

[Shri Manubhai Shah]

valid only after they are scrutinised by the Forward Markets Commission, their recommendations are sent to the Ministry and the Ministry, in the light of the views, objectives and the general directions that the House has endorsed from time to time, scrutinise those recommendations from that angle and approve them. So the approval that is being today regularised and made valid is nothing which is different from what the House has generally endorsed.

Coming to the last point, Shri V. P. Nayar mentioned about validating something which is invalid or trying to see that the entire operation of this Act disregards the provisions of the company law. I may repeat what I had said when he was speaking that excepting the provisions in which the amendment is to be sought, the rest of the provisions of the Companies Act still continue and will continue to govern all the rest of the working of the associations recognised by the Forward Markets Commission.

I would once again thank hon. Members for having given their approval to the principles and clauses of the Bill.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: I shall now put the motion for consideration to vote. The question is:

"That the Bill further to amend the Forward Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1952, as passed by Rajya Sabha be taken into consideration."

The motion was adopted.

Clauses 2, 3, and 1, the Enacting Formula and the Title were added to the Bill.

Shri Manubhai Shah: I beg to move:

"That the Bill be passed".

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The question is:

"That the Bill be passed".

The motion was adopted.

FOOD SITUATION IN WEST BENGAL

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty
(Basirhat): I am glad that this House has at last had an opportunity of discussing the food situation in West Bengal.

Never since 1943 has the food situation in West Bengal been as serious as it is today. At that time, the British Government, which was in power, refused to accept the position that thousands were dying of hunger and it was only as an *ex post facto* investigation that the official inquiry showed that 18 lakhs of people had died, though unofficially we knew that 36 lakhs died. The same pig-headed obstinacy has persisted in denying the seriousness of the food situation that has been growing more serious every day during the last three months. Starvation deaths are yet few in number, but they have begun. But they are brushed aside with the same callousness as did our erstwhile rulers.

Fourteen years after the worst ever famine that my State saw and 10 years after independence, there is one question that you will hear from the lips of everyone in West Bengal: will 1943 be repeated? Already in Calcutta, you will see peasant families, women with little emaciated babies in their arms, driven by hunger and unemployment, trekking the streets of Calcutta, hoping that they will be able somehow to eke out an existence, if not by work, at least by begging.

From my own constituency of Sunderbans, I have seen an entire family which has come away from Minakha, from Harwa. If you go to Sham Bazar in the northern outskirts of the city, under the Balliaghat bridge span, you will find there little sheds. Only the other day in answer to a question, the hon. Minister of Rehabilitation said that all the refugees staying in Sealdah—a very large number—have now been added on by those who are now coming from outside because of hunger.

In the streets and by-lanes of Calcutta, you can hear the shrill cry: "Give us a handful of rice". To us, Calcutta dwellers, it gives a chill which runs down our backs as we remember those terrible days of 1943 when we used to hear the frantic appeals of tens of thousands of people who just wanted a handful of *kanji*.

The most amazing is the way the Government has played about with the entire question of food. I charge the Government that it is they who are responsible for the terrible condition as it exists today. It is man-made largely, of course now aggravated by the drought conditions that have developed in my State. It has brought tremendous suffering and starvation to millions of our people. I say this because you will find that rice is there. In certain parts of our State itself as well as in various other States in India, there have been bumper crops and yet today, can we not ask why people starve?

The first stock answer which is given to us is that there have been floods and that is why production has been affected. I do not deny that in certain areas, there has been lowering of the production figures. But, what about the overall figure? For instance, we have just been supplied by the West Bengal Government the figures which show that the increase in the average production during the first five years after independence was only 2.25 lakhs and in the next 5 years, it was over 6.5 lakh tons. Only the other day, I was reading a very remarkable article which appeared in the *Hindustan Standard* and that showed the answer very clearly to the stock arguments that have been trotted out that there has been lowering of the production. Actually, during 1956-57, whilst the population has been estimated to have increased by 9 per cent, they say that rice production improved by 21 per cent and the price of rice went up by 37 per cent over 1949-50.

Not only that; we are told now that the cultivator has now become richer by the higher price for his produce and consumes more rice. A very interesting sort of plea has been put forward by the Asoka Mehta Committee where they say that during the last few years, the production of food-grains in the country has shown an upward trend but the per capita consumption has declined as compared to pre-war years. Therefore, to say that people are consuming more because they have more money and not to go to the crux of the matter is, I think, trying to avoid the issue and that is exactly what our Government has done.

I should like to point out that we have tried again and again, both at the Centre and in the State, to show that there has been an amount of hoarding. I remember at one time in 1956, if I remember correctly, it was in July or September or a little later, when we asked two supplementary questions in this House, when we asked our Food and Agriculture Minister, Shri Jain, whether he was contemplating to take action against the hoarding, he said that Government did not think it necessary.

What has been the result? This year, as we have heard, in Andhra there has been a bumper crop unlike any they have seen for many years, and yet we know that much of that is being cornered by the trade, by the millers and it is outside our scope. When we had a meeting with the Food Minister, I remember, I told him that in the Sunderbans areas, certain parts of it had been affected by floods but certain other parts had a very good bumper crop and I have seen with my own eyes that hundreds of cartloads, lorryloads and boatloads of rice going away and taken away by the trade. We are told that it has been smuggled across to Pakistan. What is the use of telling us so at this late stage, when we are already facing a very serious situation?

A very interesting answer was given on the 30th August, 1956, to a

[Shrimati Renu Chakravartty]

question of Shri Khub Chand Sodhia. It was stated in the answer that the Central Government had bought in 1955, 123,500 tons of foodgrains from the open market in India but in 1956 they had only bought 2,21,000 tons. What is the reason for it? It was an amazing figure that was given and I am afraid it escaped our notice at that time. This has been going on for a very long time. I have looked up the statement which was placed on the Table of this House in August 1956 by Dr. Deshmukh and he said that there has been steady increase in prices of rice in the south, and what is the way out that he suggests? He says, 'The Government of India have already taken the following measures to check the rising tendency in the prices of foodgrains in the country', and No. 2 is the stoppage of purchase of foodgrains by Government in the internal market.

I say this because today, the Central Government and the State Government and, of course, the people are faced with this situation, when there is a tremendous shortage and the people have lost the purchasing power. We are unable to give them rice at a level of price at which they can buy it. What help is given from the Government will be in the form of gratuitous relief and subsidised rationing. Rs. 17/8 and Rs. 16/- are high even for a large portion of the people living in the cities and far more so for those who live in the villages.

Imports have been slashed down; that is known to everybody. Now we are in the position of having to buy at a far higher rate and the whole basis of the Plan almost gets upset. People are taxed more because they say that the Plan is floundering and they have to be taxed more. But, who has actually created this situation? I say that it is the food policy of the Government of India

This year in my State it is an amazing position that on August 21, a few days before the promulgation of the Ordinance for the seizing of food-

grains, Shri P. C. Sen, the Minister of Food and Agriculture in my State, said: 'I do not deny the existence of hoarders.' He said that there were only a few. It was only after a great amount of agitation was there that....

The Minister of Food and Agriculture (Shri A. P. Jain): On a point of order, Sir. Should this House discuss a statement made by the Minister of a State who is not present here to answer the points raised?

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: I am not saying anything except that he has said in his communic.....

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: We cannot discuss the statement. But, sometimes, to support their assertions reference can be made to what the Minister has stated. We cannot discuss it.

Shri Punnoose (Ambalapuzha): Am I to understand that the hon. Minister will not defend his counterpart in this House?

Shri A. P. Jain: He does not need any defence

An hon. Member: I think he needs defence.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: I do not think any explanatory statement is needed. He has, in his statement to the Press, said that he did not deny that. Not only that. I can quote our hon. friend Shri A. K. Sen, the Law Minister. He said that there was not very much of hoarding over there. We know that today the position is that the amount that has been hoarded is more than what was stated at the first instance even by the Food and Agriculture Minister of my State. We know what has happened after the Ordinance.

I hope the hon. Food Minister will note this. In Midnapur there was a hoarded stock of rice. Some say it was even 20 lakh mds. in the 65 mills of the district. In June, 1957, the Mill Owners Association did offer to give 4 lakh mds of rice at Rs. 15/- if the Government would supply wagons.

When Shri Sarju Roy, M.L.A. asked on the floor of the Assembly, our Food Minister remained silent. When the Ordinance was promulgated and the hoard was seized, it was found that in the whole district there were only 1 lakh mds. which were available. It is in the papers and nobody has refuted it. The *Ananda Bazar Patrika* has given details as to how the hoards are slipping out even in places where they have been frozen. This is a matter which is of concern to the people of Bengal because the Ordinance itself says that there was some stock hoarding. Today we know that they have all gone underground and the Government machinery is all corrupt and it is not able to check it.

In the statement that has been given to us today we find certain remarks made which show that Government itself has realised how much corruption there is and what is the state of distribution in my State. The entire history of the Supply Directorate has shown that the atta that is put into the Supply Directorate's Wagons, when it comes out, it is something else and it is inedible. During the last 2 months people have said that the atta you give from the modified ration shops is impossible to eat. Then, again, even that atta has not been available in the shops. When we raised it with the hon. Deputy Minister of the Union Government, he told us that he had given enough atta and yet we find no atta there. So, this is another question which has to be resolved. We have seen the modified ration shops, we have seen the fair price shops and all these and we are sceptical about this.

Price too is very important in this respect because a large portion of the people have lost the purchasing power, especially so in the districts, because we have had drought conditions. And, as the hon. Minister himself has acknowledged in his statement, at this time of the year, it is the landless labourers, the poor peasantry and even others, even a part of the rich

peasantry is being affected because they have not been able to carry on cultivation. Of special difficulty has been the fate of agricultural labour and poor peasantry. The question of giving relief has assumed great importance. From the statement I find that 25 per cent has to be earmarked for relief.

There are very few modified ration shops. The other actual factor of objective reality is that people who are actually starving cannot buy because of what of wherewithal and the question of test relief has become very important. I have heard from some of the villages in my constituency that they are starving to the extent that they are unable to get one meal a day. There are cases where people have even sold their children. Such extreme cases are there. The position is very desperate. That is why the question of relief is very important.

A few days ago, there was a remarkable article in the *Statesman* from Murshidabad. A reporter of that paper went to one of the pawn brokers and he said: "If I had enough money, within three hours of the opening of the shop, I could purchase gold and silver worth Rs. 20,000. Even after the floods people did not part with their valuables. But, since June this year, the position has gone much beyond their power." That is the true position.

That is why I want to plead with the hon. Minister. When he lays down a policy, he has to realise that a very large part of the people in the districts are unable to take the rice which he is going to give through Government rationing shops. That is why the question of giving relief has assumed so much importance. Even in the city of Calcutta, the demand is that it should be Rs. 15 per maund and not more than that because even there today the middle class and the lower middle-class are unable to purchase at higher rates than that.

On September 8, we find the price of coarse rice is Rs 28 and that of

[Shrimati Renu Chakravartty]

fine rice is Rs. 33 per maund. Our biggest festivals, the pujas are approaching. The children are waiting, hoping that for these few weeks in the year, they are going to enjoy. Today, fine rice is selling at Rs. 33; there has been an increase of Rs. 4 or Rs. 5 in the last one month in the rationing shops. I find that there has been an increase in the rationing shops but in a large number of these shops, rice is not available

As a matter of fact, I have got a letter from my mother and she says that for the last two or three days, she has been going round and round only to get some atta. She says:

"We can purchase it at usual rates. But, I am unable to get even a little bit of atta and only with a great deal of trouble I got some from the *chakiwala*. But that is so mixed that it is almost impossible to eat it. But, what can we do? We have to eat this inedible."

This is the letter from my mother which I got yesterday. If this is the condition of my family, you can imagine what the condition is in the families of those who are unable to buy from outside sources. This is the position as far as Calcutta goes.

We have to give up the complacency. When I heard Shri A. K. Sen's statement yesterday and also when I read the statement made by Shri P. C. Sen, West Bengal's Food Minister, I was amazed at their attitude. We are told that we are going to get 80,000 tons of wheat and 20,000 tons of rice for Bengal. We are glad that the hon. Minister has said that he was giving all that the West Bengal had asked for. We have to see that people in the whole of Calcutta, in the industrial belt get their rations. Without that, it is not possible to check the anti-social tendencies that are continuing

All of us have been enumerated for ration cards some two or three weeks

ago. But, even today we have not got the ration cards. On paper the hon. Minister will be able to say that so many people have been issued ration cards. If you check it up, you will find how few are the people who have got these ration cards.

The amount that has been stipulated here is nine ounces per day. That is the central quota. But the total quota which is to be given from these shops is one seer of rice and one seer of atta. This is completely insufficient. At least three seers per adult should be given.

It has been stated that we are going to have approved shops. But, how are going to check these shops? We have been told that there is going to be a better system of inspection to check the distributive machinery. What is this overhauling of the distributive machinery? Meanwhile stocks are going into the black market and hoarders profit. People are suffering. What is the step we are taking. We know how these hoarders have links with many of the Ministers and that is why they are rushing and are circumventing all the laws.

Consumers' resistance is sought to be built up by means of publicising the prices and in some other ways. I want to say this. Let the names of the firms and individuals who have stocked rice and from whom they have been seized and also the names of firms for which advance had been given against stocks of rice be made public. If there is any hoarding, let stern measures be taken against them. The Preventive Detention Act which has been used against political parties be used, as long as it is on the statute book, against such people. It has been said that it is going to be used against anti-social people. Let it be used. Let us not hear from the mouths of Ministers that there is no hoarding.

If there is no hoarding, where have things gone? We have rice; we have atta but where have they gone. Even today, people of Bengal are suffering.

The prices have not gone down in spite of the efforts of the Union Minister. We are not yet safe; the position is bad and with all the steps taken by the Government till now, it has gone from bad to worse. We have not been able to tackle it.

The question of relief is of foremost importance. If the hon. Minister is hopeful about the *aman* crops, I want to disillusion him. Even in those districts where we have got *aman* crops, not more than 25 per cent of the crops will be there and unless new steps are taken and new loans are given—it again depends upon the whims of the State Governments—I am afraid we cannot depend upon the *aman* crop. That is why it is a long-drawn out agony through which we in Bengal are going to pass through and that is why the State and the Union Governments and the people should co-operate to eliminate corruption, hoarding and other malpractices prevalent which lead to destitution, starvation and misery of our people

Dr. R. Banerji (Bankura) Sir, I thank you very much for giving me some time for expressing my views in connection with the food situation, especially in my own State of West Bengal. It is causing a great headache to the people and also to the Government. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to allow the debate on this particular subject of food so many times.

The policy of food, as is being followed by the Government at least this year, is found to be one of vacillation. That vacillation began from the very beginning and it is still continuing.

The position that has been created, which could be called more or less critical, in connection with food, especially with respect to my State of West Bengal, I should say, can be divided into different stages. The first is a stage of, say, complacency. Before March 1957 we were given to understand that by the First five

Year Plan we have produced enough food and we have arranged for such a large production that only a small import from outside will be sufficient for our consumption, and we need not bother about food in the Second Five Year Plan, simply we should direct our attention for industrialisation of the country. That complacency was not only in the Government but it was also there in the public.

Within a short time, after March or April 1957, the bubble of complacency exploded, and it was found that foodgrains were neither easily available nor were they sold at prices at which they used to be sold before. As a result, there was a sort of demand for food. Then the Central Government *vis-a-vis* the State Governments came forward with statements that we are not in dearth of food and that we can supply any amount whenever necessary. This may be called the stage of assurances. But these assurances either from the State Governments or from the Central Government did not bring down the prices, and the prices went on soaring. There were many deputations and representatives met the Central Food Minister. Further assurances were given then that we would be able to meet the situation.

But, within a short time people used to be given advices, especially in my State, that they should change their habits, that they should switch on from taking more rice to partially taking wheat and partially rice. When this statement came out, practically speaking, the price of available rice became very very high, and this high price was beyond the reach of many people. This produced an agitation. There was agitation amongst the people who were not getting rice, agitation by the people who were interested, or who were having vested interest over the food policy, and it was even made a sort of a political issue. As a result the agitation was very large.

It was always stated by the different parties, and even supported by

[Dr. R. Banerji]

Government, that it is the hoarders who are responsible for making food not available to the people or making their price very high. As a result, practically speaking I should say, Government was made an easy prey to these kinds of statements. It was actually believed that there was a large amount of hoarding of food. At least I should like to say that I was given to understand in the area in which I was living that there are lakhs and lakhs maunds of rice which are being hoarded either by the mill-owners, or by parties taking advances from the Reserve Bank etc., or by people who have earned a lot in this profession and they have been keeping large quantity of food away from the market.

The Government, without taking into consideration all the facts that were put into circulation, also believed in these statements and went on with the Bill for seizure of the essential commodities etc. Actually, when the seizure came in, they found that in Calcutta they could not even get sufficient quantity of food to supply the needs of Calcutta for three or four days. In the district towns it was not found to meet the demands of a day even. But this seizure caused a great unrest. That unrest is still continuing because of the absence of a determined policy on the part of the Government and the existence of the same vacillating spirit.

Why? Because as a result of the seizure of stocks what has happened is that the mills are practically closed. They are not purchasing paddy. The producers might have a certain amount of excess which they would like to sell away before the next harvesting season. But there are no buyers. The millowners are not inclined to buy. They say, we do not know actually what the intention of the Government is, what price the Government is going to fix. As a result of that the growers have got a certain amount of excess which are remaining with them. The millowners

are not purchasing any paddy and they have practically closed their mills. Consequently the people are not getting rice. The consumers are feeling difficulty in getting rice. They are paying very high prices. That is why I say that the same vacillating policy of the Government in connection with food is still continuing as it is, which began in the beginning of 1957.

Today I have heard the hon. Minister has made some statement in connection with the supply of food to West Bengal, so many thousands of tons partially in wheat and partially in rice. Whatever it may be, I am sure, it might be very well distributed or may not be very well distributed in Calcutta, in the rural areas the distress and suffering of the people is immense. I can tell you that rice is never being sold below Rs. 23 a maund in any district. Of course, the Government has opened a few fair-price shops. But the quality of rice that is being supplied there is not fit for human consumption, it should be called 'cattle fodder'. I am sure even the cattle will feel shy to take that rice when it is boiled. As a result of that large quantity of food which is available to the poor people is sold at the rate of Rs. 23 a maund. You can just imagine the fate of the poor people during these days when rice is sold at Rs. 23 a maund, when there is so much scarcity and inflation in the country. Test relief works are going on. A man employed there is only expected to get Rs. 1|4|-. A couple working together simply on earth digging or some such thing, if they have four children and for Rs. 1-4-0 if they get 1½ seers of rice at the rate I mentioned, is it sufficient for 24 hours to keep six souls alive? Of course the Government will always deny starvation deaths, but it is undoubtedly causing malnutrition. In spite of the fact that there are certain stocks still left with the growers, the mills are sitting idle and large quantities of rice can

still be made available in the market, as a result of the seizure that is not made available.

Another effect that the seizure of foodgrains has produced is that, practically, the Government has been compelled to accept a higher price for food than it was prevailing in the market. Practically speaking, it has committed to pay at an average of the last three months' market price which comes to Rs. 22 or Rs. 21-8-0 a maund. That has also become another hardship to the consumers, and the Government is not in a position to supply them in large quantities.

Therefore, my humble prayer for the rural people is that the Government be requested to go in a planned way from the very beginning. Without depending on hearsay, without simply depending upon calculation with pen and pencil by the officers the Government should actually try to find out what is the production in the different States, and what is the production in the whole country, what will be the expected production, what is the actual production, what will be our requirements and how much we will be required to import. Without doing these things in a proper and determined way, this type of vacillation is causing much hardship to the people in the rural areas. My friend Shrimati Renu Chakravartty just now said that her mother is not getting flour. That is in Calcutta. I can say that hundreds of people like that in rural areas are not getting rice, and the rice that is made available at the fair-price shops is uneatable.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The hon. Member should try to conclude now.

Dr. R. Banerji: Thank you very much, Sir. More than that I have got nothing to say.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Shri T. K. Chaudhuri: I would request the hon. Members to condense their remarks within ten minutes.

Shri T. K. Chaudhuri (Berhampore): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, a few weeks ago, while participating in the

discussion on another subject relating to West Bengal, I had the occasion to call West Bengal, a Godforsaken province. I cannot refer here to the State Government, but so far as the Central Government is concerned, although we are aware that the Central Food Minister has been active recently in the matter of meeting the situation in West Bengal, it has been our misfortune that somehow or other the woes of West Bengal are not noticed here.

I will give you some instances from the Address of the President to Parliament. There, the food situation and food scarcity in three or four States were mentioned. But unfortunately in West Bengal we had an unprecedented flood last year; we had drought. All the four successive crops including the *rain* crop this year failed, but our food situation, our difficulties, failed to find any mention in that Address. Of course, when we brought that to the notice of the hon. Food Minister, he met us, the Members of Parliament from West Bengal, in an informal meeting. He did that a second time, also, but we cannot say that these confabulations have brought much result.

The speaker who preceded me suggested by way of reference to the complacency of the Government. I fail to understand, the responsibilities of these governments for maintaining the supply of food in the country being what they are, how they could remain complacent to the series of misfortunes that have overtaken West Bengal. One of the main factors in the situation is that they have always depended upon certain paper calculations. I tried to bring certain facts to the notice of the Government, but unfortunately I do not know what has happened with regard to my suggestions. Originally and even early this year, the food situation in West Bengal was acute, but not what it is today. There was actual failure of crops in three districts Murshidabad, Nadia and 24 Parganas and even in these three districts, there were limited regions, pockets so to say, which

[Shri T. K. Chaudhuri]

were affected by drought or floods, and if supplies could be rushed to these places in time, then perhaps we would not have witnessed the scenes that we are witnessing today.

Language fails to describe the misery that is stalking West Bengal both in the countryside and even in urban areas. I would refer to one case recently in Calcutta where husband and wife were found soliciting for selling the body of the wife. They pleaded in court that they had no other alternative and they were starving for several days. I would request the hon. Minister and every Member in this House to go through the judgment that was given in that case by the magistrate of that court. Not only is this an isolated case. The hon. Minister has referred to the question of refugees who have not been rehabilitated. Do you know what is the actual position of refugees in Sealdah Station today? How many people are dying every day? I made that statement sometime ago and it was challenged by the hon. Minister of Rehabilitation that my statement was not correct. Every paper published the facts on which my statement was based. Papers publish photographs. We fail to understand what are the avenues and what are the ways in which we have to bring the facts of our misery before the Government. There is sheer starvation. It is no longer a shadow of famine. Famine is stalking round the countryside in the three districts which he has mentioned—24 Parganas, Nadia and Murshidabad. I hope our friend Shrimati Ila Palchoudhuri will presently describe the conditions in Nadia. In all these three districts, it is not merely distress; it is not merely scarcity or acute food condition; it is real famine, full-scale famine and starvation by death that is actually prevailing. That is why I implore the Government not to rest satisfied with supplying what requisitions the West Bengal Government have made. They have their own agencies; they have their own responsibilities. I am not concerned here

with what the West Bengal Government is doing or not doing. But I think, although I do not know whether the hon. Minister will agree with me, that this Government, the Central Government, has also a responsibility for keeping up supplies there at least to see that people get food and that food is made available to them. That is what we can expect and we hope that they will do it at least. That is their responsibility under the Constitution, at least that is as we have understood the Constitution.

Far be it from me to hold out any threats. But let nobody understand me amiss. The situation is really much more serious than the government think. Already isolated instances of food riots have occurred and people will not this time submit to these hardships quietly. This much at least I am very certain of. I would implore upon the Minister to realise this. I from this side can speak on behalf of my Communist friends and of all Opposition parties in West Bengal; particularly, all of us—not only in the Opposition benches—every Member of Parliament from West Bengal belonging to every party will be prepared to co-operate with this Government and with the State Government to find a solution for this problem. The situation is much more serious than what we find described here in the statement. I would implore upon the Government to take note of that fact.

Shrimati Ila Palchoudhuri: (Nabadwip): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, when the Calling Attention Motion came up before this House and the names were stated, it would have been realised that this is a question that has crossed all party barriers, and where West Bengal is concerned, as the hon. speaker opposite just now said, I think all parties and everybody in West Bengal will be prepared to co-operate with the Government to tide over the serious situation.

Before I come to my own particular constituency, I want to put one or two points to the Minister. When

we think of prices, there are two aspects about food prices, we have to consider, food prices as received by the grower and the food prices as paid by the consumer. In India these two prices fluctuate with a big margin and very often, the grower does not get as much as the consumers pay. So, the Government must find a way to have some sort of stabilisation of the prices. We find that the poor peasants do not have money to buy the wherewithals of life and the consumers also have been put to great disadvantage, having to pay as much as Rs. 27 or Rs. 28 per maund for rice. Even in my district in Nadia, in the very place I stay, namely, Swarupganj, a few days back the price of rice rose to Rs. 27 per maund. In spite of the fairprice shops that have been opened by the Government, the people are badly in need of relief in West Bengal.

15 hrs.

After the Food Minister's visit to Calcutta, we were very happy to hear that 80,000 tons of rice would be made available for West Bengal. But I want to submit that not only the fairprice shops be opened, but relief must be given, because we cannot really depend on the *aus* and *aman* crop that we are hoping for. There is a saying in Bengal that it is only when "Lakshmi comes into the house that we can be sure of her". This year we cannot be sure of Lakshmi at all. She is crying in the fields of Bengal and I do not know how we can bring her into our homes. In rural areas of Bengal, the price of rice has to be brought down.

In small district towns where you have opened a certain number of fairprice shops, my suggestion is you open more fairprice shops in the interior, so that the stocks taken away from the small district towns are not again depleted, because the small district population is put to a great deal of hardship.

I would like to bring to the notice of the House certain other facts also. The Minister said in his statement

today that practically a crore of ration cards might be made available. Already there are some thousands. The figure goes into astronomical numbers. I would like to point out that although ration cards are available, there is not the money to buy the rations. All these ration cards may be there, but what good is the ration card if I am not able to take the rice at Rs. 17-8-0 a maund and wheat at Rs. 15 a maund and if the money is not there to buy it at that price? I will give you one example. Of course, it is from a communist paper *Swadhinta*, but it happens to be true, which is not always the case. But I know the district myself and so I corroborate their opinion that in Swarupganj union itself, which is a union of about 16,000 people, ration cards have been issued, but about half the number have not been able to take any rations on them. Actually speaking, only 5,200 people have been able to take the rations on their ration cards and the rest 10,400 have not been able to take rations at all. So, that means that they are practically on a very low subsistence level, and that would apply to 70 per cent people of Nadia.

Of course, the paper has also put in some extraneous matter which really cannot come into the picture. I come from that district and my coming from that district can only have that effect that I can bring this position to the notice of the hon. Minister. I hope that my name being put into that column will have this effect that the Minister will take note of the fact that the ration cards might be there, but the money to buy the rations is not in the hands of the rural population. So, right up to December you must continue your test relief work. Relief work must go on in spite of every kind of ration shop that you may open. Of course, the Centre has been generous; 80,000 tons of rice have been promised and I hope all the help that the Centre can give will be forthcoming. But the relief question must really be in the mind of the Centre; relief should

[Shrimati Ila Palchoudhuri]

not be stopped, because it is only on that slender thread that the life of the rural population of West Bengal is hanging today.

It is really true that the dire want is rice in West Bengal. If you look at the faces of the peasantry and their emaciated bodies, you will know that ration shops and ration cards cannot help them, because there is no money in their hands. I will also pose a long-term policy to the Minister. Although irrigation projects are there, the common peasant has never felt the effect of it. He has never been able to take any advantage of the irrigation facilities. Therefore, I would say that the D.V.C. and other project waters should be available for the next three years without any kind of cess or tax to convince the peasant that it is doing them good. Unless that is done, I do not think we can increase the production and increasing production is the only way in which one can ultimately tide over this situation. Also, there should be quick carriage of things like vegetables and fruit crops, apart from foodgrains, because it is only by these crops that the peasantry will get a little money at least in their hands to utilise the ration cards that have been made available to them.

In West Bengal today the dire necessity of carrying on relief work cannot be over-stressed. I hope that the Minister will consider these aspects and see that West Bengal does not really have a repetition of the 1943 famine. As my hon. friend, Shri T. K. Choudhuri, has said, it is true that there have been small food riots. I have myself been confronted with 400 or 500 people standing ready to loot any food lorry that went by. It was only after much persuasion and many promises by the District Magistrate and myself that they were persuaded to go back and the lorry was not looted. But these things have started happening. It is something that the Centre and the State Government must take

note of, join hands and co-operate in every way to tide over this situation. I am sure in this respect there will be no political barriers and I hope every co-operation will be assured from all political parties to tide over this great crisis in West Bengal and save the people.

Shri Ghosal (Uluberia): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, of course, I am not going to describe the misery of West Bengal and the food scarcity there, because the previous speakers have already described it. Only the root cause why the people of West Bengal came to the threshold of this situation has to be taken into consideration.

First of all, the defect was in the jugglery of statistics, because from the month of May, we have been hearing in this House that there is sufficient production of food and production has been so much that there is no reason for any apprehension that there would be food scarcity anywhere in this country and if in any part there is scarcity, food can be rushed from the Centre. If that was the position, we do not know why for this long time we have been hearing complaints about food scarcity in West Bengal and why so long no steps were taken by the Centre, so that this situation could not have happened in West Bengal. For that, the statistics on which our hon. Food Minister depended should be re-examined.

When the hon. Minister went to Calcutta and addressed a meeting of Congress workers, he admitted that now there was food shortage not only in India, but he advised them to look to the world food shortage. About a few months ago this was not admitted by him. That has to be looked into. Only because of that self-complacency this situation has been created and West Bengal is now on the threshold of famine.

As regards immediate relief, I beg to submit that the best relief should

be immediately rendered to the people of these districts, namely, Murshidabad, 24 Parganas, Nadia and so on. The cultivators in all these places should be immediately given loans, because the rains have been delayed and now they are going to sow the seeds. All sorts of loans should be given to them, so that they can cultivate their land at this late stage. It should also be seen that these people from the villages do not rush to the streets for dying on the pavements.

Regarding blackmarketing and hoarding, we were assured that the Reserve Bank has issued orders that no advances should be made to the traders for hoarding of foodgrains. But the West Bengal Government has issued a statistics and from it it is found that the advances have not yet decreased but have increased. I am quoting from page 4 of "Facts and Figures about West Bengal's Food Problem". It reads:

"Early in June this year, the Reserve Bank issued a directive to all scheduled Banks in the country to the effect that in respect of each credit limit and advances against the security of foodgrains, a margin of not less than 40 per cent of the value of the foodgrains should be maintained and that Banks should maintain an aggregate level of credit against foodgrains in such a way that by July 12, and in every week thereafter, the level will be in respect of paddy and rice not more than 86-2/3 per cent and in regard to other foodgrains not more than 75 per cent of the level obtaining in the corresponding week in 1956. The Reserve Bank further instructed the Banks not to sanction any fresh credit limit to any party in excess of Rs. 50,000 against foodgrains, not permit existing limits for amounts below Rs. 50,000 against such securities to be increased beyond this figure. The Reserve Bank issued this directive because it thought that though advances

against rice and paddy at the end of April, 1957 were 84 per cent of the April 1956 level, this April 1956 level was itself abnormally high and advances against wheat, gram and pulses which in April 1957 remained at the level of April 1956, recorded a marked increase in the first fortnight of May 1957."

So, the advances have registered an increase and not a decrease. Therefore, the Central Government should instruct the West Bengal Government to take serious steps so that the accumulated rice and paddy, which is still in the custody of these boarders, can be brought out in the market for sale.

As stated by the hon. Members who have preceded me, we are all agreeable to co-operate with the Government in tiding over this distress. But, after tiding over this distress, I would request the Food Minister at the Centre, not to sit complacently with the statistics that would be supplied to him by his office, but to go round and visit the areas, see the local leaders and devise ways and means so that in future such things do not happen.

Shri Barman (Cooch Behar-Reserved-Sch. Castes): I have read the statement made this morning by the hon. Food Minister and I am happy for the last para of that statement, wherein he has stated:

"Hon members will agree that the West Bengal Government have, for a considerable time, been facing a very difficult and complex situation."

My complaint is just the reverse. While we, who represent the public, are trying to convince the Government—by Government I mean both the West Bengal Government and the Central Government—that the food situation is not happy, it is acute and it will be growing more acute as days pass by unless timely steps are taken.

[Shri Barman]

we are told that it is not so. So, I am happy that the hon. Minister has told the members of this House that West Bengal had been passing through a serious food situation for a considerable time past. Had this realisation been a little earlier, a few months earlier, it seems to me, this situation would not have arisen and I shall give you the reasons for that.

In the 1943 great famine of Bengal when, according to Government statistics, 35 lakhs of people died in the streets out of hunger, we have seen one thing and that is, if timely action is not taken, food prices go up, and once they go up, with all its powers, Government cannot bring them down. Many of the members who have spoken before me have stressed the fact that food prices are not coming down. Once the food price goes up, it shall not come down because of certain factors

Every hon. Member and the Government will agree with me when I say that whatever rationing system there may be, whatever quantity of rice may be sold through fair price shops, it meets with just a fraction of the demand. So rice will have to be purchased from the open market. It cannot be supplied by Government. We cannot supply their full requirement and everyone cannot go to the fair price shops. Now what happens? Through the fair price shops and the ration shops we supply those needy persons who cannot purchase in the open market. We give them just nine ounces, which is just sufficient for a meal, not for a day. We give him half ration. The rest of it he has to procure. Whether it is coarse grain or rice, whether it is vegetables or even jungle herbs, he has to procure it; we are not supplying them. They have to purchase them from the open market.

It has been stated on the floor of the House by some members that the rice that is supplied there through the

fair price shops are not edible. Perhaps there is some exaggeration. But there is truth in it. Certain quantities of it are such that they are not edible. Then, so far as Bengal is concerned, unfortunately, if anybody has got money, he will take to rice at any cost. So far as other States are concerned, those who are accustomed to take coarse grains such as bajra and other grains and pulses, if those grains are not available, they will take to finer grains. But, so far as Bengal is concerned, it is unfortunate that they stick up to rice though the hon. Minister has stated that they are taking to wheat gradually. But we have seen even during the 1943 famine that even if rice is not available, they will never take to other grains.

Then there is another difficulty. Government can only supply a fraction of the needs of the population, whether it is rice or wheat or any other grain. The rest they have to purchase from the open market. Once you introduce fair price shops and rationing, the climate of scarcity at once starts and the hoarders won't sell their stocks unless they get higher prices. Gradually, the prices go up. So, what I am contending is this. If Government had been anxious early and if they had studied the situation and made a proper assessment of the whole situation, given ration cards to those people who are needy and who will have to go to fair price shops some day and not try to meet the situation after the acuteness has developed prices would not have risen so high.

In this report we find that Government is contemplating—it is also said that the West Bengal Government is just studying the situation—to increase the number from 77 lakhs to one crore. But they are not doing it now. I do not know whether they have any difficulties of supply. But if Government have got the supply, as they profess to have in this report, they should not lose time until the situation becomes more acute, because

that will lead to further increase of the price of rice in the open market.

My complaint is that Government perhaps thought that the situation in West Bengal so far as food is concerned, is not so acute, while we from our own experience knew months before that the situation was becoming graver and graver. I fail to understand one thing. When we approach Government they say there is no fear, there is enough stock; but if there is enough of stock why are not adequate arrangements made in time so that the situation does not become acute. I do not wish to reiterate the statements that have been made by other Members on the floor of the House, but we are getting reports in the newspapers of the things which we actually experienced at the time when the Bengal famine was approaching. In the course of a week the price of rice at Calcutta went up from Rs. 7 to Rs. 14. That was a peculiar situation and after that it could not be brought down. That is a factor which I want Government to be cautious about even at this late hour.

It is hoped that in December the lean period would terminate. But we shall have to watch the situation and feed those who are in want of food and who have to purchase from the market the whole of January. So far as Bengal is concerned the *aus* crop has practically failed; it is just a fraction of our rice crop. Until the *aman* crop comes to the market this acute situation will continue and these lean months will continue.

I do not wish to say anything more. I would only request Government now that they are conscious of the acute situation that is developing in Bengal they should be prepared to meet it and not just wait and see how things shape. Once the situation in Bengal is allowed to develop to an acute stage things will become more and more tense and it will be very difficult for Government to tackle it. I apprehend as Shrimati Ila Palchou-

dhuri said—the situation will not be so easy as in the last famine of 1943, but it will be a grave and serious one.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: I find some hon. Members are trying to rise. Under our rules when a discussion is to take place previous notice has to be given by the Members who wish to take part.

Shri Pramathanath Banerjee (Contai): Hon. Members who have preceded me have given the House an idea of the food situation in Bengal. The hon. the Food Minister has himself admitted that the food situation in Bengal is bad and he has kindly promised that he would supply us food so that Bengal may tide over the bad situation.

I only wish to draw the attention of the hon. Food Minister to the experiences that we got in the last famine situation in 1943. At that time rice or paddy was not wanting in the market, but it was the high prices that made it difficult for people to buy it. I am afraid of the situation that we met with in 1943 recurring this year. Whatever food stocks the real agriculturists have got will be requisitioned and poor people will not be able to get food for want of money and for want of purchasing power in their hands.

In 1943-44 there were many large hoarders of food. The hoarders were crafty and they used to conceal their hoards in such a manner that it was difficult for Government to find out the hoards of food. They accumulated so much of money that some of them were worth Rs. 30 lakhs or Rs. 40 lakhs. Such people conceal stocks and sell their stocks at high prices. At that time I know paddy was being sold at Rs. 25 per maund. In the constituency from which I come, Contai sub-division, paddy is being sold at Rs. 17 or Rs. 18 a maund. The rice that is being supplied from the fair price shops is so bad that it is not fit for human consumption. I would request the hon. Minister to see that people are not allowed to hoard stocks to sell them at exorbi-

[Shri Pramathanath Banerjee]

tant prices later. I have information that every week the price of paddy is rising up, because the supply of food to the fair price shops has not been regular. Though the rice is bad poor people go to the fair price shops, but do not get food sometimes. The rice received by the fair price shops lasts only for a week or ten days and for about a fortnight the shops are left without any stock whatsoever.

This sort of things should at once be stopped, so that there may be a regular supply of rice, whether good or bad. That is the concern of the Government, but it must be kept in the shop.

There is another class of persons who are the middle class persons. They have neither paddy in their house nor money in their pockets. These persons are very hard hit, and I think Government should make some arrangement of giving loans, so that they may get food with the help of those loans.

Other things have been referred to by my friends and I do not wish to dilate upon them. I have spoken on some matters on which I feel much concern, and I hope the hon. the Food Minister will see that the people of Bengal do not die of starvation.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Mr. Guha

Shri Sadhan Gupta (Calcutta-East): May I make a request? If the list of persons who have already given their names is exhausted and there is still time, then the technical objection may be waived and the others might be allowed to speak.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: That will be waived if there is such a situation.

Shri A. C. Guha (Barasat): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, the hon. the Food Minister made a long statement this morning on the floor of this House. I am sure every Member from West Bengal must have read this statement carefully. I can see he has tried to meet the situation as far as it goes by the supply of foodgrains

as demanded by the West Bengal Government. But I am sorry this statement does not contain any reference to some very relevant and important matters on which I am sure every Member from West Bengal would like to have some assurance from the hon. Minister.

It has been almost openly admitted that the foodgrains supplied to the fair price shops were finding their way to the black market and corrupt practice was rather the regular feature in the fair price shops than being exceptions. I do not know what assurance the hon. Minister can give us that the foodgrains that he will now be supplying for the ration shops or fair price shops will not also find their way into the black market and that there will not be any profiteering through corrupt practice with these foodgrains which he may be able to supply to the West Bengal Government.

I think his statement is lacking in another important matter. Last year's production of rice in West Bengal is 43 lakh tons, which is about 2 lakh tons more than the previous year. It may be said that not only West Bengal but the whole of India had almost a record production of foodgrains last year. So it is somewhat enigmatic to be told that with that record production of rice in West Bengal there is so much scarcity or there is so much high price prevailing in the market. His statement does not give any explanation for this.

The hon. the Food Minister would recollect that on many previous occasions he has stated that there must have been some hoarding, and hoarding may be at three levels—with the primary growers, with the middlemen or trades and with the mill sowners. Recently, the mill-owners have exposed that there is not much foodgrains hoarded with the mill-owners of Calcutta. It should be realised that that is less than even one week's consumption for the people of Calcutta. And I think into the bargain, the trade channel has more

or less been blocked. We find also demonstrations being led by the colleagues of Shrimati Renu Chakravarty, of the rice mill workers asking for work and food. Naturally, if the rice mills cannot work, about fifty or sixty thousand workers go idle. I do not know how the Central Government could have agreed to this step without being sure of the stock that they might have been able to seize. In this matter I do not like to be very reticulous in criticising the Government, but yet I should say that was not a wise measure taken by the Government.

To come back to my point of hoarding if there is no hoarding with the mill-owners, Government should find out what is the position with the other two sectors, namely the middlemen and the farmers. The Act passed by this House recently has apparently been defective. Only yesterday or the day before that, I think, the Act was amended to a certain extent to meet the situation created by the seizure of rice from the Calcutta rice mills. But the main defect in this Act is about the fixation of price of the rice seized. At that price I think it would be practically impossible or imprudent on the part of the Government to seize the rice. At one stage I know the traders who were importing rice from the other States were rather eager that the rice lying at the railway station might be seized by the West Bengal Government. If the Government are determined to take a step, the step should be effective. Even now I think the Act should be amended.

Professor Ranga has arrived just now, and I know that he will very much resent the idea of seizing rice from the farmers. But if it is within the information of the Government that big farmers have stocks of rice hoarded with them, then the Government should go even to that length. I think the hon. the Food Minister gave an assurance when that Act was passed that no grams would be seized from the farmers, that is from the primary growers. I do not like them

to take any hasty step, but if the Government have any idea that there is some stock of hoarded rice with the farmers, I think Government should not hesitate to take that step.

Sir, food situation in Bengal has developed into a serious crisis and also a national crisis. It should be tackled with determination and as a national problem. The hon. the Food Minister has made an appeal in the last sentence of his statement. He has said, "It is hoped that with the co-operation of the people, who seem to fully realise the difficulties of the situation, undue suffering will be avoided". But I feel that before the Food Minister can ask for this co-operation on the part of the people, there must be on the side of the Government a concerted and determined action. I am afraid, in this very serious matter, there is a sort of split thinking within the ranks of the Central Government and between the Central Government and the State Governments. It required the Prime Minister to write to the Governor of the Reserve Bank to realise the seriousness of the situation created by the Scheduled Banks giving advances to hoarders to hoard rice when prices were rising so high. Why should it require the Prime Minister to draw his attention? Advances against rice went up to Rs. 23 crores, very much more than it was last year. The Reserve Bank's instructions were being flouted by the Scheduled Banks. How can they dare do that? If the Government were really serious in this matter, in this crisis, there should not be any split thinking within the ranks of the Government or other agencies operating on behalf of the Government.

I appeal to the Food Minister that he may take a determined measure. I do not say that every measure will be correct. Nobody in this House can give a ready-made formula. Whatever step he may take, that step should, to some extent, be knave-proof. It may not be fool-proof; it should be knave-proof as far as possible. The measure passed in the last session

[Shri A. C. Guha]

about essential commodities was not effective.

You have already rung the bell. I should try to conclude my speech. Just on the eve of the hon. Food Minister's visit to Calcutta, the Calcutta papers published some stories that the Central Government have not given adequate help to the West Bengal Government as regards the supply of foodgrains. There was a definite suggestion that the Central Government have failed to meet the requirements of the West Bengal Government. I think that was in the form of a present to the food Minister when he would arrive in Calcutta. I would like some categorical statement from him that there was no difference of opinion between the Central Government and the State Government as regards the supply of foodgrains.

I think I should now conclude with one word. Repeatedly there have been references in the papers to scenes of 1943. I wish those things should not have been repeated. Scarcity, a Government can meet. But, if a scare is created, it is not possible for any Government to meet the situation. Somehow or other, every attempt should be made from all sections of the people to avoid a scare being created. No reference to the 1943 famine should be made. That famine was styled even by the *Statesman* as a man-made famine. It was part of the war strategy of that Government. But, the nation should have this confidence in this Government. Errors, this Government may have committed. But, this Government has not and cannot have any purpose or any intention of creating a famine and it will do its utmost to prevent a famine or anything of 1943 scenes recurring.

Again, coming to the statement....

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The hon. Member must conclude now. After saying one word, he cannot go to a new point.

Shri A. C. Guha: He said about the supply of foodgrains to West

Bengal. Nothing has been mentioned about the prices, whether he has been able to bring down the price and whether he expects that the prices will come down within the reach of the West Bengal people in the near future before the Puja and whether the reduced rates will be maintained till the aman crop.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The hon. Minister. Shri Sadhan Gupta has been pushed out, I am sorry.

Shri A. P. Jain: I propose to confine my remarks to the points raised in my statement this morning. The debate today has covered a much larger area. Within the short compass of time at my disposal, it will not be possible for me to cover all this ground.

The hon. Member Dr. Banerjee has accused both the Government of India and the West Bengal Government of complacency. It is easy to make a charge. Last year, when there was a flood, I personally went to West Bengal and I covered a large part of the area which was affected by the flood. We gave all the assistance that was needed by the West Bengal Government. Subsequently, during the course of this year, my Deputy Ministers have been to West Bengal twice. I have also visited West Bengal once in order to study things on the spot. I dare say that the West Bengal Government has no complaint about the supplies which were made to the West Bengal Government.

We have never concealed the situation. If one reads my statement made this morning, I hope he will agree with me that I have not minimised the difficulties of the situation. I have admitted that there are difficulties of stocks. I have also said that the prices are ruling high. I have not concealed the facts. I have not concealed that there are defects in the administration, in the distribution of food. Part of the food has gone to the black market. I have also stated the steps which I propose to take. I have also sought the co-operation of the people of West Bengal, consisting of various shades of opinion, political parties.

I am very glad that the hon. Member Shri T. K. Chaudhuri has offered co-operation. So far as I am concerned, I can promise here on the floor of the House that any co-operation coming from any section of the people will be welcome to me. I hope that would be the same with the State Government.

In considering the food situation, we have to consider three points. Firstly, availability of food, secondly, distribution machinery and thirdly, the prices at which food is available. Hon. Members will agree, as Shri T. K. Chaudhuri said, that there are certain responsibilities which solely belong to the Centre, and others belonging to the State Government. Not that I am going to dissociate myself with what the State Government is doing. They have been doing things with our fullest concurrence and I am prepared to shoulder responsibility for all the good and bad things that the State Government has done. Nonetheless, situated as we are, working under a Federal constitution, there are certain responsibilities for which I am directly responsible, and there are other responsibilities about which I am responsible in a vicarious manner.

So far as direct responsibility is concerned, the Centre, to the best of its ability, subject to the overall stock position, is responsible to make adequate quantities available to the State Governments. I have given the quantities which we propose to make available to the State Government during the period of the next three months. A number of hon. Members have stated that this difficulty is likely to continue for another three or four months. That is exactly what my statement covers. What is the responsibility we have undertaken? Are we or are we not in a position to fulfil that responsibility? That is the first question. I accept that we are not in a position to supply only rice to the West Bengal people. The West Bengal people are rice eating people. But, they have been good

enough to substitute wheat for rice in a substantial manner. We have promised to supply the West Bengal Government 80,000 tons of rice during the next three months. They have already 15,000 or 16,000 tons of rice with them. I have undertaken to supply 65,000 tons during the next three months. We have adequate stocks, more than 65,000 tons in our godowns in Calcutta. I am confident, come what may, that we shall be able to place 65,000 tons at the disposal of the West Bengal Government.

I was hurt that some hon. Members have made reckless statements about the quality of the rice. I maintain it is very good quality rice. Hon. Members who have made this statement have either not seen the rice or have made the statement in an irresponsible manner.

Shri Sadhan Gupta: It may be very good quality, but it may be that rice is not available to the consumer.

Dr. R. Banerji: The quality of the rice supplied is very bad. That is why people have got to purchase it from private sources, and the rates for the private sources the Government has not been able to fix.

Shri A. P. Jain: Has the hon. Member seen it?

Dr. R. Banerji: I have seen it myself.

Shri A. P. Jain: I am prepared to show that (Interruption)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Quality will not improve now by this discussion.

Shri A. P. Jain: . . . part of the rice which we are supplying to Calcutta is fine American rice which we bought at about Rs. 32 per maund, and we are issuing it at Rs. 20 per maund. It is one of the finest qualities available in the country. The other part is either imported from U.S.A. or from Burma which is the 1956-57 crop rice. So, I am sorry that efforts have been

[Shri A. P. Jain]

made to condemn the quality of the rice supplied. I am prepared to take any hon. Members to my godowns and show them the rice which we are supplying.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty: The godown is all right, but in the rice shops what is being given?

Shri A. P. Jain: I do not know how within a few hours good rice is converted into bad rice.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty: Some magic happens.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Do the shops draw from the godowns or have they any other source?

Dr. R. Banerji: When Burma rice was supplied, it was better. Now, Orissa rice is supplied, which is uneatable.

Shri A. P. Jain: That is a new thing. Bengal has been always importing rice from Orissa, and the same quality, i.e., part of the rice, is being supplied from the Central godowns, but part of it is also directly imported. If the directly imported rice was good, I do not understand how the Orissa rice issued from the Central godowns could be bad. At any rate, I hold out a challenge to any hon. Member who questions the quality of the rice to come along with me to Calcutta, and I will show him the quality of the rice issued (*Interruptions*)

Shri Sadhan Gupta: In the shops or the godowns? Come along to the shops.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The session is drawing to a close and the hon. Members have to go that side. The Minister will also take the trouble to go there, and that can be settled. So, why should there be such an excitement? It is not usual to throw out challenges, and when several hon. Members are challenging, what can the Minister do?

Shri A. P. Jain: Coming to wheat, we have promised to give West Bengal Government 60,000 tons of wheat dur-

ing the next two months, and a somewhat reduced quantity of wheat during the month of November. That was all the quantity asked for and we are supplying it.

I know that there have been certain complaints about the quality of atta, and I have taken good care to ensure that in future the quality of atta should improve. Certain sections of the producers of atta were mixing it with some bad stuff, but we have now secured powers under the new notification which has been issued, and I hope that the quality of atta will improve.

At any rate, so far as quantity is concerned, during the next three months I have agreed to supply 80,000 tons of rice and wheat to the State Government, and so far as that is concerned, the general consensus of opinion among the Members of the House is that that is a substantial quantity which should meet the requirements. At any rate, that is all that the West Bengal Government asks us to do.

Next comes the question of distribution. I accept there have been some defects in the distributive machinery, and some of the shopkeepers might have substituted good rice for bad rice. That is possible. I am not going to deny it. I do not say that the machinery was good; otherwise we would not have taken steps to alter it.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: At least the Minister speaking should have a quiet surrounding around him

Shri A. P. Jain: What have we done to safeguard against it? We have provided that the approved shopkeepers will not sell any rice other than the rice which we supply them, that they will not sell any wheat other than the wheat which we supply them, and that they shall not sell any atta except the atta that we supply them. So, that is the safeguard that we have provided.

In order to eliminate the other malpractices which were practised by the fair price shops, we have now issued

ration cards. Seventy-seven lakh ration cards have already been issued, and the West Bengal Government may issue another 28 lakh ration cards. I think with the closer supervision of the distributive machinery, with the introduction of the ration cards and with certain other precautions which we have taken, it will be possible to eliminate the substitution of good product by bad product.

A number of hon. Members have laid considerable emphasis, and rightly too, on the relief works, the test works and other kinds of distribution outside these approved shops. We have agreed to supply the West Bengal Government enough ration food, and we are supplying them sufficient quantity to feed another 25 lakhs of persons either by way of free doles or through test relief works or otherwise.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty: Is it 25 lakhs or 25 per cent?

Shri A. P. Jain: Twenty-five lakhs. Twenty-five per cent of one crore is 25 lakhs.

Although we have taken the responsibility of feeding 125 lakhs of people in West Bengal which constitutes more than 40 per cent of the total population, that is not a small responsibility which we have taken, and that is all that the West Bengal Government wanted us to undertake.

As regards the price, hon. Member Shri Guha complained that I had made no mention of the price. We have been issuing wheat at Rs. 14 per maund and we have prescribed a corresponding price for flour, suji and atta. The same prices will continue. We have been issuing rice at Rs. 16 per maund, and together with the cost of distribution, rice is being sold through the fair price shops or the approved shops at the rate of Rs. 17 or Rs. 17-8-0 which is very much below the prevailing price of rice in West Bengal. And we propose to maintain these prices.

There is a certain section of people which has not the capacity to buy even at these rates, and for that it has been

provided that the State Government can give either free doles by way of relief, or they can open test works or they can otherwise distribute. Hon. Members are fully aware that the Government of India have a scheme of relief under which the State Government can issue either free rations or rations at a subsidised rate. Any expense incurred up to Rs. 2 crores is shared fifty-fifty by the Central and the State Governments, and the expense incurred in excess of Rs. 2 crores is to be shared to the extent of 75 per cent by the Central Government and 25 per cent by the State Government. So, there is a full and perfect scheme both in regard to the availability of stock and the distribution of free doles or through test works etc., as also about the prices at which food will be ordinarily available from the approved shops on the basis of identity cards, besides test works etc.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty: Will it be only up to 25 lakhs or will it be beyond that?

Shri A. P. Jain: We have made enough quantitative provision for feeding 25 lakhs of people. Whatever may be the distribution is for the State Government to determine.

I want to make it clear that so far as the Central Government is concerned, our responsibility is to make adequate quantities of foodgrains available to the State Government. That I dare say I have done. Neither the State Government have any complaint about it, nor anybody has any complaint about it. So far as other things are concerned as for instance the distributive machinery, relief works, test works etc., that is all the responsibility of the State Government. They consult us, and as friends we advise them, but the ultimate responsibility rests with them. What decisions have been reached I have mentioned in the paper and I hope that with those decisions properly implemented, conditions in West Bengal should improve not only with regard

{Shri A. P. Jain}

to supplies, but the prices should also show a downward trend.

16 hrs.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: May I have the right of reply?

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: No. In discussion like this, there is no right of reply. Unless it is a motion, there is no right of reply.

COMMITTEE ON PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS AND RESOLUTIONS

SEVENTH REPORT

Shri Supakar (Sambalpur): I beg to move:

"That this House agrees with the Seventh Report of the Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions presented to the House on the 10th September 1957".

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: I shall now put the motion to the vote of the House. The question is:

"That this House agrees with the Seventh Report of the Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions presented to the House on the 10th September 1957".

The motion was adopted.

RESOLUTION RE: NATIONALISATION OF SUGAR INDUSTRY

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The House will now resume further discussion of the Resolution moved by Shri Khushwaqt Rai on the 30th August 1957 regarding nationalisation of the sugar industry.

Out of 2 hours allotted for the discussion of the Resolution, 25 minutes have already been taken up and 1 hour and 35 minutes are still left for its further discussion today.

Shri Khushwaqt Rai may continue his speech. If he wants that others should support him, he should conclude soon. 30 minutes is the maximum that the hon. Member can have for his speech on the Resolution. He has already taken 25 minutes and 5 minutes are left.

श्री कुशुवकत राव (बेरी) :

I will finish in 5 minutes.

उपाध्यक्ष महोदय, उस दिन जब मैं बोल रहा था, तो मैं गन्ने की कीमतों की बात कह रहा था। हमारी सरकार ६.५ रिक्वरी को बेसिस पर गन्ने की कीमतें मुकर्रर करती है। मगर काश्तकार की विवकत यह है कि जब रिक्वरी प्रविक होती है तो उसको दाम ज्यादा नहीं मिलने है और अगर रिक्वरी जरा सी कम होती है, तो दाम घट जाने है। अंग्रेजी की एक मसल है कि हुंठका भाई बिग, टेह्र यू लूज। वही बात होती है, यानी काश्तकार का भना किसी तरह से नहीं होता है।

दूसरी बात यह है कि इन मिलों में कुप्रबन्ध इतना ज्यादा है कि बहुत सी मिले गन्ने के दाम भी नहीं दे पाती है। यू० पी० में बहुत सी मिलें ऐसी हैं, जो सस नहीं दे पाती हैं। होता क्या है कि सारा रुपया मिल-मालिक के निजी खर्च में चला जाता है या कांग्रेस के इलैक्शन फंड में जाता है। उत्तर प्रदेश में जब पिछली बार चुनाव हुए थे, तो काफी बड़ी रकम शक्कर के कारखानों के मालिकों ने कांग्रेस को दी थी। यही वजह है कि आज शक्कर के कारखाने कायम हैं, वनी मैं कह सकता हूं कि जिस भावना से, जिस कारण से लाइफ इन्शोरेंस बिजिनेस-जीवन बीमा कारोबार का सरकार ने राष्ट्रीयकरण किया, वही कारण आज उपस्थित है कि जिन के प्राधार पर शक्कर के कारखानों का राष्ट्रीयकरण हो जाना चाहिये।

इन शब्दों के साथ मैं अपने प्रस्ताव को इस सदन के सामने उपस्थित करता हूं और प्रार्था करता हूं कि मंत्री महोदय मेरे प्रस्ताव को स्वीकार करेंगे।

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Resolution moved:

"This House recommends to the Government that the sugar industry be nationalised."