

12.05½ hrs.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
THIRTY-FIRST REPORT

Shri Barman (Cooch-Bihar-Reserv-ed—Sch. Castes): Sir, I beg to present the Thirty-First Report of the Public Accounts Committee (1960-61) on the Appropriation Accounts (Posts & Telegraphs) 1958-59 and Audit Report 1960.

12.06 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

PREVALENCE OF SLAVERY IN N.E.F.A.

Shri Vajpayee (Balrampur): Sir, under Rule 197, I beg to call the attention of the Prime Minister to the following matter of urgent public importance and I request that he may make a statement thereon:—

“The reported prevalence of slavery in the North-East Frontier Agency.”

The Deputy Minister of External Affairs (Shrimati Lakshmi Menon): Sir, it is a two-page statement. Would you like me to place it on the Table of the House?

Mr. Speaker: All right. The statement will be placed on the Table of the House. Hon. Members will look into it leisurely.

But I have always said that while placing a long statement on the Table of the House a small summary of it in a few lines may be given out orally or read out from the statement itself. Is there slavery at all?

Shrimati Lakshmi Menon: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. There is slavery. The other details will be there in the statement.

Shri Braj Raj Singh (Firozabad): What steps do Government propose to

take now to abolish this sort of slavery?

Mr. Speaker: When it has been admitted that slavery is there, hon. Members will kindly read the statement before putting other questions.

Shri B. Das Gupta (Purulia): It may be circulated to Members. Sometimes, Sir, the statements placed on the Table are not circulated.

Mr. Speaker: Any hon. Member can get a copy in the Notice Office.

STATEMENT

Slavery in the NEFA is a heritage from the past when inter-village and inter-tribal feuds were very common. People became slaves for a number of reasons. They were captured in war; they were purchased; they were used to repay a debt. Many were born slaves. Sometimes a man became a slave because he had committed a serious offence against the community and could not afford the fine demanded.

2. The slaves are, however, by and large, treated as members of the household and are themselves quite often unwilling to leave the shelter and security of their masters to lead an independent life. In many homes, they come to be accepted as members of the family after a period of years. The owner provides them with food, clothing and shelter. He arranges their marriage. In some areas, a slave is allowed to keep a part of the earnings.

3. The Government of India is a contracting party to the Slavery Convention of 1926. Its provisions were applied to NEFA in 1938. It was agreed that positive steps should be taken as soon as possible to bring about progressively the disappearance of slavery in every form. Our Constitution does not permit slavery. Government have been exerting all efforts to eradicate this evil. Where

[Mr. Speaker]

necessary compensation in cash has been paid to liberate slaves from their masters. During the current year, a sum of Rs. 25,000 has been provided for this purpose. The Political Officers are authorised to pay up to Rs. 500 for the emancipation of the individual slave.

4. During 1950 and 1959, some 160 slaves have been liberated through Government efforts. There are a few hundred more slaves left in NEFA.

5. During a Conference of the senior officers of the NEFA Administration in October, 1960, decision was taken to take even more energetic steps for the liberation of the small number of slaves still left in NEFA. Some of the ways suggested were:

- (a) A slave who becomes a Government employee should be encouraged to put aside his savings regularly and himself pay for his liberation;
- (b) when a slave escapes, no efforts should be made by the Government to restore him to his owner;
- (c) when a slave is involved in a customary case, the local authorities should see that the customary decision does not strengthen the owner's hold over the slave;
- (d) when a slave-owner is involved in a customary case for which he has to pay fines, the possibility of compelling him to liberate slaves in lieu should be exploited;
- (e) when a slave-owner becomes eligible for relief from Government, it should be given on the condition that he will free one or more slaves;
- (f) in border areas refugees bringing slaves should be denied asylum unless they set them free;

(g) no one who is a slave-owner should be given any form of paid Government employment; and

(h) no one born after 15th August, 1947, should, under any circumstances, be accepted as a slave nor should the transfer of ownership of slaves after that date be accepted as legal.

6. Efforts are being made to eradicate slavery from the NEFA as soon as possible. The situation is not serious nor has the Government met with failure in ending slavery as has been stated in the adjournment motion. The process has necessarily to be slow, for it would only add to the problem if a slave is freed, without at the same time providing for his (and in many cases his masters) rehabilitation suitably.

7. The need to accelerate the process has, however, been fully realized, specially in view of developments across the border, as it would be clear from decisions recently taken in Shillong, (as summed up above).

12.08 hrs.

STATEMENT RE: CLOTH PRICES

The Minister of Commerce and Industry (Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri): Sir, the House is aware that as a result of discussions which had taken place between the Indian Cotton Mills Federation and the Government in August last, a scheme of voluntary price regulation was adopted by the Federation and announced with the approval of Government. Under that scheme, maximum ex-mill prices were laid down for different categories of cloth, expressed in the form of percentage increases permitted over the prices