

उनके लिये काफी नहीं है। अगर उनकी आसपास की जमीन भी बिक जायेगी तो वे उस छोड़ी सी जमीन में क्या करेंगे। आपको कुछ सोचना चाहिये इन सब के लिये वे लोग अपना सब कुछ छोड़ कर भाये हैं। वे लोग काफी जमीनों के मालिक थे। जब तक इनका इलाका इनकी नहीं मिलता तब तक इनके लिये कुछ ठोस प्रबन्ध होना चाहिये। उस इलाके के लिये काश्मीर की जनता बेचैन है। मैं कहूँगी कि आप उनके लिये कमेटी बनाइये जिसमें काश्मीर के कुछ सदस्य भी शामिल हों। वह कमेटी जा कर इस बात की जांच करे कि किसके पास क्या आमदनी है। अगर यह कुछ नहीं होता है और उन बेचारों का इस प्रकार से निकाला जाता है और उनमें रुपये की मांग की जाती है, तो मैं कहूँगी कि यह तो उनको फिर से उजाड़ना होगा। इस पर जरूर ध्यान देना चाहिये। जब वे लोग आकर फरियाद करते हैं तो बड़ी बंवेनी होती है। मेहरबानी करके आप इस पर जरूर गौर कीजिये और उनकी जो दिक्कतें हैं उनको दूर करने का कोई ठोस कदम उठाइये ताकि वे लोग फिर से कह सकें कि हमने आपकी मेहरबानी से अपना कुछ पाया।

17-00 hrs.

CLOSURE OF TEA GARDENS IN ASSAM

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The House will now take up Half-an-hour discussion regarding the closure of tea gardens in Assam.

Dr. Ram Subhag Singh (Sasaram): This half-an-hour discussion has been raised due to the inadequate and unsatisfactory reply given by the hon. Deputy Minister in reply to Question No. 1025 on the 18th March, 1958. The question specifically asked was whether Government will make any efforts to save those gardens from closing so that the labourers employed in them may not starve consequent to the

closure of those gardens and the reply given was that details were being ascertained. The hon. Deputy Minister further admitted that six tea gardens were on the point of closing, and according to the information of the Government of Assam, which had been furnished to the Central Government, about 1,598 workers were likely to be thrown out of their jobs. He further admitted that these gardens were going to be closed because of lack of finance, mismanagement and lack of replantation and so on.

I think that it is a very serious matter when mismanagement exists in our tea gardens because the plantation industry is one of the biggest organised industry in India, which employs over one million workers, who are primarily agricultural workers and on whom depend about five million other persons. About Rs. 75 crores have been invested in this industry and it has made over three million acres of land accessible which were previously inaccessible. There are about eight lakh acres of land on which tea is grown and that land is such where nothing else can be grown. Besides, due to this tea plantation industry, some help is also given to the plywood and transport industry and these two industries also employ a large number of workers. If those workers are allowed to be thrown out of work in that way, a serious situation will be created not only in Assam and in South India, where those workers are employed, but in other parts of the country also because in Assam this industry comes to about 49 per cent. in West Bengal to about 25 per cent. and to about 26 per cent. in other parts of the country, particularly in South India. It will create a situation in that way particularly in Assam.

According to the information, which was supplied here on the 18th March, already two gardens have been closed and that information was supplied by the Government of Assam to the Government of India about six months ago. Over two thousand workers became

[Dr. Ram Subhag Singh]

unemployed about six months ago and the Government of Assam arranged test relief work for them. Later on, that work was also withdrawn. So, those workers, about two thousand of them, and their families are virtually starving. There is information—I do not know whether that information is correct or not, but I have learnt on reliable authority—that some of them are facing actual starvation condition.

Besides, there are other 80 gardens which are on the verge of closure. My point is that when there was a lack of finance, the Government ought to have known that. When there was mismanagement, they should have known that also. When there was lack of replantation and that was not known to the Government then there is something seriously wrong in the source which gives information to the Government of India, because this industry earns about Rs. 100 crores of foreign exchange and it also gives revenue in other ways, for instance, agricultural income-tax and other taxes to the State Governments which come to about Rs. 1 crore and about Rs. 5½ crores to the Government of India in the shape of duties, cesses and other things. In that way, if we allow closure of these gardens or if we allow mismanagement and lack of re-plantation in them, not only will the workers be thrown out of their jobs, but the Government will be losing a great portion of their revenue.

This is happening because 64 per cent. of the gardens are owned by foreigners, particularly the British people. Due to various circumstances, especially the high duty, these people are shifting their capital perhaps to East Africa where there is no duty. I do not say that there should not be any duty. On common tea, we charge the same duty as on quality tea. Common tea is grown in 65 per cent. of the tea gardens. The remaining tea is quality tea. Most of the quality tea gardens are owned by the foreigners. Cost of production per pound is about Rs. 1-6-0 for this common tea and Rs. 1-10-0 for quality tea. The sale

price is Rs. 1-6-0 for common tea and Rs. 1-10-0 for quality tea. This disparity is allowed by the Government. This also comes in the way of proper management of the tea gardens.

What I want is this. If there is such a good industry in the country in which so many workers have been employed, and if you allow them to be closed, not only will these workers be thrown out of their jobs, but they will create difficult conditions in the areas they come from. Most of the workers come from eastern U.P., Bihar and Madhya Pradesh including Orissa. These are scarcity-stricken areas. Most of them have settled in the tea plantations. They are in wretched conditions no doubt. This dawn of freedom has not improved their conditions any further. During the pre-Independence period, they were living in terrible conditions. They were beaten also and very cruelly treated by the tea garden owners. At that time, they were having security of their work because that industry was not suffering on account of lack of re-plantation, etc. But, now due to lack of re-plantation they are going to be thrown out of their jobs. They will not only create political problems there in Assam and in other parts of the country where they will go, but they will bring degeneration to our society. Our idea is to open up new opportunities for employment for our population. But, we are not looking after our gardens properly. Therefore, we ourselves are creating unemployment in our plantation industry.

There is the Tea Board. They are having good sources of revenue. They send their delegations to foreign countries to promote our tea export and they do good propaganda, I believe, in America, etc. But, they do not care for increasing our production here in the country. The net result is that 40 per cent. of our gardens have become superannuated. This information is also known to the Government and the Planning Commission for a long time. But, they have not so far

taken any steps to see that something is done for re-plantation of these tea gardens. For re-plantation work they charge a cess, but I want that some portion of that cess should be utilised for replanting new bushes. You may allot some money straightaway to those people or to your own agency there, because the life of one tea garden is about 40 years, and if we do not replant, that garden will become superannuated. Today their percentage is 40. After some time it will become 50 or 60 per cent., and the percentage will go on increasing day by day. Therefore, I want some legislation should be enacted.

The Government of Assam pointed out this fact to the Government of India about six months ago, and the Labour Minister went there. He called a meeting and discussed the problems. They wanted that something should be done by the Government of India, but so far nothing has been done. They also wanted that they should be authorised to legislate for taking over such gardens as were not properly managed, but they have not been authorised to make that legislation. For that purpose, it is necessary that the Tea Board should be directed to see that it devotes some of its energy for properly maintaining those tea gardens and doing something for replanting new bushes. The Government of Assam should be authorised to legislate so that they may give directives to such tea gardens which are not being properly looked after and if any one violates them, then the State Government should be authorised to take over those gardens and properly manage them.

Here, the Labour Ministry and so many other Ministries are involved. They should have moved in the matter long ago, but thus far they have not moved. Therefore, I request the Government to direct the Tea Board to devote some of its funds for replantation work and I also request the Government to authorise the State Government to legislate on the subject.

Pending that legislation, the Government of India should do something so that all the capital which has been invested in the tea industry by foreign people and their profits may not go to East Africa, because now those foreign owners—I do not say all the foreign owners, but most of them—are not interested in properly managing the tea gardens or properly replanting them, and they are shifting their capital from here to East Africa where they are opening up new plantations. Because they are finding good ground there, they are doing it. Therefore, I request our Government to see that all facilities are given and proper care is taken so that this industry which is one of the biggest in India is properly managed, so that it may give employment to 15 lakhs of our people on whom so many others also depend.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Shri Tantia. He may put a question or two.

15-14 hrs.

Shri Rameshwar Tantia (Sikar): My hon. friend Dr. Ram Subhag Singh has mentioned most of the points about tea. I want to add something to that.

The tea industry just now is one of the foremost industries of India, bringing the biggest amount of foreign exchange, but unfortunately in the years after freedom the Europeans who own 85 per cent. of the tea trade have been shifting their business to East Africa. Although it is just now only 7 crores of lbs. there against 64 crores of lbs. of our tea production, it is increasing there slowly. The reason for this is, as Dr. Ram Subhag Singh has said, that there is no tea export duty there at all in East Africa, while we have got a duty of six annas per lb. here. Unfortunately, the export duty is the same on the best tea and the very commonest tea, though there is a difference of Rs. 5 to Rs. 6 even per lb. in the price between the grades.

This industry was started before 70 years with labour imported from

[Shri Rameshwar Tantia].

Palamu, Ranchi and Dumka. They left their houses and went to Assam at a time when it was said that the people who went there did not return because the water there was oily, there was black fever and all that. Now, it may be a question of the closure of only six tea gardens. But if this continues to be the position, then it will become a case of the closure of sixty tea gardens, because the gardens which are situated in Cachar, Dooars and Tarai etc. cannot face competition with East Africa. The tea industry is not only confined to India but also elsewhere. India produces 64 crores lbs. while Ceylon produces 38 crores lbs. Africa produces 7 crores lbs., Japan produces 13 crores lbs. and so on. So, there is competition from most of the countries. In other countries where they have to face competition, there is some relief given; they give some subsidy to the exports. But on the contrary, in our country, the duty is so uneconomic that if it continues like that then within a period of ten years we shall be facing a situation when the exports will go down very much. In 1953-54, we exported 48 crores lbs., in 1954-55 we exported 46 crores lbs. but in 1955-56 we exported only 40 crores lb. And the value went down from Rs. 148 crores to Rs. 109 crores. So, our Ministry should see that this important industry where 9,70,000 workers are employed, where Rs. 41 crores are paid as wages to them every year, and where Government get Rs. 5 crores by way of internal duty and Rs. 15 crores by way of export duty does not go down.

There is another important point which I would like to mention, and that is in regard to the common tea. It is sold at Rs. 1-8-0. But the consumers do not get any tea below Rs. 8 a lb., because there is a profit of Rs. 1-8-0 or Rs. 1-4-0 which goes to the Blenders. There are only two firms in India who control most of the internal tea markets and they are the Brooke Bonds and the Liptons. So, something must be done in this

regard, and some relief should be given to the small traders and blenders so that other people also could come into the trade, and the consumers can get tea at a reasonable price.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Now, Shri Hem Raj. He may just ask a question. No speeches can be made now.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: But Shri Rameshwar Tantia made a speech.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Shri Rameshwar Tantia had given notice, while others have not. Moreover, he was the supporter of the request for the discussion.

श्री हेमराज (कागडा) : उपाध्यक्ष महोदय, मैं दो बातें अपने मंत्री महोदय से पूछना चाहता हूँ। उन दिन इस सलाल के जवाब में यह कहा गया था कि जो छोटे छोटे-स्माल टी-गार्डन हैं, उन के बागीचे बन्द हो रहे हैं। मैं कहना चाहता हूँ कि प्लान्टेशन एन्कवायरी कमेटी ने कुछ सिफारिशों की थीं कि स्माल टी-गार्डन को मदद होना चाहिए। खास तौर से पंजाब में जितना भा टी एस्टेट्स हैं, वे सब छोटी छोटी हैं। उन के मुताबिक यहाँ एक डेलीगेशन भेजा गया था और उस के बारे में यहाँ पर जवाब दिया गया था कि रिपोर्ट ग्रैंडर कन्सिडरेशन है। इस वक्त पंजाब की हालत यह है कि वहाँ पर त्रास लास पीड चाय तैयार हुई, जिस में से बीस लाख पीड ग्रान टी मार्केट में पड़ा है और वहाँ के बागीचे क्रौरन बन्द होने वाले हैं। मैं यह पूछना चाहता हूँ कि इस सिलसिले में हमारे सेंटर को मिनिस्ट्र क्या कर रही है ?

Shri Kasliwal (Kotah): I just want to ask the Minister why he should not examine the question of workers' participation in the management of these tea gardens which have either closed down or are threatening to close down.

Shri Dwarikanath Tewari (Cachar): I just want one minute to speak. I shall give a concrete example of mismanagement. There are three closed gardens in my constituency.

Shri S. M. Banerjee (Kanpur): Which is the hon. Member's constituency?

Shri Dwarikanath Tewari: Cachar. There are three gardens there, which have been closed down for the last ten months. As to why they closed down, I shall just give you an inner picture.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: That picture may take too long.

Shri Dwarikanath Tewari: I shall take only two minutes and not more than that.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The hon. Member has doubled his time now.

Shri Dwarikanath Tewari: In the tea gardens, the crop is hypothecated. On hypothecation, the management takes money from the banks. The closed tea gardens at Santhalia and Chencorri drew about Rs. 1.60 lakhs and Rs. 1.65 lakhs respectively from the bank, and they spent this Rs. 3 lakhs odd in the stock exchange. They never paid it to the workers there. So, it is not a question of lack of finance. Finance is there from the bank. These are good gardens and there are also bad gardens. But still the money went in the stock exchange. In the stock exchange, they tried to corner some big assets, and they had failed.

So it is not only the lack of finance but also something else, speculative interests, that are there. I think that the Government of India should look into this matter.

Shri Panigrahi (Puri): Have those States where the tea gardens are closing asked for financial aid from the Centre to manage them? Will the Central Government provide such financial assistance?

Shri S. M. Banerjee: May I know from the hon. Minister whether Government would, in the large interest of the employees and the country, like to nationalise those tea gardens which have been closed due to financial difficulties or mismanagement?

सरदार ब. सि. सहगल (जंजीर) :
उपाध्यक्ष महोदय, एक बनेबन पूछ लेने दीजिये ।

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Then the House shall have to sit longer.

Sardar A. S. Saigal: We may sit for five or ten minutes more. It does not matter.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: I am told that the half-hour limit cannot be exceeded.

सरदार ब. सि. सहगल : मेरा मतलब यह है कि जो नेबरज मध्य प्रदेश और दूसरी जगहों से आ कर काम कर रहे हैं, हमारे पाम उनकी सिन्पोरिटी क्या है ?

Shri Bhagavati (Darrang): May I know if it is not a fact that in the Hapjan tea estate in the Lakhimpur district of Assam, 42,500 lbs. of graded tea and 3,376 lbs. of loose tea worth more than Rs. 1 lakh were lying in the factory undespached against the total dues of nearly Rs. 20,000 payable to the workers?

The Minister of Commerce (Shri Kanungo): It is right and proper that the House should take cognisance of any possible distress, and the discussion is an example of such concern. But I beg to submit that the problem is not as serious as it is envisaged.

We have 6500 and odd estates in India covering an acreage of nearly 7 million, out of which, only 6 gardens have closed down for a short time. It is quite possible that among this large number of estates, there will

[Shri Kanungo].

be good, bad and indifferent managements and it is certainly not alarming that 6 estates have closed down. Taking the industry as a whole, as against a production of 3,83,000 and odd lbs. in 1933, we have come up to 6,44,000 and odd lbs. in 1954, and production is keeping up the increase. Therefore, on the whole the tea industry is healthy.

The reasons which the hon. Member who sponsored the discussion advanced to take care of the situation were lack of finance, mismanagement and the question of replantation. I will take the last first. Replantation is not such a problem as it is made out to be. It is a fact that a tea bush is a wasting asset. Normally, the life of a tea plant is taken as 60 years. But there are plants, as recorded by the Plantation Enquiry Commission, which at the age of over 80 give very good crop. It all depends upon the management, agricultural management and agronomical care of the estates. There are estates where plants of less than 30 years age also do not give good yields. It is not necessarily due to lack of attention but also due to climatic factors, soil fertility and various other factors. Out of a total of 7 million acres, the Plantation Enquiry Commission had computed that about 21,000 acres had been replanted. But there is a little confusion about it which we are trying to check up because the Commission has taken into account only one form of replanting. In this House we have made mention that there are three forms of replanting and infilling is the most common form. Judging infilling, I think, the volume of replantation is much more than has been recorded by the Commission in their report. But, we are checking on that.

In another debate in this House. I mentioned that we are fully cognisant of the recommendations of the Commission and that is why we are trying to organise a Directorate of Development where we will have technical personnel who will be able

to check on the good husbanding of the tea estates and offer advice. After that we have to get the right personnel over there for we will have to put in regulatory action, if necessary. Regulatory action is necessary because of various factors.

I am not going into the question of repatriation of capital from the tea industry in India to other countries. We have not got the full facts before us today. It is a fact that new areas in Africa are growing tea and are in the market and we have to face competition. How much of it is repatriated capital from India and how much is fresh investment from other sources is not known yet. We will try to get that information. But, whatever it is, the problem is that we have to face keener and keener competition and I think we are in a position to hold on.

One of the arguments advanced was that the incidence of excise duty is a handicap to our competitive capacity in the world market. I would only mention the announcement of Shri Morarji Desai during the course of the debate on the Demands of this Ministry in which he said that the problem of adjustments of duty on common tea is under the active consideration of Government. We are fully apprised of it and we are taking care of it.

But, apart from the duty aspect of it, the question of finance is also being tackled. We had a conference last year with the tea interests in Calcutta and with the financing banks and others and we are trying to evolve a certain procedure by which finance could be made available through the State Finance Corporations etc. The matter is still under discussion. As I have said earlier, the problem of closure is not likely to be as acute as is being anticipated. (Interruptions.)

In a huge industry with 6500 and odd units, it will always be possible to find a few closing down for the time being or changing hands and all that sort of thing. On the whole, I think, when the Tea Board is fully

equipped with its technical personnel—the Directorate of Development—and when the marketing conditions are also improved, for which the Tea Board is constantly on the alert, there will be no question of anticipating any large-scale closures or unemployment.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The House now stands adjourned to meet at 11 A.M. tomorrow.

17-30 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Friday, the 11th April, 1958.