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OF THE

SECOND COUNCIL OF STATE, 1927



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COUNCIL OF STATE.

Thursday, 3rd March, 1927.

The Council met in the Council Chamber of the Council House at Eleven of the Clock, the Honourable the President in the Chair.

RESOLUTION *RE* OPENING OF NEW RAILWAY STATIONS BETWEEN MADRAS AND ARKONAM.

THE HONOURABLE RAO SAHIB DR. U. RAMA RAU (Madras: Non-Muhammadan): Sir, I beg to move the following Resolution which stands in my name:

"This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that between Madras and Arkonam on the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway there should be a railway station for every two miles and that new stations should be opened in places where this distance is exceeded."

Sir, my object in moving this Resolution is twofold. Firstly, to prevent overcrowding and consequent spread of diseases in Madras, by providing facilities for suburban traffic, and secondly, to promote cheap and easy transport of agricultural produce from village parts to Madras, with a view to a favourable market being found for the same.

Sir, it is a notorious fact that Madras is highly congested and heavily overcrowded. The late lamented Dr. T. M. Nair, whose activities in politics, both parochial and provincial, are too well-known to need any mention here, once described Madras as the deathtrap for the mufassalites. This description is as true to-day as it was nearly a quarter of a century ago when it was first given expression to. The Government of Madras and the Madras Corporation had discussed various proposals to relieve congestion in the city and had finally come to the conclusion that migration of the Madras population to the suburbs was the one and only solution of this problem. Unfortunately, Sir, the two Company-managed Railways that serve the city and the suburbs, *viz.*, the South Indian Railway and the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway, were unable or reluctant, which it is I cannot say, to meet the serious situation caused by the congestion in the city. The South Indian Railway, with its single metre gauge line and inordinate delays in crossings, was practically of no use, though it ran into the heart of villages and towns all along the line and was consequently found to be favourable for suburban migration. When the Railway Company was then asked to double the line, they, with their usual indifference, said that the case could be met by providing more crossing stations. Accordingly, three crossing stations were provided between Madras and Pallavaram, a distance of 15 miles and two more beyond that up to Chingleput, and though they had greatly helped the suburban migration on this line, the delay and inconvenience to suburban passengers still remain the same as before. In these days of advanced

[Rao Sahib Dr. U. Rama Rau.]

facilities for transport of passengers, when steamships and railways have become back numbers and aërial flights have come to replace them, the Honourable Members will be surprised to hear that under the benign British Government in India, the South Indian Railway administration do run even now suburban trains at the record rate of 7 miles an hour! It was only after frequent representation to the railway authorities and constant agitation in the press that the Railway administration have undertaken to double the line now and adopt the scheme of electrification of trains for suburban service. Now, turning to the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway, it was originally intended to be a strategic line and so it traverses plains and forests far from towns and villages. Though this Railway can give a faster train service, having a double line up to Arkonam, and more convenient accommodation too, it has this disadvantage, namely, that people have to walk long distances before they can reach the railway stations or engage carts or other conveyances, which is an additional expense. So, wherever there were villages in close proximity to the railway stations, they were all colonized by the citizens of Madras. The suburban service now extends up to Arkonam, a distance of 42 miles from the city. There are many railway employees and labourers and other officials coming to Madras daily to attend to their avocations and returning home in the evening, undergoing this inconvenience of having to walk several miles both ways. Again, there are many officials who own their lands and houses in villages and have their business in Madras daily, who are prevented from residing in their own homes and villages, on account of the inconveniences above referred to. In spite of all that, Sir, the suburban traffic has increased by leaps and bounds during the past 15 years. Officials, merchants, labourers and others, in their anxiety to escape from the jaws of death, prefer to live outside the city undergoing all these inconveniences. In order to convince the House of the popularity of the suburban traffic, in both these Railways, I will quote some figures. We are always told that our figures are unreliable but official figures cannot be depended upon either. For, in the proceedings of the Standing Finance Committee for Railways, dated the 20th January, 1926, Vol. II, No. 6, the figures for season and vendor's tickets are given. Heaven knows why these two altogether different kinds of earnings have been clubbed together and why, after the year 1923-24, the figures have been included under each class of passenger earnings. I fail to see how income from vendor's tickets can be classed under passenger earnings. Well, be that as it may, the figures disclose considerable satisfaction with, and wide popularity of, the suburban traffic. In the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway line, the number of season and vendor's tickets rose from 762 in 1910 to 1,495 in 1924-25 and the earnings from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 1,28,000 during the same period. In the South Indian Railway, the number of season and vendor's tickets rose from 1,195 in 1910 to 2,491 in 1924-25 and the earnings from Rs. 61,000 to Rs. 1,92,000. While in the two systems of Railways, the number increased in equal proportion, the earnings from the South Indian Railway and the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway were in the proportion of 8:5. So, the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway had materially benefited by its suburban traffic.

In the Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway, and the Great Indian Peninsula Railway the increase on the number of season tickets

is proportionately the same as in the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway, while the earnings were proportionately less. So, it stands to reason that the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway ought to provide more facilities and more conveniences to suburban passengers. I understand and am subject to correction that, after the war, 4 new stations were directed to be opened between Madras and Arkonam and two have already been opened between Madras and Trivellore, a distance of 28 miles and these stations have since been confirmed, being both popular and profitable. This gives a station for every two miles up to Trivellore, but beyond that, it is four miles between each station, or a little less. I understand there was a demand from the villagers beyond Trivellore for a station being opened between mile No. 31 and 32 and about 4 or 5 years ago, a memorial was sent to the Agent on the subject and no steps have been taken as yet. Unless the Railway Company provides more facilities for suburban passengers and provides more stations at convenient distances, the suburban traffic will go down. In the Bombay side, there is a station for every one mile on the Bombay, Baroda and Central India line, and in the Calcutta side, there is a station for every two miles. Furthermore, Sir, the average lead of third class passengers in the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway line was 34 miles in 1910, it rose up to 37 miles in 1919-20 and it has come down to 32 in 1924-25. Apart from the subsequent rise in fares, which may be said to be one of the contributory causes for this decrease in traffic, there is every reason to suppose that want of traffic facilities is also responsible for this decrease. People were not prone to travel much more frequently paying higher fare and walking longer distances than before. Still, the new station asked for is within the lead and third class traffic has not abated in this area.

Another aspect of this question is, as I have stated above, from the view-point of the agriculturist. It will be remembered, Sir, that for nearly 25 miles on either side of the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway line, there is no railway communication. There is ample scope for feeder lines in the Madras Presidency more than in any other. The poor agriculturists in the interior have absolutely no means of getting favourable rates for their produce, and if they take it to Madras, whatever gain they may make there is eaten up by cartage and other expenses. Sir Clement Hindley in his recent budget speech said:

"The keynote of the programme we are now working to is the filling in of the interstices of the net work of trunk lines with useful branches and feeders so that the railway service may be brought right to the door of the agriculturist and the rural population."

I think, Sir, that before this becomes an accomplished fact, which is a matter of time and money and delay at every step, the opening up of more stations at convenient distances, thus minimising lead and cost of cartage, etc., will be the first and foremost step in the direction of the Railway Board translating their desire to help the poor agriculturists into action. After all, Sir, these new stations will not cost the company much. An annual recurring expenditure of Rs. 500 for establishment, etc., say, one station master on Rs. 20 per mensem, for that is the handsome minimum pay that is paid by the company for their staff, *plus* Rs. 10 for a porter, *plus* Rs. 10 for oil and other contingencies, in all Rs. 40 per mensem or Rs. 480 or Rs. 500 in round figures per annum and an initial expenditure of about that sum is all that may be required to start a trial station. Three or four tickets sold to Madras daily will meet this expense. So,

[Rao Sahib Dr. U. Rama Rau.]

I think if there is any public demand for more stations, the company would do well to open trial stations, to work them for a year or two, and then confirm or give them up, according as they are profitable or otherwise. That is the only way they could meet the popular demand. Instead, they plead a number of excuses and finally shelve the whole matter.

Before I conclude, Sir, I wish to say one word. This House has already been sufficiently reminded that questions of a local character ought to be dealt with by the Local Advisory Committees. So far as I know, these local Committees serve only certain vested interests and the dumb millions, the rural population, have no means of approaching them. So, their cries have always been cries in the wilderness. The Passengers' Associations who have their representative in these Advisory Committees are, I understand, tied down to certain limitations and restrictions. They are only expected to deal with passenger comforts, train alterations and the like, and besides they are not statutorily constituted bodies representing rural and agricultural interests. We, who are representing the public, can only bring these grievances before this Council and ask for redress. There being no other alternative open to us, such Resolutions are brought before this House. As I have said times without number, the Company-managed Railways, on whom the initiative rests in all such matters, are irresponsive and irresponsible and unless the Railway Board goads them into action, they are not likely to move fast and keep pace with the times. Until such a time arrives, when the executive are subject to the control of the Legislatures and when a just and equitable distribution of the varied interests in this country is secured in all the Committees and Councils, and when their decisions are made binding on the Railway and other administrations, I am afraid the Government of India will have to shew some indulgence to Honourable Members to have such grievances ventilated through this House and redress obtained.

With these words, Sir, I commend this Resolution for your kind acceptance.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. L. CORBETT (Commerce Secretary): Last week, Sir, also at the instance of the Honourable Mover, we discussed the question of suburban developments at Mangalore. To-day we are asked to discuss the question of suburban train services in Madras. I do not imagine that this House is very much interested in these suburban grouses from the Madras Presidency, and I will try to be as brief as possible.

I will first give the facts. The distance from Madras to Arkonam is 43 miles. On this length there are 16 railway stations. There are actually 9 stations on the first 18 miles. In the last 25 miles there are 7 stations, but stations are nowhere more than 4 miles apart.

Now, Sir, in determining the number of stations on a particular length of line several points have to be considered. First of all, there is the question of cost, on which the Honourable Mover seems to be somewhat misinformed. It actually costs Rs. 70,000 to build a single station of the simplest type, that is, an ordinary flag station without any arrangements for crossing. If you have platforms and an over-bridge, which are rather necessary on a suburban line, it costs two lakhs or more. Then you have the annual working expenses, which are not Rs. 500 a year as the

Honourable Mover supposes, but may be anything from Rs. 5,000 upwards a year for each station. Before undertaking this additional recurring and non-recurring expenditure, the railway administration naturally have to consider very carefully whether it is justified by traffic requirements. They cannot open a station one year and shut it the next, as a sort of test station, to the extent that the Honourable Member suggests.

Next you have got the conflicting interests of different groups of passengers. You have got to remember that every additional stopping place would slow down considerably the time of the local services. It takes time to slow down a locomotive, to halt and to get up speed again. You have got to weigh, therefore, the conflicting interests of different groups of passengers. On the one hand, there are the few people who would like the train to stop at some small wayside place, and, on the other hand, there are the very-much larger number who want to get on to their journey's end. You cannot always be stopping. *Prima facie* the distribution of stations on this railway seems to be very suitable. You have got them close together, about every two miles, for the first 18 miles from Madras, and afterwards, quite naturally and properly as one might expect, they begin to string out a bit.

However, this is a local matter, and as the Honourable Mover anticipated, I regard it as a question of local demand, on which I submit this House is really in no position to express an opinion. It is a matter, as the Honourable Mover himself suggested, which could more properly be discussed in the Local Advisory Committee to the Railway. I understand that the Honourable Mover is dissatisfied with the constitution of the Local Advisory Committee in Madras, and I agree that it seems to be a misfortune to Madras, and I might add to this House, that the Honourable Mover is not himself a member. However, I can assure the House that the local railway authorities are fully alive to the position, and are carefully watching the needs of suburban traffic round Madras. The Honourable Mover has himself said that quite recently they have successfully opened two new stations on this line, and with increased demand there is no doubt they will open more. And I may also add that their interest is being further stimulated by the development of motor omnibus traffic round Madras, which is assuming large proportions, and which is an additional local complication affecting the number of stations on the suburban lines which this House is quite unable to assess. That also is a purely local matter. I also understand that the improvement of the local services on this very line has recently been before the Advisory Committee. I am not well acquainted with Madras. The Honourable Mover will correct me if I am wrong, but I am told that one serious obstacle to the improvement of the service on this line is the need for an overbridge at Elephant Gate Road, instead of the existing level crossing, and that is one of the things that cause considerable delay in getting trains out of Madras. There have been difficulties with the Madras Corporation, but I am given to understand that through the influence of the Local Advisory Committee, these difficulties may be overcome. That at any rate, shows that the Local Advisory Committee has a certain value.

Well, Sir, I think we may safely leave this matter to the local railway authorities acting in consultation with their Advisory Committee. In fact, I think that we in this Council are hardly called upon to express an opinion on such a very local matter as the number of stations on a suburban line. Sir, I oppose the motion.

THE HONOURABLE COLONEL NAWAB SIR UMAR HAYAT KHAN (Punjab : Nominated Non-Official): Sir, when I first saw this Resolution I had a mind to put down an amendment to the effect that throughout the length and breadth of the country there should be stations two miles apart and that the train should stop at every one of them for at least, say, five minutes; but I meant, Sir, when moving this amendment, to say that "this amendment of mine is unworkable and ridiculous and so I withdraw it". But as the Resolution itself is also of such a nature, I would have asked my Honourable friend to withdraw his Resolution, as I withdraw my amendment. But this I have not done. However, I have said what I wanted to say, and I would ask the Mover to withdraw his Resolution, and I think the whole House will be very pleased if he does so.

THE HONOURABLE SAIYID ALAY NABI (United Provinces West : Muhammadan): Sir, may I tell the Honourable Mover of this Resolution that my difficulty in this case has been rather great. As the Honourable Member read out his speech, it was very difficult for me to follow him through all the reasoning and arguments which he gave in support of the proposition that he moved before the House, and still more to follow the facts and figures. I think, Sir, in a case like that it is very difficult to come to an independent judgment, and I think it would be for the good of the Council if a speech like that were to be distributed among the Members before they are asked for opinions in the matter.

THE HONOURABLE MR. P. C. DESIKA CHARI (Burma : General): Sir, at first I wanted to give a silent vote on this Resolution, but I find that there are some good points in the recommendation which is proposed to be made by this Resolution. We are told that there are these Local Advisory Councils, and my friend, the Honourable Dr. Rama Rau, has explained what the Local Advisory Council consists of. In fact originally when this line was constructed, I take it, it was meant to be a strategic line; and from my own experience of this part of the country, I say that the lines were so constructed and the stations were so located as to place the stations as far away from the distant villages as possible. The result is no doubt now that at some of these stations you will find villages springing up, and as for the more important villages, the villagers have to get down at some stations or other which are named after the villages and which are miles from the station, so that they can go to their homes: and I think it is high time that these distances ought to be removed by locating the stations more favourably. But as it is, in those places where stations have been located, villages have sprung up and it is not desirable to disturb those stations. But we have got a large area where there is no possibility of finding railway communication except by going to these few stations which are on this line between Madras and Arkonam. I know, Sir, the villagers are put to a considerable difficulty in going to the railway stations because they have not got even proper road communications to these places. No doubt the district is well provided with roads, but people have to go a long way and along a somewhat circuitous way to reach those roads which lead to Madras, and then, as it is, the roads not being near the railway stations, the traffic is more largely attracted by motor traffic which has recently come into vogue there. Sir, as it is, these poor villagers can illafford to pay the motor charges, which are more burdensome than the railway charges, and in the interests of the agriculturists it is absolutely essential that we ought to have stations which are more easily accessible; and if we locate

these stations at places where these villagers can have easy access, it is necessary to locate more stations: and that will come to the same thing as is suggested by my friend, the Honourable Dr. Rama Rau, because if you locate these stations within a distance of two miles from each other, there will be some sort of facility afforded to these villagers who will have to take a long way to go to the main roads to catch these motor buses and to go to Madras. Apart from that, we have got a large cooly population going all the way from Arkonam to Madras mostly every day, and these people find that they have to walk long distances before they can get to a train; and the difficulty can thus be appreciated when we see that these coolies who have to go to Madras have to get up very early to catch trains so that they may be in time for their work in Madras and places round about Madras.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Why cannot they go by lorries?

THE HONOURABLE MR. P. C. DESIKA CHARI: I have already explained that motor lorries cannot be secured at places along the railway line, and it is only on the main roads where they can find motor lorries. If they have to take an hour or two to get to motor lorries, how can they be in time? And then Madras is so largely congested that there is a tendency for the people to go and live in some of these suburban parts, and as it is, in several of these places where you have got stations, people who have got their permanent work in Madras have settled down, and at some of these places which are not provided with railway stations, there are very good facilities for such colonies for people who have to go to Madras every day. It would very greatly assist in relieving the congestion in Madras, and the agricultural population will also be greatly relieved; and I think that a matter of this kind is sufficiently important not to be entrusted to the Local Advisory Councils which are not meant for taking away a large share of the responsibility of the Central Government in these matters. No doubt in regard to small matters which require inquiries as regards the conveniences of the public or the location of one station or another or the provision of crossings and all that in a few places, the Local Advisory Council may be expected to look after them. But a matter of this kind involves a fairly large amount of expenditure, though I do not admit that it would cost so much as has been put forward by the Honourable Mr. Corbett. As it is, no doubt, for a flag station it would cost so much, but I find in several parts these stations consist of small bunks or disused railway carriages which are made into small railway stations for the booking clerk or station master. As a matter of practice you find this all along the lines. I do not see why a small beginning like that should not be made in these places. We do not want to be too ambitious in having these small amenities. If you make a modest beginning by having such sort of stations at least, it will go a long way to help these agriculturists, as well as clerks and other employees, who, on account of their small pay, find it impossible to find accommodation in Madras, having regard to the rise in rents. Rents have trebled from 1912 onwards, and it is not possible for people with a small pay to find the requisite accommodation. Now, that theory has become a recognised fact. In spite of all the facts and figures it has been practically accepted by all the Governments, and the Central Government particularly, that the cost of living in Madras is very cheap in spite of the facts and figures which will go to show that this is a fallacy and that Madras is as costly, if not costlier, than some of the other Presidency-towns which are considered to be costly.

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Under these circumstances, it will really be a great boon to the employees, as well as to the agriculturists, to have stations at a distance of two miles from each other, not because the people who can come to these stations can very well have a saving of two miles, but because a good deal of traffic which is not attracted to the railway will be attracted by locating these stations. The station called Uttarpara, including quarters for the station which naturally gets diverted to other channels and not to the Railways. With these words, I heartily support the Resolution.

THE HONOURABLE RAO SAHIB DR. U. RAMA RAU: Sir, the estimate given by the Government Member who opposed me was Rs. 70,000. That estimate, Sir, is a very high estimate. I know, Sir, that the cost of construction of the station called Uttarpara, including quarters for the station staff, as submitted by the railway authorities, came to approximately Rs. 45,000. That station is a third class station with waiting room for passengers and all that, so that the estimate of Rs. 70,000 is really too much. As my friend Mr. Chari has just now said, an unused railway carriage or one or two railway carriages could be used for a trial station or flag station. In that way the station could be tried for six months, and if it pays, a better station could be provided afterwards. There is no necessity for spending Rs. 70,000 for a flag station. The estimate for the maintenance charges, which the Honourable Member gave, is also too much. I do not think the station master of a flag station gets more than Rs. 25 or 30 and the pay of a porter is only Rs. 10 or 12. On the South Indian Railway, a station master does the work of the station master, ticket collector, ticket checker and everything else. You can get a station master and menial staff for a trial station at not more than Rs. 50. Then, for my not being on the Advisory Committee, I am thankful I am not, and even if I were on the Committee, I could do nothing because the Advisory Committee is constituted in such a way that their advice would not be taken by the Agent. As regards motor traffic, there is no motor traffic at all in these parts. Motor traffic only extends from Madras to Poonamalle on the South Indian Railway. So far as the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Company is concerned, there is no motor traffic along their line. As my friend Mr. Chari said, stations are 10 to 20 miles apart. Motor traffic can never compete with railway traffic at all. As for the question of the Elephant Gate crossing that has nothing whatever to do with this question. That is only an overbridge between Wall Tax Road and the railway goods station. That has nothing to do with the development of suburban traffic whatsoever. So, with these remarks, Sir, I do not see any reason why the Member in Charge of the Railway Department should not accept my Resolution.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: The question is:

“That the following Resolution be adopted:

“This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that between Madras and Arkonam on the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway there should be a Railway Station for every two miles and that new stations should be opened in places where this distance is exceeded.”

The motion was negatived.

RESOLUTION *RE* MANAGEMENT AND UPKEEP OF FISH-CURING
YARDS IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY.

THE HONOURABLE MR. V. RAMADAS PANTULU (Madras: Non-Muhammadan): Sir, I beg to move the following Resolution which stands in my name:

" This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that the management and upkeep of fish-curing yards in the Madras Presidency should be taken up by the Central Government."

I fear, Sir, that this Resolution might be somewhat uninviting and prosaic to this House from the view point of its topical interest. But there is a story behind it which I am sure will be of some interest to this Council if my Honourable colleagues would care to listen to it. I propose to tell the House the sad tale of a very interesting community in the Madras Presidency which at one time was plying a very flourishing trade but whose condition is now very miserable. The tale is indeed so harrowing that I have no doubt that it might perhaps melt even the hearts of my bureaucratic friends over there. The fishermen community in the Madras Presidency is a fairly large community. Fortunately, they are not reckoned among the depressed classes. They occupy a fairly high social position from the view point of the caste privileges. I do not know the conditions in other parts of India. It may be that in Bengal from which province a great poet Kalidasa came, the fishermen may be a depressed class, if his description of them in his famous drama *Sakuntala* is true, but the position of fishermen in Madras is far from that Kalidasa assigned to them in Bengal. They are respectable and interesting community. This community is responsible for carrying on a very important industry in the province of Madras, namely, the fishing industry. Before the introduction of the salt tax, this industry was carried on with the help of what they called the "salt earth." This salt earth is nothing but earth impregnated with salt which the women of this community used to gather in the hot season from low-lying saline lands, and from this earth they used to manufacture a sort of crude salt by dissolving it in water and evaporating the fluid either by boiling or by exposure to the sun. By that means they used to manufacture what is called "earth salt". With this salt they used to cure fish of small dimensions. With regard to larger fish they used to buy salt from the bazaar and used to cure the bigger fish. By this means they were making a very decent living and were also carrying on a fairly large trade. With the introduction of Act VII of 1840, if I am right, stringent regulations were introduced with regard to the use of this earth salt and the utilisation of salt earth for making or manufacturing earth salt was made punishable. These provisions were made still more stringent by the introduction of Act II of 1878. At that time, having regard to the importance of the industry in Malabar and South Canara and also having regard to the fact that the fishermen in these parts were found not to have recourse to illicit use of this earth salt, these two districts were exempted from the operation of that Act. But later on they were also brought under the Act and earth salt was made contraband, and the use of it for curing fish was also made punishable. Then as time went on the duty on salt was enhanced and it became practically impossible for the poor fishermen to pursue their hereditary occupation of curing fish with cheap salt, and salt was essential as a preservative of fish. Fish in those parts of the country is the only nutritive food which the poor people could get, and therefore not only trade

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suffered by the restrictions imposed on the use of cheap salt, but the cost of edible fish also became prohibitive. The Government realised the difficulty of the situation and they adumbrated a policy wherein they undertook the responsibility of establishing some public fish yards in important fishing centres along the coast. The object of these yards is firstly, to improve the condition of the fish-curing industry and secondly, to protect their own salt revenue. Ultimately the latter object seemed to have been kept in view much more than the former. My Honourable friends may not know what a fish-curing yard is. It is an enclosure fenced all round, with a shed in the middle, where salt is stored and supplied duty free, merely at the cost price of it, together with transport charges, to those who cure fish. The fish has got to be cured within these yards. Certain restrictions were imposed and certain rules were framed for the curing of these fish. The whole of the curing has got to be done in the yards and the fish has to be kept there for two or three days until the salt is dissolved and they become dry and these operations are carried on under the supervision of, and strict watch of, departmental officers. Therefore, the industry suffered greatly. Apart from that it had a tremendously depressing effect upon the fisherman as a class. It might interest the House to know that in this community both the men and women and children are equally industrious and the whole of the curing operation is conducted by the women and children. They all toil. The catching is the vocation of the man and curing is the job of the women and children. These women and children by traditional habit were accustomed to carry on their profession in sheds near their houses, because it was an essentially cottage industry. As they were a timid class of people they were reluctant to carry it on in public places and to have any direct intercourse with officers in uniform. So they were very shy in going to these yards. The men could hardly be spared for they had to be in the water to catch fish. In these yards they had to construct their own sheds to keep the fish. Therefore, the cost of putting up these sheds to cure the fish and the difficulty of women being induced to go to these public yards to work under the surveillance and supervision of these officers drove away the women and the fishermen as a class from this trade. There was also the constant fear of prosecution for infringing any of the salt laws and this was the last straw on the camel's back. Therefore, the fishermen have practically gone out of this curing business. But the Government has to see that somehow this curing was carried on and they resorted to the device of issuing licences. Some concessions were made and naturally enterprising middlemen came into the bargain and they took up these fish-curing yards and employed their own hired labour to cure fish. These hired labourers were hardly fishermen in many cases and therefore the entire trade had gone from the hands of the fisherman to the hands of the petty traders and the middlemen in a very short time. As I have told you, Sir, the cost of the bazaar salt, especially after the salt duty became heavy, was so prohibitive as to practically make it impossible to use it for curing fish. The normal value of salt in the bazaar was five to six times that of the old earth salt which these people were getting at a very low cost. They had no means of curing fish except by resorting to the Government curing yards. The women and children having been deprived of their facilities, these poor people became very much embarrassed. Fish caught by men could not be cured by their families. So they had to part with it to the middlemen who always tried to beat down

the prices. In course of time the gain from catching fish also thus dwindled gradually, and the men who had lost a very considerable source of income from the labour of their womenfolk had to incur debts and the credit naturally came from these middlemen. They advanced money to these fishermen and in course of time it led practically to the position of mortgages and anticipatory catches were sold to these people by means of forward contracts. This tended further to bring down the prices. So these poor people practically became stranded; and the evil has gone so far that, instead of getting the benefit of the fish caught by themselves, these men are compelled actually to buy the fish for their domestic use from these middlemen. That this evil is not exaggerated or imaginary will be apparent if I quote to you a small passage from an Administration Report of the Government in the year 1916 concerning the condition of Malpe, one of the most important fish-curing yards situated near the place from which the Honourable Dr. Rama Rau comes. The Report says:

"In April 1915 there were 71 ticket holders (licensees) of whom only 6 belong to the fisher community and these have also to engage coolies of other castes to carry on curing operations. The remaining ticket holders (65 out of 71) belong to various non-fisher castes, such as Brahmans, Muhammadans, Christians, Bhunts, Shettis, Billavas, etc., who were attracted to this industry by the large profits it gives, as several people have grown rich by it. These conduct operations through hired labourers. Thus the curing industry is mostly in the hands of non-fisher castes."

That is from the Report of 1916. Then a very well-informed reviewer of the situation had reviewed the condition of the fishermen in these distressing words:

"Contrabanding the original method of curing, and the opening of the public yards, have destroyed the domestic aspect of the industry. It was a short step from this to the middleman system in the shape of licenses to the yards, which took advantage of the indigence of the fishermen, advanced them money and practically attached them as mortgagees in anticipation of catches which the poor fishermen were to obtain by their toil. By its very nature the article must needs be disposed off at a price that is offered on the spot, which the middleman takes care to keep down at the lowest level in order to strengthen his hold upon the fishermen. The pathetic irony of the situation is in the fact that the fisher folk have themselves to buy from middlemen contractors their supply for domestic use. It is no wonder therefore that the condition of the community has been going down from year to year."

This is the criticism of a very well-informed journalist. These conditions did not improve since 1916. I am free to admit that the Government was not inspired by any desire to make a profit out of this transaction. They recognized that it was their duty to take over these fish yards, because their introduction was a direct incidence of their policy of administering the salt tax. Therefore, they recognized the fact that they had to maintain these fish yards, although the income from the issue price of salt was not quite sufficient to maintain them. But as a matter of fact it was found that they were making some profit, a considerable amount of profit. And on looking into the reports I find that in 1897-98 the progressive profits aggregated a lakh and 50 thousand rupees. As their policy was not to make any profit apparently the Government was a little piqued at this result and consoled itself with this statement in the Report which appeared in a later year:

"The usual method of calculating loss or gain on fish-curing operations has been found to be defective and that the true gain is much smaller than has hitherto been supposed."

All they say is that something is wrong with the calculations. When we come to 1912-13 we find that there was a further progressive accumulated

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profit of Rs. 1,20,000. In 1917-18 they introduced a system of charging a fixed price of 10 annas per maund instead of a varying issue price which consisted of the cost of manufacture *plus* transport charges. And in regard to this 10 annas price, what the Board of Revenue of Madras said was that this "more than covered the cost of making the salt and delivering it at yards, but it only covered a part of the charges on account of establishment and construction and repairs." I value those words of the Board very greatly, for this reason. Their implication is clear that the Government recognized its responsibility to maintain these yards and also to bear a part of the establishment charges, though the payment of extra expenditure is not covered by the income. It is a direct admission of their responsibility to maintain these yards. Then a very great change came over this industry with the bifurcation of the Salt and the Excise Departments. As soon as the bifurcation took place the fish yards were handed over to the Department of Fisheries which the Local Government has been administering, and since then the change has wrought even greater havoc in regard to the condition of these fishermen. In order to make these fish yards self-supporting and not to put an undue strain upon the resources of the Provincial Government, the issue price of salt was doubled. From 10 annas it was increased to Rs. 1-4-0, and it naturally told very prejudicially upon the trade. In the very year in which this extra charge was put on, the fish curers had to pay out Rs. 1,17,000 in addition to what they used to pay till then. Last year, which happened to be a year of famine and cyclones, has brought these people down to the lowest economic state imaginable.

To reduce the cost of the salt the Madras Government purchased what I may describe as a white elephant. In April, 1926, they got down a second-hand trawler, and by the end of June, 1926,—I have access only to the Report of 1926—its cost and transport charges have come to somewhere near Rs. 1,05,000. The wisdom of this step was questioned by the Members of the local Legislative Council, who asked some questions as to what work it was going to be put on, and the Council was assured that it would only be used for deep sea fishing and for the transport of salt to west coast fish-curing yards from salt-factories. As a matter of fact we find that it is now a maid of all work, and in addition to those duties it is also doing the duty of inspecting pearl banks, research work and so on. Therefore, what we find is that this trawler, which is now costing the Government of Madras a sum of Rs. 10,000 monthly, including her Master's pay, has proved to be a case where the remedy is worse than the disease. There was therefore no improvement. I am therefore asking the Government of India to take this industry into their own hands.

My reasons for asking them are briefly three. Firstly, these fish-curing yards are the direct incidence of their policy of regulating the salt tax. The salt tax is a Central subject and so they ought to take up their working. The Fisheries Department of Madras has to maintain a staff of officers; duplicate the inspecting staff and employ a number of menials, and there is in addition a Salt Department also to supervise what is going on. The result is that the cost is very heavy and the industry is suffering. In order to make the yards self-sufficing the cost

has been put up, and I find as a matter of fact this year that a profit of Rs. 18,000 odd has been made by the Fisheries Department on the fish-curing yards. This is a very anomalous state of affairs. While the fish yards were under the direct supervision of the Salt Department, till the bifurcation as I told you, a profit was being made with a lower issue price of salt and then the Government did not lose anything over it. The Government therefore need not be under any apprehension of loss. Even if it does lose I think it ought to bear the loss because this is a part of the huge system of salt monopoly in this country. Again, the Government has as a matter of fact taken up the direct management of the fish yards in the Presidency of Bombay, and experience of working in the Bombay Presidency shows that by minimising the cost and avoiding duplication of machinery, by the management of these yards under the combined supervision of the Salt and Customs Department in Bombay the Government is able to issue salt at 12 annas per maund instead of at the Rs. 1-4 rate at which they issue it in the Madras Presidency. A similar economy will be possible in the Presidency of Madras, if the Government does take it up, as I hope it will. Secondly, the plea which I have noticed in

12 Noon. some of the reports in favour of the things being run by the Fisheries Department is that in view of the fact that the operations will be supervised by expert officials, the quality of the salt curing will be improved and the cured fish will be of a superior variety. But this plea has been exploded very often, and 30 years ago the Board of Revenue, Madras, said that these experiments in improving the quality of the cured fish had proved futile, and that the fishermen were not people who would improve by any amount of teaching in that direction. Things have not changed during the last 30 years. Therefore, I think the hope of the Fisheries Department improving the quality of fish-curing is a vain one. Then, Sir, thirdly, there is yet another consideration why the Government should intervene. The fisheries are a transferred department in the province and are being administered by the Minister for Development. These operations are costing an amount of Rs. 1,20,000 a year in the Madras Fisheries Department, and the legitimate claims of other industries which are the proper charge of the Development Minister are suffering on account of this expenditure which he has to incur. If the expenditure is to be minimised, or if the industry is to be self-supporting, then you have got to put up the price of salt to such an extent that the industry will be hit. Either you must prejudice industries which have a legitimate claim upon the resources of the Development Minister, or you have got to put up the cost of the salt so much as to hit the fish trade. These things can be avoided by the Government of India. I would request my Honourable friend, Mr. Brayne, the Government spokesman on this occasion, to investigate this matter carefully. I have not tried to exaggerate the situation. Those who have seen the condition of these fishermen will shed tears for them, and if you want a correct description of the economic condition of these men, I would refer you to bulletin No. 9—Fisheries—published by the Madras Government in 1916. It is a very interesting document which gives you a very graphic account of the condition of these men, and since 1916 during the last decade their condition has become much worse. It would be an act of justice, mercy, and graciousness to a community like this if the Government of India would inquire into their condition and do what it can for them. I am glad to note that the Honourable Mr. Brayne has tabled an amendment to my Resolution which meets me halfway. If he is not prepared to accept

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my Resolution, at any rate he is prepared to consider the recommendation of this House as to the advisability and practicability of transferring the control of the fish-curing yards in the Madras Presidency to the Central Government. I hope that is not a mere caution which is intended to obviate the difficulties of accepting my Resolution. If it is something more than that—and I always care for practical sympathy—if practical sympathy is forthcoming, I shall, as at present inclined and advised, be very glad to accept the amendment, coupled with the hope that the amendment has real sympathy behind it, just as my Resolution has really a real sad tale behind it. With these words, I commend this Resolution to this House.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Resolution moved:

“This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that the management and upkeep of fish-curing yards in the Madras Presidency should be taken up by the Central Government.”

The question is that that Resolution be adopted. Does the Honourable Member (Mr. Brayne) wish to speak?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. F. L. BRAYNE (Finance Secretary): No, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: The question is that that Resolution be adopted.

The motion was adopted.

THE HONOURABLE KHAN BAHADUR SIR MUHAMMAD HABIBULLAH SAHIB BAHADUR (Member for Education, Health and Lands): Sir, with your permission I beg to invite the attention of the House to the agenda which was issued for this day. As Honourable Members will notice, it contained three Resolutions which were intended to be discussed to-day, but they will also notice that Resolution No. 2 has not been moved. It will be within the recollection of Honourable Members that the practice that certain Resolutions appear on the agenda and are not moved in the course of the day has become more or less a matter of frequent occurrence. They will, I hope, realize that when notice of a Resolution is received by Government, it is incumbent on the Government Member in charge of that Resolution to spend time and labour in the preparation of the case so that he may present it to this House when the Resolution is moved. This labour and time cannot be saved if notice of the fact that a particular Resolution which has been balloted and appears on the agenda is not going to be moved is not given to him in sufficient time to obviate that inconvenience. I therefore very earnestly appeal to the Honourable Members of this House to be good enough to give timely notice of the fact that any Resolutions which might have been balloted and which might appear on the agenda will not be moved by them, so that the Member in charge may not devote that attention to its preparation which would otherwise be necessary.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I hope Honourable Members will pay due attention to what I consider the very reasonable request of the Honourable the Leader of the House. The Council will now adjourn till Saturday, the 5th March, at 11 O'clock.

The Council then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Saturday, the 5th March, 1927.