

[Shrimati Indira Gandhi]

Now, I would like to know whether this Government has tried to ascertain from its Embassy in Prague as to whether there is any truth in this report and whether it is a fact that the workers of Czechoslovakia are, by and large, indifferent to this aggression. It is on these two points that we should be told in order to enable us to take a clear stand.

THE PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF ATOMIC ENERGY, MINISTER OF PLANNING AND MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI): Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I rose to make the statement in this House yesterday on the situation in Czechoslovakia, I said that I was doing so with a heavy heart and with a profound sense of concern I chose my words with deliberation and with a great deal of thought.

There are moments in history when grave responsibilities are cast on Government in whatever they say or do. This is one such moment. The dictates of wisdom enjoin upon us to tread carefully and with great circumspection and, when we are in front of an avalanche, not to make too much noise which—my hon. friends who have done any mountaineering will know—increases the force of an avalanche. I say this not to engage in metaphor but to try to convey to the House the real gravity of the situation. It is easy to give vent to one's feelings and it is easy enough to condemn. But, Mr. Speaker, let me say that I am not insensitive to the views expressed by the Hon. Members. As I have said on a previous occasion, I myself have had the closest connections and personal friendship with Czechoslovakia and her people. So, I myself do feel very strongly on these matters, not only as a Government but also, if I may say so, as a person. But after we have given expression to our feelings, the political realities remain and Government has to deal with them.

Yesterday, I voiced our feelings in which, I am sure, the sentiments of

this House were also included, for the Government and the people of Czechoslovakia. I expressed the hope that it would be possible to restore the normal and legally constituted Government of Czechoslovakia. We earnestly hope that even now it would be possible for this to happen. We earnestly hope that it may still be possible to resolve the differences by the conflict of argument, discussion and debate, not by force. Only that way can there be any durable settlement. This again is the view that the Government has held on all similar problems that these political differences, political conflicts, cannot be resolved by means of force.

Here, I would like to express my deep concern for the safety and welfare of the Czech Government and the party leaders and, I am sure, the House will join me in this.

We are specially concerned with what has been happening because over the years we have been working in the lessening of tensions and we have been working for the softening of the cold war atmosphere. This action of the armed forces entering Czechoslovakia has, with one blow, reversed the situation. It has, immediately, taken us back over the years as if all this long work of bringing people together or getting them together or getting them to find peaceful solution has been overnight wiped out.

Naturally it is of concern to us and we feel that it is of concern for peace in the world. Hon. members have urged upon the Government to play a role at the U.N. We ourselves are anxious to do so. Our country has the honour to be a member of the Security Council. Under the U.N. Charter, the Security Council is the sole forum for the consideration of security matters. I wonder if it would be right for a Government which is a member of the Security Council to state its position on the issues which are going to be discussed..... (Interruption). We should not do anything which might prejudice our role

in the Security Council.....(Interruption).

SHRI NATH PAI: U. Thant has spoken very categorically and has given his opinion.

SHRI KANWAR LAL GUPTA: Why don't you say clearly this side or that side? Don't have rope-dancing.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: I think Hon. Members are deliberately trying to give slants to my statement. They have sought to prove that I have not spoken out on the side of Czechoslovakia or perhaps that I have not spoken out strongly enough. Does courage lie merely in words? Venerable Acharyaji reminded us of Gandhiji. Gandhiji did not often use strong words, but he did teach us to act fearlessly and firmly, and in our reaction to what has happened in Czechoslovakia, I do not think we have been timid or that we have hesitated. We have very firmly stated.....

SHRI J. B. KRIPALANI: Gandhiji once wrote an article shaking the mane of the British lion. He did not speak in soft words. When he spoke even in soft words, they went round the world. There was determination in whatever he said, and he did not mince matters.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: I should like to assure the House that we shall always uphold the United Nations' Charter on which rests the hope of mankind for a peaceful world. This we have always done, this we shall always do, and we shall work to ensure that the Charter rights of Czechoslovakia are safeguarded in every way. This obviously depends on how the matter comes up there. I can assure this House that just as we are interested as a member of the Security Council and as a member of the United Nations Organisation in upholding the sacred principles of the Charter, we are equally wedded to certain basic and fundamental principles to which we have adhered all these years, and I would like, with the permission of the House, to restate them.

30—1 LSD/68.

We ardently and sincerely believe that every State should be left free and unfettered to decide its own future and its own destiny. We believe that there should be no..... (Interruption) external interference in the affairs of any country. Thirdly, force should not be used as the arbiter of decisions, and finally the differences in ideology or social systems can never be an excuse for interfering in one another's internal affairs. These are no new principles. All who have followed the course of India's conduct of international relations in difficult and varied circumstances will admit that these principles have provided the very foundations of our foreign policy. It is in the light of these principles that we have judged, and shall continue to judge, situations as they arise.

SHRI KANWAR LAL GUPTA: What is her decision?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: I would like to compare the present situation to an avalanche because I know that hereafter the world will either get over this crisis honourably and peacefully and go forward with the process of *detente* and relaxation or we shall revert to the terrible confrontation which had rocked, and nearly wrecked, this world after the end of the Second World War.

I spoke earlier of the work we have done in the lessening of tensions. Now, we had a vested interest in this. Our country, as all developing countries, needs peace for its very development, its very existence. It was, therefore, with hope and confidence that we had watched the vast movement in many countries towards a better and more harmonious world order. It is our hope that the present crisis will not reverse the trend. In the present situation, the immediate need, as I had said yesterday, is for the withdrawal of the forces which have entered Czechoslovakia so that the Czechoslovak people may be free to determine their own future for themselves without any intervention and in an atmosphere which is free from tension. Whatever

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problems there may be between Czechoslovakia and its neighbours should be settled peacefully by means of negotiations and not through the use of force. The processes of peaceful co-existence which we have tried to promote for so many years must be allowed to develop unimpeded.

We were asked here about whether we have conveyed our views to the Czech Ambassador. We have conveyed our views. The Ambassador is, unfortunately, not here; he is in Czechoslovakia. But we have conveyed our views very clearly to the *Chargé d'affaires* who is here, to the *Chargé d'affaires* of the USSR and to the Ambassadors of the other Warsaw Pact countries. We are in touch with the Ambassadors of other nations also.

We are second to none in our sympathy for the brave and valiant Czech people. We are second to none in our admiration for the dignity and calm with which they are facing the tragic situation, and we are specially aware that the method they have chosen is the method of *satyagraha*.

Just before I spoke, an Hon. Member asked about clash of personalities in the USSR, clash of personalities in Czechoslovakia, something about workers *versus* intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia. We are, as I said, earlier, in touch with the various embassies, though we are not directly in touch with our own Embassy in Czechoslovakia. But there is no authoritative news about the various rumours that are afloat, except that sometime ago, not within the last few days, a letter or a communication did appear in the *Pravda* newspaper signed by 90 workers of, I think, the automobile industry—I am not quite sure which industry it was—in which they had said something about needing help to save socialism.

SHRI SURENDRANATH DWIVEDI: So-called letter in *Pravda*.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: So-called—all right.

SHRI RABI RAY: False.

SHRI RANGA: Did they circulate that letter to the editor?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: Whatever it was. This is the only indication that we have of any such views. It is quite possible, however, and it is probable also, that there is some kind of difference of opinion within two groups; but whatever the difference of opinion, it is their business to solve it themselves. I have said this before, and I reiterate it.

SHRI PILOO MODY: What did her Ambassador inform her?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: There is no contact for the last two days.

SHRI PILOO MODY: Before the last two days.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is our ambassador safe?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: To the best of our knowledge, yes.

SHRI NATH PAI: Is he in Karlov Vary or in Prague?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: To the best of our knowledge, he is in Prague.

SHRI NATH PAI: To the best of our knowledge, he is in Karlov Vary.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: It is not very far from Prague. It is a very small country and it takes no time at all to go from one place to another. However, I have digressed. I only wanted to say that the Hon. Members should give us the benefit of doubt, if I may put it that way.....
(Interruptions).

SHRI KANWAR LAL GUPTA: Is it aggression or not?

SHRI NATH PAI: We cannot resist that plea.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: The situation is extremely grave. We want that we should be in a position where we can really play our role at the United Nations. We have made our views very clear, without changing words. We have talked about Russian armies going there...
(Interruptions.).

MR. SPEAKER: You must allow her to continue her speech.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: When we say that the forces should withdraw, I think that our views are very clear.....(*Interruptions.*)

MR. SPEAKER: If Hon. Members do not like this, I cannot continue the debate.

SHRI PILOO MODY: The whole purpose of the debate was to get the Prime Minister to change a word here and a word there. At the end of a Five hour debate, all she can say is this.

MR. SPEAKER: Therefore, you must allow her to change the word. You cannot force her to use your words.

SHRI ABDUL GHANI DAR*

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order. I have not allowed you to speak. Nothing will be taken down. If you cannot observe order, you have to withdraw.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI: I should like to say only this. Many Hon. Members have said that this is not a party matter; this is a matter with which the whole nation is concerned. With what are we concerned? We are concerned with the safety of the Czech leaders. We are concerned with the sovereignty and independence of Czechoslovakia. We are concerned with the withdrawal of the forces.....(*Interruptions.*) I have already said that we would support the Charter rights of Czechoslovakia in the United Nations. So, I should say: let us combine on this matter and not quarrel over the use of a word here or there. Let me conclude expressing once more our sympathy and admiration for the people of Czechoslovakia.

SHRI M. R. MASANI: In the spirit of the Prime Minister's appeal just now I should like to say that we on this side also would like a

unanimous vote of the House, not on our motion but on a motion of a Member of her own Party. If the Government accepts Mrs. Sucheta Kripalani's amendment from her own party, we shall all vote for it and withdraw our own amendments.

SHRI HEM BARUA: Just one clarification from the Prime Minister.

MR. SPEAKER: Then the whole House would like to have some clarification or the other. Mr. Bhandare.

SHRI R. D. BHANDARE: Sir, after the speech of the Prime Minister, I think it is not necessary for me to say—

SHRI J. B. KRIPALANI: Anything.

SHRI R. D. BHANDARE:—anything; but, lest a wrong impression in the minds of some of the Hon. Members should remain, I would like to correct that wrong impression and remove that misunderstanding. The Prime Minister was perfectly right when she posed a question: What is it that we are interested in? Are we interested in the security of the Czech people, or are we to be obsessed as to what has been done by Russia? We are interested in the Czech people, in their sovereignty and their way of life.

Let me read out to you—I am not going to take the time of the House—the statement issued by the authority of the Czech people. It says, “We demand the immediate withdrawal of the armed forces of the five countries of the Warsaw pact.” Has that not been said by the Prime Minister? What is there to be misunderstood? What is there it to be misconstrued? Then, it says, “We urgently request the military commands of the Soviet Union to go away out of our country. We demand that normal conditions be immediately restored to enable the constitutional organs of the Republic to discharge their constitutional functions.” Therefore, I submit that if at all there has been any

*Not recorded.