . . .

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi** (Dacca *cum* Mymensingh: Muhammadan Rural): The Honourable Member is entirely wrong.

**Babu Baijnath Bajoria**: I am not wrong. I do not want to mention names; but the biggest agent was a very prominent member of the Muslim League Party. I am not blaming the Party and I am not dragging in the Central Muslim Party. This state of affairs has to be remedied. There is something very rotten in the state of Denmark. The Honourable the Commerce Member said in one of his bulletins sometime ago that Bengal is now a surplus province as regards rice . . . .

**The Honourable Mr. N. E. Sarker**: I have not said it is a surplus province; it is a deficit province.

**Babu Baijnath Bajoria**: I stand corrected. Then, what is the position about sugar? For several months in Calcutta we did not get any sugar at all, and it was being sold at about 12 annas a seer or thirty rupees a maund. Government had some control shops where they were selling half a seer of sugar at six annas a seer and it was very difficult to get any sugar from these control shops without waiting for a several hours together. The position as regards sugar has now, I must admit, improved considerably and it is now available, though with some difficulty, and the prices also have gone down from 12 annas to 8 annas in Calcutta.

As regards standard cloth, it reminds me of the remark which was made about Addison—it could be very well applied to the Honourable the Commerce Member—that he conceived thrice but produced nothing. We were promised that the standard cloth was coming in April last, then in September, then in December and then in February and now we are being told that the delivery will be in April. But what prevents delivery? I think he should consult a doctor!

The situation as regards cloth is absolutely pitiable not only as regards the poorer section of the people but as regards the middle class people also. A pair of *dhotis* cannot be got under 6 or 7 rupees. I think this *National War Front* is being published under Government patronage by my Honourable friend, Mr. Griffiths. I will read a few lines to show what they regard about clothes for the people of this country. It begins:

"One of our American guests asked me recently the reason for the number of small children who run about the streets of our towns and villages almost quite naked. He has taken it as a sign of poverty but it is perhaps more properly to be attributed to the warmth within India's climate the people enjoy from the sun. During most of the year in India the sun's heat is so great that fires are unnecessary except for cooking, and clothes are more to be desired (*this is very important!*) as an ornament to the body than as a protection from cold."

I do not know whether the Honourable the Commerce Member also shares this view. It shows what scant respect they have got for the needs of the poor as far as clothes are concerned. They think it is unnecessary—that it is only an ornament to be worn at convenience. I do not share this view at all. Clothing is as much a necessity as food and every one wants clothing to a certain extent; and it is the duty of the Government to provide clothing at reasonable prices.

Now I must come to King Coal. Here, the Commerce Member was very discreetly silent. Probably the Railway Member will say something about it. As regards coal, there is plenty and it cannot be said that there is a shortage.

[*Babu Baijnath Bajaria.*]

of coal as in the case of wheat or rice. There is plenty of coal and it is very near to Calcutta—only about 100 or 150 miles away, and the only question is about transport; still coal cannot be obtained and is obtainable only at very high prices. I will read a few lines from the *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, when the price of domestic fuel went up to 7 or 8 rupees a maund:

“In Ward IV of the city of Calcutta”, said Councillor Sushil Chandra Sen at Wednesday’s Corporation meeting, ‘in course of the past two days certain families had to go without food for want of fuel to cook it’. If all other Councilors had taken equal pains to enquire into the difficulties of their respective folds, they would certainly have been able to give testimony to a similar misery all over Calcutta.”

The paper then goes on to say—I do not want to take up much time of the House, I will only read the most important passages:

“The Corporation had given an order for 30 wagons of coke to be brought into the city immediately. That quantity itself was hopelessly inadequate for the minimum requirements of the citizens. Even out of that quantity only 5 wagons had reached Calcutta up to the 27th January. Five wagons for nearly 20 lakhs of people! Somebody somewhere in the well-fed confines of Imperial Delhi has been playing with India’s railway transport in criminal self-complacency.”

These are the Editors words:

[At this stage Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim) resumed the Chair.]

Again,

“A special allotment of 200 wagons has been obtained from the Controller of Coal Distribution. This, they went on to say, was outside the coal distribution scheme so that wagons may be loaded at any colliery irrespective of its quota and is a purely emergency measure to counteract the effect of delays in implementing the scheme. These wagons, they proclaimed, are now being loaded and are expected to arrive here within the next three or four days. What happened to these 200 wagons? Is it to be presumed that after they had been loaded and sent haste-post-haste towards Calcutta, the wagons suddenly developed a truant mentality and never reached Calcutta?”

I think they were never loaded at all. The Honourable the Railway Member has got a direct responsibility on this question. Coal, though it is not a food grain, is the father of cooked food. It is very essential to have coal at reasonable prices everywhere. In Delhi what is our experience? I think Honourable Members will bear me out when I say that coal is not obtainable. What coal we are getting is all wet, soaked with water. This is the position of coal of which this country has got plenty. In this case the Honourable the Railway Member must give a high priority for domestic coal. This is not the time to speak of coal for industrial purposes, about which I shall take another opportunity.

As regards foodgrains I understand that one Mr. Butler has been appointed as—I do not know his exact designation—as the Controller of Food Grains. He has been appointed to look after the distribution of food grains in the provinces. It is very curious we should have experts from foreign countries, even for the supply of food grains in this country. Does he know more about food, what kinds of food are required in the different provinces, what kinds of food grains are being produced in this country? This seems to me to be merely a case of favouritism in favour of a particular person, however, high he may be.

To summarise, there should be a central organisation in Delhi composed of representatives of the provinces and of the Central Government and the representatives of the people, that is, Members of this House which will see that a fair and proper distribution is made. There must be a co-ordinating link between the Central organisation and the provincial organisations. I had tabled a Resolution to this effect during the last Session of this House but unfortunately that could not be discussed. I think that that Resolution should commend itself to the Honourable the Commerce Member. The question of food is the subject of all subjects, and on the solution of this depends the contentment of the people of this country. On the solution of this problem depends the war effort, because

unless and until the people are satisfied and people have no hungry stomachs, they cannot be expected to do their best for war effort, nor can they sit idle. They will always create mischief. There is a proverb in Sanskrit:

*"Bubhukshitah kim na karoti papam."*

A hungry soul, what sins can it not do?

As has been said by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, hungry souls know no law, and the best way to bring contentment to the people is to provide the means so that the public and every one of us can get enough to eat. There should also be a campaign about no wastage of food. I would like to tell the House that if everybody takes a vow like myself, which I have taken for several years, not to throw away any food, I think a lot of food will be saved.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member's time is up.

**Babu Baijnath Bajoria**. I hope that the points to which I have drawn attention will receive due consideration of the Honourable the Commerce Member.

**Mr. Muhammad Azhar Ali** (Lucknow and Fyzabad Divisions: Muhammadan Rural). I know that it is only for five minutes that I can speak on the floor of the House today.

**An Honourable Member**: You can continue day after to-morrow.

**Mr. Muhammad Azhar Ali**: That I know. I said to-day. The Honourable the Commerce Member has admitted on the floor of the House to-day that he and his Government have been wrong, that he wants himself to be excused and the Government also to be excused for the sins of omission and commission as regards this problem. We have no objection. He also wants that suggestions should come from this side of the House, that full schemes about food, schemes about other necessities of life should be clearly stated before the House in order that the Honourable Member may be in a position to adumbrate some final scheme. We have no objection to that as well. But, Sir, how can we refrain from saying that all this position that has been created in the country to-day is due simply to the carelessness and callousness of the present Government? I would not say that it is only the Honourable the Commerce Member who is to blame or who is responsible for the present condition. I would submit that the whole Cabinet of His Excellency the Viceroy have got a joint responsibility. It is not a single responsibility of a single Member alone, it is the responsibility of the whole Cabinet. Sometimes it is said that transport is not to be found; sometimes it is said that peasants are hoarding; sometimes it is said that traders are hoarding. But it is never admitted that the scheme was not put before the country and specially the commercial concerns of India who are very widely affected, their opinion was not taken. I am pained to learn that the present condition is such as has been described by Maulana Zafar Ali and others,—that we are sitting on a volcano. It is a fact that we are sitting on a volcano. Discontented peasantry, discontented consumer, discontented middle class, and what more do you want? If it is a fact that the whole country is discontented, then I would say to Honourable Members of His Excellency the Viceroy's Executive Council that they are also not free from any responsibility to the people of India.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): It is now four O'clock. The Honourable Member can continue his speech next day. Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra.

#### MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT.

FAST BY MAHATMA GANDHI IN JAIL.

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra** (Presidency Division: Non-Muhammadan Rural): Mr. President, Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Assembly do now adjourn."

[Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra.]

This adjournment motion arises out of the fast undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi in jail since the 10th February last. My main object in moving this motion for adjournment is to draw the pointed attention of the Government to the situation that is developing from day to day as a result of the step taken by Mahatma Gandhi. Sir, from the correspondence that passed between Mahatma Gandhi on the one hand and His Excellency the Viceroy on the other, it appears that Mahatma Gandhi wanted some redress in respect of certain grievances at the hands of the administrative head of the country, but, failing that, he took to what he himself characterises as an ordeal, a limited fast for a period of 21 days.

Sir, I am not here to enter into the politics of the Mahatma. This is at least not the time to do that. I am not also concerned to enter upon a vindication of the policy of the Mahatma, but I do assert that on an impartial perusal of the correspondence that has been released it will appear that Mahatma Gandhi at least cannot by any honest man be accused of personal complicity in the orgies of violence that swept over the country after August 9th. Mahatma Gandhi made it a grievance that the whole situation would perhaps have been avoided if prior to his arrest he had been granted an interview by His Excellency the Viceroy to talk over matters. Sir, I will quote one or two sentences in this connection from the correspondence released. Mahatma said:

"I am certain that nothing but good would have resulted if you had stayed your hand and granted me the interview, which I had announced, on the night of August, 8, I was to seek. But that was not to be."

After that Mahatma Gandhi made it clear in his letter that he himself never stood for violence of any kind. He said:

"Of course I deplore the happenings which have taken place since 9th August last. I can say from the house-top that I am as confirmed a believer in non-violence as I have ever been. You may not know that any violence on the part Congress workers, I have condemned openly and unequivocally. I have even done public penance more than once."

The country knows very well that on several occasions in the past Mahatma Gandhi undertook to face ordeals of this nature for self-purification, also as measures of vicarious atonement for the faults of omission and commission of those who accept his lead. But, as I said earlier, I am not here to discuss his politics. It is well known and it does not require any statement from me here today on the floor of this House that with all his faults and failings, Mahatma Gandhi is the one man in India today who is respected and admired all the world over. His name and fame are not confined to the geographical boundaries of this country; they have travelled far and wide. He has dedicated his whole life to the service of suffering humanity through penance and sacrifice.

This fast has been characterised as a form of political blackmail; it has been denounced as a spiritual subterfuge; it has been described as a manoeuvring for position; it has been criticised as the last desperate gamble to regain lost power. Nobody can stop people or interested parties from criticising it in that way, but after all is said and done you have to realise that Mahatma is a type by himself. He has set for himself a code of conduct, a standard of life, which is something very different from that which is pursued by us. You may mock and jeer at it; you may taunt and twit, but Mahatma has lived down all such mocks and jeers, all such taunts and twits, and he will continue to remain the Mahatma all the same. Today I myself can appreciate the agonies, the torments of such a soul when it finds from behind the prison bars, millions of his own people suffering from untold privations all over this country. The food scarcity, the famine conditions prevailing from one end of the country to the other are too much for that soft and luminous soul to bear. If he could have had an interview with the Viceroy he would have disburdened himself of what had been rankling in his breast, explained his position and, if necessary, would have reviewed the situation *de novo*. If there had been any errors in his

methods, if he had been held in any way responsible for the misdeeds committed in recent months it could have been brought home to him in the interview and he would have made adequate and honourable amends. But such an opportunity was denied him. Therefore, he had to take recourse to this fast. I want every Indian Member in this House to realise this position. I am making to them an appeal. Let them not be carried away by the politics of Mahatma Gandhi. They may have their differences, but I do ask every Honourable Indian Member in this House, whether elected or otherwise this simple question! Does he want to see this Mahatma, the greatest man amongst us, one of the leading figures of the world today, die by inches behind the prison bars?

**An Honourable Member:** Why not Europeans?

**Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra:** My friend asks "Why not Europeans?" Yes, I do appeal to the Europeans as well to consider the situation. I do appeal to the followers of Jesus Christ to bear in mind that today it has begun with the crucifixion of the flesh behind the prison walls. Who can say that it will not end in the crucifixion of the spirit? In that case do you realise the consequences? The whole Christian community in this country will stand self-condemned. Mahatma's fast is an outcome of the gospel of despair. I take it as a vivid testimony of the sense of sheer frustration. It is born of a sense of utter helplessness. I cannot but take it in that light. To the Government I shall make an appeal. Sir, it has fallen to my lot today to plead before them for the release of Mahatma Gandhi. They should feel ashamed that Mahatma Gandhi—the greatest man in the world—should be condemned by them to the humiliation of prison life in his own country. I do not think there can be worse condemnation of the British than that a man like Mahatma Gandhi cannot have any place except in the British prison. To day we find civilization crashing around us and the noblest institutions of mankind going to shambles. Truth, Love and Charity which mankind had so dearly cherished seem now to depart this world. Mahatma Gandhi, in the midst of this carnage and destruction has been preaching and practising them throughout his life. Mahatma Gandhi with his lofty ideal of Truth and Love stands out as a beacon light in this tempest-tossed world. Will it be creditable for this Government to compel this noble Soul to perish in prison? Will they not try to win the good will of all by releasing him? Do they realize that if Mahatma Gandhi is forced to die in their jail, India will never forget the Britisher for this misdeed? No, India will never forgive the Britisher for this act of callous murder of her greatest son. Do they not realize that some day after this war despite all our differences now, we may have to sit together and settle up our accounts peacefully and amicably? Sir, I cannot but warn the Government that if Mahatma Gandhi is made to languish in jail, a situation will be created in India which will be absolutely beyond control of the most powerful Government. I cannot visualise the things of the future. I am deeply apprehensive that Mahatma may not survive. For in his last letter Mahatma Gandhi says, "if I cannot survive the ordeal I shall go to the Judgment Seat with the fullest faith in my innocence". I ask my friends to ponder over this ominous sentence. Now, the Indian Members of the Viceroy's Executive Council who have been giving advice to the Viceroy, have a very grave and special responsibility. The world is told in season and out of season that we have got an overwhelming majority of Indian Members on the Viceroy's Executive Council—today they have been put on their trial. The eyes of India are set on them. If they cannot assert themselves on this critical occasion and tell the British Government that not one of them would like to see Mahatma Gandhi to be killed in Jail, then I am afraid that day will not be very far off when they will have to repent of their action. The day of reckoning will come. I am pleading in all sincerity and in all seriousness with all sections of this House to do the right thing before it is too late. Let us try to be humane. Let the British Government

[Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra.]

be humane on this occasion at least, and if they fail they will be to blame for what may happen hereafter. Mahatma Gandhi is looked upon as a national asset. We Indians will not allow that asset to be liquidated by the wrong and vindictive measure of the British Government. This is not the time to stand on false sense of prestige. Mahatma Gandhi is the greatest man in this country who has served his country for well over quarter of a century. I, therefore, appeal to all the Members present here to be united in their demand that Mahatma Gandhi should be immediately and unconditionally released. And I appeal to the Government to release him forthwith. If they remain adamant, Sir, I do not know what will happen to them, to their war effort and to this country. Sir, I move.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur-Rahim): Motion moved:

"That the Assembly do now adjourn."

**Mr. N. M. Joshi** (Nominated Non-Official): Sir, the situation which has been created by the fast of Mahatma Gandhi is a very grave one. One of two results in opposite directions are bound to follow. If the situation is wrongly handled, if the Government of India does not show any sympathy with the people of India, if they do not show an understanding of the feelings and sentiments not of Mahatma Gandhi but of the Indian people, the present political situation is bound to be worsened. Mahatma Gandhi's life may not be of great concern to the British people and to the Government of India, but we regard Mahatma Gandhi, as my Honourable friend, Mr. Maitra, has said, as a great national asset. He is a great Indian and I have no doubt in my mind that if the Government of India does not show any good will towards Indian people the results will be disastrous. The political situation in the country at the present time is a bad one, but I have no doubt that if Mahatma Gandhi is allowed to die as a result of this fast, it will be greatly worsened. Not only that, but I feel, Mr. President, that if unfortunately Mahatma Gandhi dies as a result of this fast the relations between the British people—not only the British Government and the Indian people—but between the British people and the Indian people will be permanently embittered. If Mahatma Gandhi dies as a result of this fast during this crisis, I have no doubt in my mind, that the Indian people will not forget this fact, but will never forgive the British people. Sir, it may be said that Mahatma Gandhi is accustomed to fasting and he may survive and even if he survives—as we all hope he will survive—the political situation will not fail to worsen. People will not forget the fact that the British people and the Indian Government did not show any concern sympathy or understanding to the feelings of the Indian people. Sir, is the Government of India justified in taking the steps which they have taken and they propose to take? Do the Government feel sure that they are right in this step? I feel nobody can feel so sure of being right in a matter of this kind that the risk involved to Mahatma Gandhi's life, the risk involved in worsening the present political situation and the risk involved in permanently embittering the feelings between the British people and the Indian people should be taken. I, therefore, hope that the Government of India will rectify the mistake which they have made.

My own view is, that the Government of India should have released Mahatma Gandhi long ago. He should not have been even imprisoned before he had an opportunity of seeing the Viceroy and discussing with him the Resolutions which the Congress had passed on August 9th. The Government of India made a mistake on that occasion. The Government of India had, now, made a mistake in permitting Mahatma Gandhi to go on a fast. I hope, Sir, they will have the wisdom to rectify the mistake before it is too late. Sir, if the Government of India deals with this question in the right spirit, shows understanding of the problem, shows at least sympathy, then I have no doubt, Sir, that the results that will follow will be all to the

good of this country and to the people of India and beneficial to the relations between the British people and the Indian people. Mahatma Gandhi, if he is released unconditionally, I have no doubt in my mind, he has said so in so many words in his letters, will reconsider the present political situation. He has stated in his letters that if he is released, he will consider the situation *de novo*. I have no doubt in my mind that Mahatma Gandhi, if he reconsiders the situation will come to the conclusion that it is not in the interest of the country that the present violence and sabotage should continue. He had reaffirmed his faith in non-violence. That was the object of Mahatma Gandhi in going on the fast. Some may say that he is seeking release by his fast. That is so. But certainly not because he is afraid of either remaining in detention. He wants his release because he wants, I have no doubt in my mind, to reconsider the situation. He wants to help the country out of the present situation. It may be said, why should not Mahatma Gandhi condemn violence from the jail. Mahatma Gandhi has stated very clearly and I sympathise with his view that he cannot condemn acts of violence taking them for granted without going into the evidence whether they had happened or they had not happened. (Laughter.) Well, Sir, it may be a matter of laughter to some of these people. I know the feelings of people in jail when they are asked to express opinions on current events. Only last year, I had an occasion to discuss this question in this very Assembly, the feeling of people in the jails. It was the case of communist detenus in jails. The Government of India had agreed to ask them certain questions regarding their attitude towards war. I had read in this very House a letter of one of the most prominent communists that he feels that it is not to his dignity to state from the jail that he had changed his view. It is not because people are afraid of some other people saying that they changed their views in order to secure their release. I feel that it is against the dignity of human beings that while they are in detention, while they are under duress, they should express opinions changing their views or judging current political events. Sir, the Government of India may not understand this feeling, but I do. I, therefore, feel that the Government of India may consider this question from the point of view of dignity of human freedom. It is only free people who can express their views and not persons in detention.

Sir, if we judge Mahatma Gandhi from his past, from the firm faith he has in non-violence, from the courage he has shown on several occasions in admitting his own mistakes and the mistakes of his own followers, I have no doubt in my mind and the Government of India should have no doubt in their minds in coming to the conclusion that if Mahatma Gandhi is unconditionally released, his release will improve the present political situation and all the risks which are involved in this fast will disappear. Sir, I feel it was wrong for the Government of India, it was unworthy of the Government of India, to impute the motive to Mahatma Gandhi that he was undertaking the fast in order to find a way out of the difficulty. The Government of India intended to say that Mahatma Gandhi will some day be brought before a Tribunal and Mahatma Gandhi was afraid of facing the Tribunal. Is there any Indian here who feels that Mahatma Gandhi is a coward, that he will be afraid of facing a Tribunal? Sir, is it right for the Government of India to talk of facing a Tribunal? It is only a few days ago that the Honourable the Home Member told us that the Government of India cannot make an enquiry into the doings of the Government. There was an amendment to the effect that all the events in that situation should be examined. Did the Government of India accept that amendment and the Resolution? If the Government of India had shown courage to face a Tribunal, then they could have talked of Mahatma Gandhi's inability to face a Tribunal. But the Government of India themselves had shown that they were unable to face the Tribunal, a Judicial Tribunal for examining their own actions, and even if I may say, the actions of the Congressmen. Sir, to talk of Mahatma Gandhi as trying to blackmail

[Mr. N. M. Joshi.]

is still more unworthy. I would say it is disgraceful to attribute such a motive to Mahatma Gandhi. What was Mahatma Gandhi to gain by securing his release? Is he not accustomed to stay in jails? What did he want to get? If he wanted to get, by his release through this fast, to have a reconsideration of the situation, is it blackmail? Do the Government of India not want it? I feel, Sir, that the Government of India allowed themselves to use language which perhaps in their sober moments they would not use and they would not consider right. Sir, the Government of India consider a fast as a blackmail and they translate it by calling it *himsa*. Sir, I feel that by our standards perhaps the fast may be *himsa*, but we cannot judge Mahatma Gandhi by our standards.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member's time is up.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi**: Sir, I will take one minute more.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): No. The Honourable Member's time is up.

**Sardar Sant Singh** (West Punjab: Sikh): Sir, in our college days a text book was prescribed and its title was "Help's Essays". In one of the essays it was written that a falsehood often repeated assumes the aspect of truth, and the man who started that falsehood comes to believe in it at one stage. That seems to be the position of the Home Department in the Government of India. They have started with certain pre-conceived ideas about the administration and the methods of Government. They started on the theory of exploitation and hypocrisy against the people of this country, and after a rule of two hundred years they have come to believe that that is the honest way and the moral way of governing this country. I have nothing but pity for this mentality.

The Government of India, since the outbreak of the war, has been committing indiscretion, if not something more grave and more serious. From the beginning of the war it has been clear to them that the constitutional question of this country should be solved, but they lack the vision with the result that today we are faced with another crisis in the history of this country. To a man in the street it was quite clear that if the Government of India and, as a matter of fact, His Majesty's Government in Great Britain were earnest in solving this political deadlock in this country there were occasions when they could have easily done so. But they persisted in their wrong attitude with the result that the Indian National Congress went on stiffening in their attitude towards the war and so the Government of India and His Majesty's Government stiffened in reprisals towards the Congress till the 8th of August was reached and that Resolution was passed by the All-India Congress Committee. Before that if they had cared to visualize they would have found in some of the expressions of Mahatma Gandhi how his mind was working and to which side he was going. When he took up this slogan of 'Quit India', he is reported to have said that 'if you cannot leave India to God, leave it to chaos and anarchy'. Without going into the merits of this question, may I ask the members of the Government of India if such an expression was not an expression of a soul that was suffering the bitterest agony against the present administration and the system of administration in this country. I do not go into the question of righteousness or otherwise of this demand, but I ask in all seriousness and all earnestness from those who still have their faith in the religious teachings of their own religions whether this expression did not indicate the bitterest agony that was going into the soul of Mahatma Gandhi when he uttered these words. Was it not the climax of frustration which India today is feeling for want of a genuine National Government at the Centre? Well, they did not realize then.

We have come now to the question whether this crisis produces another effect, a different effect, upon the mind of the Government, or it does not affect them at all. From the correspondence one thing stands very clear and that is that the Government offered a conditional release to Mahatma Gandhi during the period of the fast. From this I infer that the Government of India did feel that the coming crisis will be too much for them. But they have a feeling of the maintenance of law and order. May I remind them of a fact from the history of Christians—it is from the Bible—that Jesus Christ was crucified in the name of law, but does humanity believe in that law today? Similarly, all prophets—the Great prophet of the Muslims—had to fight the battles against the then administration in order to preach the truth that he believed in for the time being. Similar is the history teaching of the Sikhs. Our several Gurus were crucified in the name of law, but today that law does not exist although these great men are respected, followed and claim millions of disciples in all the countries of the world. Is it not the time when religion and spiritualism should find some place in your politics? Mere temporal power that we know you are possessing—we know you possess machine guns and torpedoes and you can crush and destroy the people of India at any time you like—will not do. I appeal to you, to your sense of duty and in the name of spiritualism, I ask you: Are you not touched by this present crisis and will you not release Mahatma Gandhi and allow him to review the situation in the country and come to your assistance in solving the greatest problems that we are faced with today? Do you think that the winning of this war would be worth anything without the preparations for the future order in the world, and can you believe for a minute that the future order in the world will be maintained by mere brutal force which you can claim today? Certainly I am of a different opinion. Mahatma Gandhi is a personality who has got a place in the heart of every Indian, if not every decent man in the world today. The whole country looks up to him for something nobler, for something higher. For such a noble spirit who appears once in generations on this earth you have got no place but a jail, a detention camp, or a concentration camp.

May I still, Sir, appeal to the Government and to the Honourable Members, the Indian Members of the Executive Council, that they should not rely upon the rules and regulations on which they want to take their stand? The crisis has come and they should rise up to the occasion. India demands, and rightly demands, that its soul should be freed from all restrictions: and who is the best expression of India's soul, if not Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi's death in jail will be just like the birth of Krishna in Jail. Krishna was born in jail, and when he came out of it, the whole empire trembled and he revolutionised the whole country during his life-time. Similar will be your fate if you do not listen to this advice at this time. We may not be able to carry the resolution by vote and censure you, but our censure does not carry much weight. It is the censure of humanity that will trouble you in your sleep and will appear to you as a phantom when you have retired from life, if you do not rise to the occasion now and do justice to India by unconditionally releasing Mahatma Gandhi. We are avoiding, as far as possible, his politics and his policy. We have avoided deliberately to enter into the controversial questions for obvious reasons. But one thing stands out and dominates the situation, and that is that Mahatma Gandhi's fast must not be allowed to be continued in a detention camp. Against that our soul is revolting today and we would wish the Government of India to take a realistic view of the situation, and not merely the materialistic view. In that hope, I wish we get a good response, a favourable response from the Treasury Benches. They are there to see to the welfare of the country, and the welfare of the country lies in listening to the demand. The unanimous demand, of the public in this respect. I hope, Sir, that our appeal, humble though it is, will carry some conviction to the minds of those who are at this time in charge of the government of the country. With this, Sir, I support the motion.

**Dr. P. N. Banerjee** (Calcutta Suburbs: Non-Muhammadan Urban): Sir, Mahatma Gandhi's fast is a matter of grave concern to the people and the Government alike. That people all over India have been greatly perturbed by the news of the commencement of this fast is evident from the statements to the press and the resolutions adopted by important public bodies and commercial organizations.

It may be said that Mahatmaji is a past master in the art of fasting and that there need not be any anxiety for his life. But should we forget that Mahatmaji is now 75 years of age, and that his health is far from good? The bulletin which was issued yesterday by the Government of Bombay said that his health was not as satisfactory as it had been the day before. What does that mean? That certainly means that there has been some deterioration in his health. It is true that Gandhiji says that he hopes to survive the ordeal, but his hope may not be realized in the present state of his health. And if the worst comes to the worst, if his fast in detention leads to his death, what will happen? Will not that embitter the feelings of large masses of the people in this country? There are considerable differences of opinion between the policy and programme of Gandhiji and those of other parties; I and my Party have our own differences with him. But it cannot be denied that Gandhiji is a great and outstanding figure, not only in India but in the world. The consequence of his death in detention will, therefore, be a permanent estrangement between India and Britain? This we ought, by all means, to avoid. We should also consider what will be the effect of his death on world opinion. Gandhiji is a great world figure and it is quite clear that the reaction of world opinion is not likely to be favourable to the Government of India.

On the other hand, let us consider the probable effect of an unconditional release of Gandhiji. To me it seems unthinkable—unimaginable—that if he is unconditionally released, Gandhiji will utilise his freedom for spreading lawlessness in the country. If the Government think that there is that possibility, they may put him into detention again. But that is not likely. It seems to me more probable that this will give Gandhiji an opportunity for examining the situation afresh and in a new light. Nothing but good will come out of this.

Sir, I am not one of those who believe that fasting is a suitable method of solving political problems. Nor do I think that the period of a fast is an appropriate occasion for discussing questions of a controversial character. But what I do hold is that Gandhiji's release will create a favourable atmosphere for the consideration of all political problems. His release is likely to prove helpful to the ending of the present impasse.

It is not the purpose of this adjournment motion to discuss controversial matters. It is not the purpose of this motion to lay the blame for the genesis and the continuance of the present state of things at the door of this party or that party. It is the purpose of the present motion to save a precious life. Let, therefore, all discord be hushed into silence and let us all be united in pressing the demand on the Government for preserving the life of a man of Gandhiji's capacity and character for service to India and to the world.

Sir, in the name of humanity, in the name of communal harmony, and in the name of goodwill between the Government and the people, I appeal to all sections of this House, including the Treasury Benches, to accept this motion.

**Mr. T. T. Krishnamachari** (Tanjore cum Trichinopoly: Non-Muhammadan Rural): Mr. President, I rise to accord my support to the motion of my Honourable friend, Mr. Maitra, who moved it in such stirring terms. My only regret is that I am not capable of translating the feelings of millions of my countrymen today, the hopes and fears that throb in their hearts; and nobody in this House can deny that those feelings will grow in intensity as the hours pass and as long as that great soul lies imprisoned in Poona—without food or sustenance. We have been told by previous speakers, speakers who rightly pleaded for goodwill on all sides, that political controversies had better be

eschewed in a discussion like the one now before the House. I bow to their decision, but it is impossible for anybody with any feeling of patriotism or love of his country to pass without challenge the provocative sentiments that the Government have chosen to express by means of their letters to Gandhiji. As has been stated by previous speakers, Gandhiji's fast has been characterised as a piece of blackmail. Very unwise, that word chosen by whoever it may be. Whoever advised the head of the Government to choose that word has not done either the British Government or the British Indian Government any service. Whatever might be the result of the present impasse, that particular word will go down in history and will be remembered as having been flung against the greatest Indian of the last five hundred years and more. Is it a piece of blackmail for a person to say "You are casting undue and uncharitable aspersions on me; you wrongly characterise me as the origin of all the evil which you impute to the Congress organisation. I have no means of justifying myself as I am in prison, excepting by the only method that the law of satyagraha affords to me."? If this is blackmail, I do not know what all could not be construed as blackmail.

It is surprising that the Government should not have chosen to utilise this particular opportunity, the opportunity that has been furnished to them, of settling the present impasse. Surely the people who man the Government today, with all their inherited and accumulated experience, should have realised that nothing would have happened if Gandhiji had been released: possibly they might still continue in power not merely for six months, not merely for twelve months, but perhaps for years, without their being ousted from their privileged positions. What did the Government want? Government wanted an admission of guilt on the part of Gandhiji: he had to admit that he was wrong, that he was the cause of all the evil that was imputed to the Congress and to him; it was only on that condition that further negotiations would be allowed. But if they really wanted a positive contribution from him, the obvious thing was to place him amidst his colleagues which he wanted. History will record that a glorious opportunity has been lost, a glorious opportunity to rid this country of the sufferings and the travail that it has gone through during the last seven or eight months. But it is not my place today to criticise the Government for having missed opportunities. The British Government in India have missed several opportunities to make India her friend; but what really concerns me most today is the sequel to this fast. Twenty-one days. We hope that Mahatma Gandhi will survive the ordeal; but it seems scarcely possible. Are we to sit here with folded hands and await the result, a result which will certainly stir the depths of the hearts of the people of this country, and will make ordinary government impossible for a long time to come? Are we to have the incidents of August and September and October repeated with ten times greater severity and sit here with folded hands to see the British Indian Government achieve that undesirable result? May I ask, as Honourable Members have asked before, whether the Indian Members of the Executive Council have come unanimously to this decision along with their non-Indian colleagues? Unanimity was said to be the characteristic feature of the decision taken by this Government in August last. Unanimity was stressed not merely in India but in England, in the Houses of Parliament—that Indian Members and European Members were unanimous in deciding the course that was adopted by the Government of India in August last. May I ask whether that unanimity existed in taking the decision not to release Gandhiji when he decided to go on a fast? May I ask how many Indian members really did stand up and say, "This shall not happen. The greatest man of India for ages past and for ages to come perhaps shall not die in prison as an ordinary felon"? May I ask if Indian Members, men of my own colour, will stand up and say, "Well, we tried our best but we could not succeed"? I do not ask for your resignation but I would like to be assured that unanimity did not exist in this particular instance, that unanimity did not exist where a possible, shall I say, murder is likely to be the result. That, I think, Indians are entitled to ask of their fellow countrymen

[Mr. T. T. Krishnamachari.]  
in the Executive Council. That, I think, I am entitled to ask in this forum that has been furnished to me through the kindness of my own compatriots.

Warnings have been administered to the Indian Members of the Executive Council; appeals have been made to the European Members of the Executive Council; an appeal has also been made to all the members of this House and to all castes and communities in the name of humanity. I shall put it in another way. Yes; we can make appeals; we can quote scriptures, we can cite religious experiences of the past; but what I am appealing to is this: the instinct of self-preservation demands that the situation should be met fairly and squarely; and if these people who man the Government today, who hope to continue as Members of the Government, if they want to be justified in the eyes of humanity and history, they have got to act. Otherwise, we do not know what will happen. It might be that the Government, armed as it is with a large amount

5 P.M. of power behind it, with the military behind its back,—the Government may feel that nothing will happen. But, Sir, as my Honourable friend, Mr. Maitra, has said, I shudder to think of the results of Government's continued intransigence in a moment like this, particularly as we know that the name of Mahatma Gandhi is known to every man, woman and child in every nook and corner of this land, people who revere him as great as, or even greater than, God. . . . (Laughter.) It might evoke laughter, but those who do worship images do entertain feelings of that sort, though my Muslim friends are unable to capture the idea even with the help of their imagination.

I want to make my final appeal to my own countrymen. As I said before, I want them to act. I do not want them to wait until things get worse. Many people seem to think that if Mahatma Gandhi's position gets worse he will be released. It might happen, it might not happen. Perhaps as things are, I feel that it might not happen for the reason that here is an opportunity provided for the Government to get rid of an incubus. But they would not act. They find that they are secure, and as they are secure to-day they do not want any change in that condition. If that is the motivating force of the Government in refusing the appeal of Mahatma Gandhi for co-operation in the task of reconciliation, obviously they may not relent if his physical condition grows worse. It is no good laying much store on the possibility that the Government might release him if his condition is likely to get worse. If he gets worse, the condition of this country would be something that it would be impossible for them to handle, and Indian Members of the Executive Council specially must realise that their position in this country as Indians would become almost intolerable. I have no doubt that this adjournment motion would not have been moved in vain if the appeals made by several Members of this House to the Europeans and Indians alike do not fall on deaf ears. ~ Sir, I support the motion.

**Nawabzada Muhammad Liaquat Ali Khan.** (Rohilkund and Kumaon Divisions: Muhammadan Rural): I have listened to the speeches that have been made by the Honourable Members of this House with great care, sympathy and due consideration. I fully sympathise with the sentimental concern which my Hindu colleagues of this House feel over the self-inflicted ordeal which their leader is undergoing. I join in the hope which has been expressed, that Mr. Gandhi will survive this ordeal. But I am afraid, not being a spiritualist, I do not either approve or believe in spiritualised politics. I believe in honest, clean and practical politics, and that is the only way if this country is to make any advance towards the goal which it has set for itself, namely, freedom for every nationality inhabiting this sub-continent.

Mr. President, all this and all that has happened during the last seven months has been the direct result of that tragic, that unwise decision which was taken by the Congress on the 8th of August, 1942. For the first time, after having repeated for the last 20 years or more their belief that Hindu Muslim unity was the condition precedent to any freedom for this country, the Congress in Bombay overthrew this main plank of their policy and adopted as the new policy that

unless the British quit India there was no possibility of Hindu Muslim unity. Further the Congress adopted in August last the weapon of mass civil disobedience to be used for the acceptance of this demand by the British Government. And all this was done without paying the slightest heed to the sentiments, to the aspirations, and to the ideal of the hundred millions of Mussalmans. The Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League met very soon after this decision of the Congress, and they, after very careful consideration, declared that the decision that the Congress had taken in Bombay was not meant to achieve freedom for every nationality in this land but was for the domination of one community over the whole of India, and that the adoption of the policy of civil disobedience—which Mr. Gandhi himself had stated that without Hindu Muslim settlement would be a declaration of war on the Muslim League and Mussalmans—was really adopted not only against the British Government but against the Mussalmans also and this was so on the admission of Mr. Gandhi himself. What followed that tragic decision is recent history. We know that that decision was responsible, in spite of what any Honourable Member of this House might say, for the unprecedented violence that took place throughout the length and breadth of this country.

Then, Sir, we put forward a proposition for the solution of India's problem. The Muslim League made certain proposal which I am sure every Honourable Member of this House is aware of. Honourable Members will forgive me if I do not go into it in detail and repeat here all that was said in the resolution because I have very little time at my disposal. But I know that that resolution has been the subject matter of discussion in the press and on the platform and is well known to everybody. We were appealed to by our Hindu friends that Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League should approach Mr. Gandhi and the Congress because some credulous people believed that all that had happened in the country had changed the views of Mr. Gandhi regarding the question of Hindu Muslim settlement. But the correspondence that has been published and which has been read I am sure by every Honourable Member of this House shows that, as far as the question of Hindu Muslim settlement is concerned, Mr. Gandhi does not mention even a word about it. His position to-day seems to be exactly the same as it was on the 8th of August last. He asked the Viceroy to convince him that the decision of the 8th of August was wrong. All the declarations of the Muslim League on behalf of the Mussalmans have carried no weight with him.

**Bhai Parma Nand** (West Punjab : Non-Muhammadan) : What about his offer in requesting the Viceroy to hand over the Government of India to Mr. Jinnah?

**Nawabzada Muhammad Liaquat Ali Khan** : I am glad my Honourable friend has pointed out that He says that his offer is there, that Mr. Gandhi does not want the Government for the Congress. He is willing if Mr. Jinnah is invited to form a Government, and now I would request the Honourable Member to note very carefully his next sentence, to form a Government responsible to the elected Legislature where 75 per cent. will be Mr. Gandhi's followers and 25 per cent. Mr. Jinnah's followers. Now, I want to know how long can that Government last?

**Sir Syed Raza Ali** (Cities of the United Provinces : Muhammadan Urban) : Fully 24 hours!

**Nawabzada Muhammad Liaquat Ali Khan** : My Honourable friend, Sir Syed Raza Ali, is an optimist. I was saying that there does not appear to us to be any change in the policy which the Congress had laid down in August last, and in view of that and as far as our conviction is concerned, we see no light. We believe that there is no future for this country unless there is a Hindu Muslim settlement, that there is no freedom for this country unless every nationality is made to feel free in India. Mr. President, from the correspondence that has been published it does not appear that there is any likelihood of

[Nawabzada Muhammad Liaquat Ali Khan.]

any effort being made in that direction for the time being. Sir, I would request those Honourable Members who have been appealing to us to convince us—and I will not undergo a fast if they do not succeed in convincing me—that if Mr. Gandhi is released, there is a probability of a Hindu Muslim settlement. On the contrary, what do I see today? The resolutions that are passed by all the Hindu organisations, the propaganda that is being done by the Hindu press is against the Muslim League and against the Mussalmans.

Sir, another revelation has been made through this correspondence. The Viceroy has stated in so many words that Mr. Gandhi and his friends and the Congress knew as to what would be the result of their decision of August last. Not only that, but he has stated that they were ready and willing to condone that. Not only that, but that the organisation as such has been responsible for what has happened in the country; and all this chaos and anarchy was created at a time when India was threatened by a foreign power. Now, Sir, in short, on the evidence which is before His Excellency the Viceroy he believes the Congress to be the enemy of the country and yet we are asked that unless the Congress agree to some proposal, the British are not prepared to transfer power to the other Indians who are left outside the Congress. We are asked that, unless we come to terms with a Party which on their own admission is the enemy of the country, nothing can be done by the British for this unfortunate land of ours. This shows, Mr. President, that the British also cannot do away with the responsibility which lies on their shoulders in this respect. To put the position in a nutshell and in common parlance, it seems to me that two persons who profess to be friends are having a dispute over the possession of a property which does not legitimately belong to either of them. Mr. Gandhi says, "You put me on the *gadi* of India and protect me and keep me there with your British bayonets". His Excellency Lord Linlithgow says, "Damn it, if I have to use British bayonets, why should I not keep myself installed on the *gadi* of India". That seems to be the quarrel that is going on, and the Mussalmans and all those who are neither in this camp nor in the other are out of this picture.

An appeal has been made not only on the floor of this House but outside that we should put up a united demand for the release of Mr. Gandhi. Sir, the Muslim League has not got the power and authority. We can neither support the release nor the detention of Mr. Gandhi in jail and the reason is obvious. It is the duty of the Government to maintain law and order and peace in the country and it is their responsibility to decide for themselves whether this can be done better by the release of Mr. Gandhi or by his detention in jail. That, Sir, is our position. If the Muslim League had been in power today, if it had been in a position to control the situation that might have arisen if either of these two actions was taken, then it would have been for us to decide. We certainly do not propose to take the responsibility upon our shoulders when we have not got the means to control the situation that might be created in the country.

Sir, my Honourable friend, Dr. Banerjea, appealed to us in the name of communal harmony. I assure him that there is nobody who wants communal harmony more than we on this side of the House. But he did not tell us how the release of Mr. Gandhi would achieve that noble object. Is he convinced, has he got any proof, that Mr. Gandhi, if he were released unconditionally, would at once engage himself in finding a solution of the Hindu Muslim problem? Is he (Dr. Banerjea), who is not in jail, prepared to concede to the Mussalmans their legitimate demands? On the contrary, what I find is that there is opposition from all sides. Sir, as I stated in the beginning, we have every sympathy for the sentiments of our friends, but I am afraid we are unable to join them in this demand for the reasons which I have tried to place before this Honourable House.

**Sir Henry Richardson** (Nominated Non-Official): Sir, I have no desire to make a long speech on this subject and my sole reason for intervening is that I feel this House should not be left in ignorance as to the view which we on this side hold regarding the subject of this motion.

Unfortunately, it appears that the challenge which the Congress Party issued to authority last August has once again been put forward in a different form. Then it was "Comply with our wishes or we will declare civil disobedience". Now it is "Comply with our wishes or our Leader and Dictator will endanger his own life". I wish to say nothing which may induce more bitterness, but I can point to no difference in the main intention. The pistol is once again placed on the head of authority and the Government can no more submit to the threat than they could last August. It may be self-immolation but it is none the less coercion and no Government worth the name can submit to it and retain any authority. We, therefore, fully approve of the attitude which the Government has taken up.

When reading the correspondence which passed between His Excellency the Viceroy and Mr. Gandhi, the necessity for facing the stern realities of the situation in which we find ourselves is clearly apparent. To charge Government—whatever their shortcomings—with responsibility for planned sabotage of communications surely cannot be accepted seriously. You may goad people into a sudden riot as an exhibition of rage or frustration, but you cannot goad them into cold and calculated planning of large-scale sabotage to take place at a time when the danger of invasion is at its peak. "Do or Die" was the slogan which Mr. Gandhi left to his followers; did this merely refer to non-violent activities? Mr. Gandhi in his correspondence hints that civil disobedience might have been avoided if Congress leaders had not been placed in detention; does that mean that the threat was merely bluff? Does it mean that although the pistol was primed and ready, the trigger would not have been pressed in any circumstances? If so, let it be remembered that it is the primary duty of any Government to prevent any grave menace to peace and tranquillity, a responsibility which will equally rest on any purely Indian Government of the future. If the threat was real, then was not abdication the sole alternative, and the abandonment of all those elements which disagreed with the Congress plan for transfer of power? Surely there was nothing else.

And now we are faced with a similar threat albeit employing different tactics. Under Nazi rule, there is no easier road to sudden death than political opposition. In a Nazi concentration camp there would be no need for Mr. Gandhi to endanger his health or his life; both would be in sufficient danger. The strength of the latest threat lies in the fact that authority here desires that no one shall suffer extreme penalties for his political views even though he rebels openly against that authority. But should a person insist upon inflicting upon himself the same danger that extreme penalties would carry, authority is powerless to prevent him doing so.

Putting aside political views, we fully understand and appreciate the great respect and reverence which the person of Mr. Gandhi commands and we fully sympathise with the horror which a fatal result to his fast would evoke. To those who have, we understand, asked him to desist from this course, we add our own earnest request and support. On the other hand, we view with no less horror the deaths of all those innocent victims who died violently as a result of the declaration of civil disobedience. The fast is no less a threat to authority without which there would come a chaos which we dare not contemplate.

Let there be no confusion in anybody's mind between the specific issue of Mr. Gandhi's fast on the one hand and the general question of transfer of power to India on the other hand. On this latter issue the views of my community have already been declared that we stand fully by the pledges of

[Sir Henry Richardson.]

His Majesty's Government. On the first issue however we are determined that there shall be no surrender to lawlessness and coercion which were condemned by speaker after speaker in the debate last September. We cannot afford to undermine authority in times like these.

**The Honourable Sir Reginald Maxwell:** (Home Member): I must thank the Honourable the Mover and other Honourable Members who have spoken in this debate for the serious and moderate tone of the speeches that have been delivered. I shall try to reply in the same spirit. But I must not shrink from presenting in full the case of Government.

The correspondence that led to this fast—and no one can deny the patience with which it was conducted—is there for anyone to interpret as he chooses. It can perhaps be read in the light of the following facts. When the Congress party passed their resolution of August 8th, Japanese attack on this country was thought to be likely. By demanding the withdrawal of British power from India and by placing Congress in open opposition to it the Congress party might be thought to have hoped for some advantage to themselves if the Japanese attack succeeded. Or at least such a movement at the time of enemy attack would have been more likely to be successful in attaining its object. Today, six months after, the Japanese danger has, at any rate for the time being, receded and there is little immediate hope from that quarter. The movement initiated by the Congress has been decisively defeated. Now, therefore, it is the object of the Congress party to rehabilitate themselves and regain if they can the credit that they have lost. Thus they are now concerned to disclaim responsibility for the consequences that followed their decision. The point is taken up by Mr. Gandhi in his correspondence with the Viceroy. The awkward facts are now disowned as “unproved and in my opinion unprovable charges hurled against the Congress and me”. On this assertion Mr. Gandhi takes up his stand: “Surely I can say with safety that it is for the Government to justify their action by solid evidence.” To whom are they to justify themselves?

**Sardar Sant Singh:** Before an impartial enquiry committee?

**The Honourable Sir Reginald Maxwell:** Elsewhere in his letters Mr. Gandhi makes this clear. He says: “convince me that I was wrong and I will make ample amends”. In the alternative he asks “if you want me to make any proposal on behalf of the Congress, you should put me among the Working Committee Members”. So far as can be seen, these were the demands when he conceived his fast. There is no other solid demand made. But now, fresh light emerges. Government without granting any of his demands informed Mr. Gandhi that they would release him for the purpose and for the duration of the fast in order to make it clear that they disclaimed responsibility for the consequences. On that, Mr. Gandhi replied that if he were released, he would at once abandon the fast, and that he had conceived the fast only as a prisoner. Thus, if he were released, the objects for which he declared his fast although still unfulfilled, would recede into the background. As a free man, he would neither demand these objects nor fast. Interpreted in this way, his fast would seem to amount to little more than a demand for release.

If that were the issue, I could quote several resolutions of the Congress Working Committee against him. I could quote a resolution of the Congress Working Committee dated 3rd February, 1938, or their resolution of 12th August, 1939. But it is more significant that Mr. Gandhi himself took up the subject in the *Harijan*, dated 19th August, 1939. There, he says:

“Hunger-strike has positively become a plague.”

He goes on to say:

“It is well, therefore, that the Congress Working Committee has condemned the practice in unequivocal terms so far at least as hunger-strike for discharge from imprisonment is concerned.”

On the ethics of hunger-striking, Mr. Gandhi had something to say in the *Harijan* of 20th May, 1939, after his Rajkot fast:

"I now see that it was tainted by *himsa*."

Further on he remarks,—

"This was not the way of *ahimsa* or conversion. It was the way of *himsa* or coercion."

After owning that the results of the fast had turned against him, he adds,—

"This method, I admit, is wholly inconsistent with *ahimsa*."

Well, Sir, I must confess that speaking for myself it is certainly repugnant to western ideas of decency to exploit against an opponent his feelings of humanity, chivalry or mercy or to trifle with such a sacred trust as one's own life in order to play on the feelings of the public for the sake of some purely mundane object. But that is a matter for each man to settle with his own conscience. It is not, therefore, for me to judge any man. All I am concerned with is what the Government ought to do when this method is employed to put pressure on them.

Now, let us examine Mr. Gandhi's position. What he says in effect is this. You say, Government is right and the Congress is wrong. I say the Congress is right and the Government is wrong. I choose to put the burden of proof on you. I am the only person to be convinced. You must either admit you are wrong or submit your reasons to me and make me the sole arbiter in the matter: unless you do so, I fast. But, it appears later, if I am released, I do not propose to fast for any of these things, even though they remain unfulfilled. It seems to me that Mr. Gandhi's demand is rather like asking the United Nations to appoint Hitler to adjudge the responsibility for the present war. It is not usual in this country to put the accused person on the Bench to judge his own case.

Mr. Gandhi is the leader of an open rebellion in which he denies the authority of the existing Government and seeks to overthrow it. Before that, he was entitled to be heard by Government like any other subject and was heard. But by declaring civil war, a method that repudiates the method of discussion, he forfeits that right so long as he remains an open rebel. He cannot claim to function except through the success of his own method. He cannot take part in public life under the protection of the law that he denies. He cannot be a citizen and yet not a subject. This was the position resulting from the Congress resolution of 8th August. It was passed in unequivocal terms demanding the withdrawal of British power from India and the declaration of India's independence. For the enforcement of that demand, the All-India Congress Committee resolved to sanction the starting of a mass struggle on the widest possible scale. "Such a struggle", they said, "must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhi" and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken."

In some of the published correspondence, Mr. Gandhi has made much of his intention to seek an interview with the Viceroy. But the Congress resolution still stood, together with Mr. Gandhi's own words, "do or die". The Government communique, on the subject of this fast, has already reminded the public of Mr. Gandhi's statement made on 14th July that there was no room left in the proposal for withdrawal or negotiation; there was no question of one more chance. I may again quote Mr. Gandhi's own words from the full text of his speech delivered in Hindi on the evening of 8th August after the All-India Congress Committee had passed the "Quit India" resolution sanctioning mass civil disobedience. These are extracts from his speech:

"Every one of you should, from this moment onwards, consider yourself a free man or woman and act as if you are free and are no longer under the heel of this imperialism."

Now, listen to this:

"You may take it from me that I am not going to strike a bargain with the Viceroy for Ministries or the like. I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom." "We shall do or die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt".

This is open rebellion.

[Sir Reginald Maxwell.]

Now, Sir, I would remind the House that it is not the method of peaceful persuasion to go to the person whom you wish to convince armed with a resolution declaring mass rebellion. The essence of negotiation is that both parties should be uncommitted and that neither should exert the pressure of force on the other. That is true in any circumstances. But as between a subject and the State which rules him, the position is still more emphatic. It is not for the subject to deal with the State on equal terms, still less to approach it with an open threat.

But, apart from the position in which Mr. Gandhi has voluntarily put himself, has the State, as the custodian of all the country's interests, nothing to say about all that has occurred? I forbear to utter reproaches. But I repeat that Government does hold Mr. Gandhi responsible for the recent happenings that have so disturbed the peace of India, caused so much loss of life and property of innocent persons and brought the country to the brink of a terrible danger. I do not say that he had any personal complicity in acts of violence, as Mr. Joshi wished to make clear, but it was he that put the match to the train carefully laid beforehand by himself and his colleagues. That he was forced to do so prematurely was not his fault but our fortune. This was the method by which they hoped to gain their ends. They may seek to repudiate it, now that it has proved unsuccessful, but the responsibility is theirs none the less. Indeed, if it is not, why does Mr. Joshi say, release Mr. Gandhi and he will declare himself against violence, as though it depended upon him to call off this movement? The deeds that have been done cannot now be undone. If Mr. Gandhi wished to dissociate himself from them, he could have spoken for himself without consulting the Congress Working Committee. Can he then without cancelling the Congress rebellion, without reparation, without even assurances for the future, claim at any moment to step back as though nothing had happened into the public life of the country and be received by Government and society as a good citizen?

**Sardar Sant Singh:** Leave the society alone.

**The Honourable Sir Reginald Maxwell:** Surely he and his colleagues, the Congress leaders have much to live down first.

When, therefore, the Government found that the fast could only be prevented by unconditional release—which if justifiable in Mr. Gandhi's case would be equally justifiable in the case of all the Congress leaders—they had no choice but to adhere to the policy already declared. That policy was either right or wrong in itself. Its rightness or wrongness could not depend on the quantity of food consumed by Mr. Gandhi six months later. If the Government conscientiously believed that it was right a fast could make no difference to it. The Government could not surrender their judgment under threat of a fast. To do so, indeed, would not be in accordance with Mr. Gandhi's own principles.

The situation is that the fast is claimed as a method of non-violence. Government have met it non-violently by stating that they were ready and are ready to set Mr. Gandhi at liberty for the purpose and duration of his fast. But apparently he desires his object only as a prisoner. "If, therefore," he says, "I am released there will be no fast in terms of my correspondence above mentioned". He wants to fast only in custody. But Government have made it clear that the custody is his own choice, so far as that is concerned, Government are not responsible at all. But they have, so far as it is possible, allowed him as much privilege during his fast as he would have enjoyed as a free man. He has stated that this is a fast according to capacity and that he does not desire to take his own life. Government can only hope that at this late hour he may realize the peril, the folly, and, I might even say, the unworthiness of attempting to do what may be beyond his power. Sir, I oppose.

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta** (Bombay Central Division: Non-Muhammadian Rural): Sir, my Party has made it absolutely clear that in sponsoring this motion we are entering into no political issues, that the policy of the Congress or the Mahatma or the policy of the Government are not the issues which will be included in the discussion of this motion. In pursuance of that decision of my Party I shall not enter into the discussion of the political issues but shall ask Government to look at the situation from their own point of view. The speech of Sir Reginald itself ought to be a reason for releasing Gandhiji. What does he want? He wants that the Mahatma should revert to citizenship instead of being a rebel. What proof does he want? The Mahatma has given ample proof in the correspondence that he is hoping to return to citizenship. The very fact that the Mahatma has promised to examine the situation *de novo* is most significant. It can only mean—unless the Government want to humiliate him further—it can only mean that he is honestly willing to return to lawful ways. He may come to any conclusion, but he is prepared to re-examine the situation. What more do you want? I, therefore, urge that Government should not stand on the technical position whether the Mahatma recants in so many words the resolution of the 8th August last. That would be a pure attempt to humiliate him and not to take advantage of a very favourable situation which has arisen. I can tell Sir Reginald that this is the most favourable situation for releasing him. Don't examine the logical ways of the Mahatma. He is a Mahatma. Logic is not his strong point. You must not examine too minutely whether one day he was more right than on the other, because he has declared about a year ago: "Don't tell me what I said yesterday. Follow what I am saying today".

**Dr. P. N. Banerjee:** What about tomorrow?

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta:** Tomorrow will look after itself. Therefore, I ask the Government that the Mahatma has gone, as far as he can go, in demonstrating that he is prepared to negotiate further and on that basis I will request the Government to release him, if it is likely to open the door to political conciliation the Government should not be too strict on technical aspects, whether the Mahatma has openly withdrawn his resolution of the 8th of August or not.

There are two or three more points which I wish to emphasise. One is, I wish to assure the Indian Members of the Executive Council that we are seeking no censure on them. We are not considering them as blood-thirsty, unpatriotic people who are in league with the foreign Government. They must not fear that in moving this motion we have withdrawn our co-operation with them. Their position is pathetic, they cannot defend themselves, and, therefore, I want to assure them that there is no intention to brand them as blood-thirsty, unpatriotic selfish people who are sticking to office for the sake of personal gain—all that is not at the back of our mind.

**Mr P. J. Griffiths** (Assam: European): Is it at the front?

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta:** Not even at the front. I assure you. I am saying it openly. Why are you so uncharitable? We have given them our congratulations when appointed. We shall not withdraw our co-operation from them. The only thing I wish of them is that they should place my point of view before the Executive Council that this is the most favourable opportunity for political conciliation—and make that representation to His Excellency the Viceroy.

The other point is this. My Honourable friend, Nawab Sahib, was quite wrong in his estimate of the Mahatma. Mahatma may be born a Hindu, but he is not a Hindu today.

**Sir Syed Raza Ali:** But he is greater than God.

**Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta:** You must excuse a younger man during times of excitement.

All I want to say is that the Nawab Sahib is entirely wrong. There is no better pro-Muslim in this country than Mahatma Gandhi. The resolution of the 8th of August is quite clear. There is no greater pro-Muslim in this country

[Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta.]

than Mahatma Gandhi and it is because he is so partial that there is a Hindu Mahasabha in this country. But so far as Mahatma Gandhi is concerned, you can solely trust him to do you not merely justice but generosity. He has done, he is doing it and on the 8th of August resolution—read the resolution—he was even willing to give the whole of the Government to Mr. Jinnah without any reservations. The Congress and the Mahatma are over-generous to the Muslims.

Sir, with these views and submissions I support this motion. There is no sense in the phrase unconditional or conditional release. Everybody here is free only conditionally. Everybody is free on the condition that he obeys the law. The Honourable the Home Member himself is free only on the condition that he obeys the law. Therefore, let the Mahatma be free; he may be free only on the condition that he obeys the law. If he does not, the law will take care of itself. Sir, I support.

**Sir Cowasjee Jehangir** (Bombay City: Non-Muhammadan Urban): Sir, there are many friends of Mr. Gandhi and many of his opponents who declare that Mr. Gandhi's mentality is a puzzle. On some days Mr. Gandhi has really proved himself to be a saint. On other days Mr. Gandhi has given his friends and his opponents the impression of being a clever, astute and experienced politician. The correspondence that has been placed before us is as puzzling as was to be expected from any correspondence with Mr. Gandhi. But what we are discussing here today is a vote of censure. The form in which the discussion has taken place is an adjournment motion.

**Dr. P. N. Banerjee:** I made it clear in my speech that it was not a vote of censure.

**Sir Cowasjee Jehangir:** You cannot move an adjournment motion which is not a vote of censure. It is a rule of the House. We have to know for what purpose the censure is moved. Is it because the members of the Congress Committee were arrested at the time they were, or is it a censure motion on Government for not having released Mr. Gandhi as soon as he declared his intention of having a fast? Those are the only two reasons for an adjournment motion that I can think of.

Now, Sir, on the first point, I would like to refer to the speech made in this Honourable House by Mr. Jamnadas Mehta in very eloquent terms the other day. I did not see it reported in the press, Indian or English. So I will take the liberty of repeating it. What Mr. Mehta said was that it was a mistake not to have arrested the Working Committee when they passed their Working Committee resolution, and to have waited for them to endorse it at the meeting of the A. I. C. C. Now, Sir, it is contended that the arrest should have taken place after the interview sought by Mr. Gandhi with the Viceroy. Well, if that is so, they certainly would have had more time to organise and perfect their plan of "do or die". Mr. Jamnadas Mehta was representing a point of view when he said it was a mistake to have allowed them the time they had. It naturally follows that it would have been a greater mistake to have given them further time after they had passed the resolution at the A. I. C. C.

Now let us come to the other point of censure, *viz.*, that Mr. Gandhi should have been released as soon as he declared that he was going in for a fast. No man in this House or outside, whether he be a Congressman, a Mahasabhi, or a Muslim Leaguer, or a Liberal, wants to see Mr. Gandhi imprisoned. He would rather have Mr. Gandhi a free man, and I would certainly prefer to see him a free man, advocating his views as a free man and freely. But this correspondence has taken my breath away. It has surprised me. I never expected for one minute that Mr. Gandhi would have expressed such opinions as he has done. He has declared from the housetop that he has just as great faith in non-violence as he ever had before. Well, if that is so, I do not think it can be said that since the 8th of August, we have had no violence in India. We have

had murders, bombs, dislocation of traffic which has caused the loss of lives of men, women and children. Even today we are having bombs daily in different parts of India, and they are nothing but cases of attempted murder. But Mr. Gandhi is a faithful follower of his own creed of non-violence. It does not matter who caused that violence, who instigated it, or what were the reasons for which the violence takes place. He ought to be prepared to condemn it for the sake of the principle of non-violence and not wait to examine the reason for that violence. I would have expected to see in this correspondence some unequivocal expression of opinion that violence, from wherever it comes, and for whatever reason, is repugnant to the saint Gandhi. But to my surprise and horror, I find here a few words which have been a shock to me. I will just read these few words. Government have stated, I do not know with what correctness, that there is a woman, the wife of a member of the Working Committee, who is today underground, and whom they accuse of instigating, or having instigated, or being one of the organizers of these bomb outrages. They have put down that accusation in writing and this is Mr. Gandhi's reply:

"If the wife of a member of the Working Committee is actively engaged in planning bomb outrages and other acts of terrorism, she should be tried before a court of law and punished if found guilty. The lady you refer to could only have done the things attributed to her after the wholesale arrests of the 9th August, last, which I have dared to describe as leonine violence."

Because this woman does these things in her anger at the arrests, he tries to find an excuse for her. I should have thought that Mr. Gandhi would have said that if this woman is guilty (I agree that he should use the word 'if') of what Government say, he wholeheartedly condemns her. Instead of that, he practically asks Government, to remember that she had done this after Government had arrested him. That is what he means, which to me was a surprise, a pain and a great disappointment.

Now, Sir, I have one minute left. I would appeal to Mr. Gandhi to make an unequivocal statement, even now, that he is against violence, that he repudiates what has taken place, and that he condemns it . . . . .

**Dr. P. N. Banerjee:** He has said that clearly.

**Sir Cowasjee Jehangir:** . . . . . that he condemns an act of violence for whatever reason it has been committed, whether instigated by Government or himself. If he makes an unequivocal statement to that effect and promises to do so when he comes out of jail as a free man, Mr. Gandhi ought to be released, and I would appeal to Mr. Gandhi—if anybody will convey that message to him—to go a step further, much further than he has done and  
6 P.M. reiterate his faith in non-violence regardless of consequences to his Party.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur. Rahim): The Assembly is adjourned till eleven O'clock tomorrow.

The Assembly then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Tuesday, the 16th February, 1943.