

***THE INDIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL***

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PROCEEDINGS

OF

THE INDIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ASSEMBLED FOR THE PURPOSE OF MAKING

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

From April 1919 to March 1920

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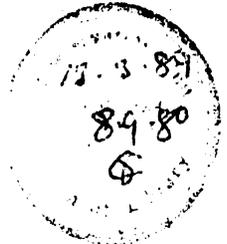
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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.  
LEGISLATIVE DEPARTMENT.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE INDIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, ASSEMBLED UNDER  
THE PROVISIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT, 1915.  
(5 & 6 Geo. V, Ch. 61.)

The Council met at the Council Chamber, Viceregal Lodge, Simla, on  
Tuesday, the 16th September, 1919.

PRESENT :

The Hon'ble SIR GEORGE LOWNDES, K.C.S.I., K.C., *Vice-President, presiding,*  
and 50 Members, of whom 44 were Additional Members.

**RESOLUTION re HIGH PRICES OF NECESSARY ARTI-  
CLES OF FOOD AND CLOTH—(Contd).**

**The Hon'ble Sir George Lowndes:**—"The Council will proceed with the discussion of the Resolution from yesterday." 11 A.M.

**The Hon'ble Nawab Saiyed Nawab Ali Chaudhri:**—"Sir, I beg to associate myself with the Resolution which has been moved by the Hon'ble Mr. Kamini Kumar Chanda. In doing so, I am impelled by a strong sense of duty. The distress of the people has really been appalling, and Eastern Bengal has perhaps been the worst sufferer. All the articles of food, as well as those other things, which nobody can do without, have been selling at famine prices. Sir, it will be no exaggeration to say that many people are going with only one meal a day. Indeed instances are not rare in which people are reported to have died of starvation or to have committed suicide through pangs of hunger. The prices are rising, as it were, by leaps and bounds. If nothing is done to check their rising tendency immediately, the situation will undoubtedly become worse. Already we have heard of several cases of hat-looting in the Barrackpore and Serampore Sub-divisions of Bengal. The *Englishman* newspaper to hand reports many cases of paddy looting in the districts of Midnapur, Howrah and Hooghly. The said paper also publishes reports of similar occurrences in such well-known villages near about Calcutta as Naihati, Jagatdal, Champdany, Gourhati, Rishra, Bally and Sheoraphuly." 11-3 A.M.

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FOOD AND CLOTH.

[*Nawab Salyed Nawab Ali Chaudhri.*]

[16TH SEPTEMBER, 1919.]

"A number of hungry people, according to an Associated Press report, recently raided the Kanaksar Post Office in the Dacca District. The man frankly said that they wanted money as they had been starving for four days. Fortunately the assailants were arrested before they could get hold of the money in the iron safe. The Government cannot but put down such acts of lawlessness with a firm hand, but true statesmanship demands that the root causes of these disorders, which are purely economic, should be removed before it is too late. In some cases offenders have openly admitted that they preferred jail life to starvation at home. This, Sir, is a serious state of things in all conscience. I can quite understand that the problem is beset with difficulties and cannot be solved as easily as we might desire; but the Government should leave no stone unturned to ease the situation. By controlling exports, facilitating imports, reducing freights, regulating prices and putting an immediate stop to profiteering, matters may considerably be improved. I am convinced, Sir, that profiteering has been the worst feature of the situation. It is intolerable that a number of unscrupulous traders should take advantage of the present helplessness of the people and make phenomenal profits at their cost.

"I was gratified to learn from the speech delivered in Council yesterday by the Hon'ble Mr. Mant that Government have taken steps in the matter. I welcome the assurance that the problem is engaging their serious attention. But the fact remains that the distress is becoming more acute and wide-spread every day. I do not say that Government have done nothing, but the question is, whether the steps taken so far have been sufficient. The supply of Burma rice in the Bengal districts has not been either adequate or prompt. This view is supported by statements that have appeared in the Press. The Dacca 'Herald' points out in a recent issue that, while the average daily consumption in the city of Dacca alone is nearly 1,500 maunds, the total supply of Burma rice during a week has been only about 5,500 maunds. So the supply is not sufficient to last the city more than four days, and there is nothing for the rest of the district. Almost the same story is repeated from Mymensingh and Barisal. If ample allotments are made for each particular district, on the basis of a liberal calculation of the requirements of every sub-division, thana or village, and if these allotments are promptly imported into the locality, scarcity will be relieved and the upward course of prices checked. Government should, if necessary, commandeer steamers and other transport for speedy carriage of Burma rice.

"The Hon'ble Mr. Mant has referred to a question asked by the Hon'ble Maharaja of Kasimbazar last year, in which it was assumed that Bengal had a large exportable surplus. I doubt very much whether this optimistic assumption on the Maharaja's part is in accord with facts. I desire to know if it is a fact that upon an average calculation of the last few years, Bengal had to import more rice than she exported, which would go to show that she cannot depend upon her own produce for her internal requirements. If this is so, how can Bengal be stated to have an exportable surplus in any of these years? At any rate, the low prices of rice last year cannot justify export on such a large scale as has been made.

"The Hon'ble Mr. Chanda's Resolution deals only with articles of food and cloth, but there is at least one thing which he apparently forgets to mention and which is no less in demand by all sections of the people. I refer to Kerosine oil. I have ascertained on inquiry that the price of this indispensable commodity has so long been kept up only through sheer profiteering. It is needless for me to multiply instances. The whole matter is too well known to His Excellency's Government to be dilated upon.

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FOOD AND CLOTH.

[16TH SEPTEMBER, 1919.]

[*Nawab Saiyed Nawab Ali Chaudhri ;  
Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra  
Nandi.*]

" I feel no hesitation in asserting that the serious economic crisis with which we are faced to-day, should have precedence over all other matters engaging the attention of Government and the leaders of public opinion. We should have no rest or peace of mind until we have arrived at a satisfactory solution of the economic difficulties which beset us to-day. I hope and trust that your Excellency's Government will rise to the height of the occasion and save His Majesty's Indian subjects by all manner of means. Before I resume my seat I would request my friend the Hon'ble Mover of the Resolution to accept the suggestions made by the Hon'ble Mr. Mant."

**The Hon'ble Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi :—** 11-10 A.M.

" Sir, I come from a Province whose smiling fields and ample granary were almost proverbial at one time, but which is now enveloped by the dark shadow of famine. There has not been such acute and widespread distress in Bengal within living memory. Apart from the suffering which we see about us everywhere, one cannot open the newspapers without coming across doleful accounts of the distress, all of which cannot certainly be exaggerated. Privation has led to disease and death, and cases of suicide and even of abandonment of children by mothers are reported. Driven to desperation by hunger, people have already begun to break the bounds of law. They are courting imprisonment which saves them from starvation. Sir, the situation is getting more and more grave in Bengal, and Government should take immediate steps to grapple with it.

" The high prices are, no doubt, to a certain extent, one of the unwelcome legacies left by the war, and are a world problem. As pointed out by the Hon'ble Mr. Mant yesterday, the unprecedented destruction and waste, coupled with an unusual inflation of currency, must be recognised to be among the factors making for a rise in prices. But we cannot refer to these world factors, without being reminded, at the same time, of the enormous efforts which the different countries of the world are putting forth for bringing down prices and easing the situation. A very complete system of control over food-supplies was introduced by the allied Nations in Europe and America during the war, and we have recently seen drastic legislation passed, after the termination of the war, to prevent profiteering. But what has been the case in India? I shall let the 'Pioneer' answer this question. In an editorial note, it wrote thus on the 11th July last:—

' There has been far too much observable hitherto of a tendency to keep within the limits of so-called sound economic dogma, and too little of the propensity to meet the demands of an unparalleled situation with measures of an equally novel character. Britain during the war has tried many strange experiments in rationing and fixing prices which in normal times would never have had a chance of being tried; and it is to the success of these experiments that Britain has owed the power of endurance she displayed in the latter stages of the struggle with the Central Empires. In India, authority has been chary about embarking on any policy of 'thorough,' and so while there has been nominally food control and 'direction' of supplies, prices have continued to soar upwards and profiteering has flourished.'

" This, Sir, is the considered opinion of a very sober and responsible Journal to which Government are expected to attach some weight. The essential objects of food control in England, as stated by a writer in the 'Edinburgh Review,' of January 1918, have been these:—

- (1) to stimulate home production and maintain imports,
- (2) to prevent the exploitation of war conditions by private greed; and
- (3) to secure for each member of the community equal opportunities of obtaining the available supplies.

These were the objects for which Lord Rhondda strove with a large amount of success in England.

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[*Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi.*]

[16TH SEPTEMBER, 1919.]

"The whole business of importing and of wholesale distribution was taken over by the State, the firms engaged in the business were made agents of Government at fixed rates of remuneration, maximum retail prices were fixed, the profits of the middlemen were reduced to a minimum. Consumption was also controlled, economies in food consumption effected on scientific principles, and national kitchens set up for cheap supply of food. Bread was artificially cheapened, with the result that the one pound loaf which would cost one shilling one penny, was made available at 9½ pence, and this entailed on the State an annual burden varying between 4 and 5 crore pounds sterling by way of subsidy to the Millers. While this was the case in England, the United States of America, under Mr. Hoover's supervision, laboured, as stated in the 'Times,' 'to increase production and to promote conservation,' and succeeded in stabilizing the price of wheat; all speculation either in wheat or flour was eliminated and the margin of profit to Millers was reduced to the minimum commensurate with maintaining the plants in a state of efficiency and perpetuating the industry. By these means was America enabled not only to avert food trouble at home, but also to feed the Allied Nations in Europe to a great extent.

"Can it be said, Sir, that the present system of control in India has attempted even a fraction of what was accomplished in England and America? In the first place, we find on a reference to the published statistics that there has not been any appreciable increase in the home production of foodgrains during these few years; yet we had, as a matter of solemn duty, to supply a considerable quantity of food grains to Europe and Africa during the war. Perhaps we have exported food beyond our means, and this, coupled with a partial failure of crops last year, has been certainly responsible to some extent for the prevailing scarcity and high prices. The Burma rice crop, which is our only hope now, was not also normal last year, and there are heavy demands for it from overseas. There are not, moreover, adequate arrangements ensuring a sufficient supply of Burma rice everywhere in the country.

"Next, as to prevention of profiteering, I am constrained to observe that Government have done very little, so far as Bengal at least is concerned. From my little experience, I can say that the prices of rice could not have gone up so much if the authorities had interfered in time. Then, as regards the securing of bare necessities of life to every member of the community, there does not appear to have been any serious attempt in this direction except in respect of areas where famine has been formally declared to prevail, and there also in regard only to those in receipt of direct relief. No provision has been made, in Bengal at least, for relieving the middle classes and persons having fixed low incomes, who are in the greatest misery and are yet loth to seek charity. But for the supply of Burma rice under license, which again has been very much belated in the case of Bengal, Government could not claim to have taken definite action by way of affording general relief against the high prices of foodstuffs in my province. And in this matter also, only half measures have so far been adopted in Bengal. As I have said, it was not till comparatively recently that Bengal was allowed to import Burma rice under license for her own domestic consumption. When these supplies arrived, Government fixed only the wholesale rates at which certain licensed importers would be allowed to sell the rice in Calcutta. There has been no dependable arrangement under which this rice would be available in sufficient quantities and at regulated prices everywhere in the Muffasil where the distress is the acutest. From a statement made by the Local Government in the Bengal Legislative Council on the 3rd September last, it would appear that Burma rice is available only in seven districts of Bengal. In some of these places, again, there is not an adequate or continuous supply. I myself had recently to

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obtain a consignment of Burma rice for free distribution among my tenants. It arrived after a month of my ordering it and after a good deal of difficulty.

“A leading citizen of Bengal, writing from the Muffasil on the 4th September, says as follows :—

‘The District Board have been trying to supply Burma rice at cost price. The other day they bought 9,500 maunds in Calcutta but only 900 (nine hundred) maunds have reached here, meanwhile the clamour is deafening.’

“The Muffasil newspapers also make similar complaints, showing that the arrangements for the supply and carriage of Burma rice leave very much to be desired. In one instance, it is pointed out that the only supply during the week, which was not sufficient, came in steamers owned by an Indian Company, there being apparently no priority given to it by the European Steamer Companies.

“Sir, I understand that a good deal more has been done by way of relieving the distress in Bombay, Madras, Bihar and Orissa and certain other areas, than in Bengal. In several Native States, rice has been artificially cheapened at the cost of the Durbars. I fail to see why Government should not provide, on their own responsibility, for the retail sale of Burma rice throughout the interior of the country at fixed prices. I quite appreciate their difficulty in regard to fixing prices of indigenous rice over whose source of supply they have no control. But if the authorities were to import Burma rice in sufficient quantities, make arrangements for its sale in every town and every important village, and fix its price at every stage, it will have a stabilizing effect on the rice market generally and tend to lower prices of the indigenous stuffs as well. Greater transport facilities should also be secured for Burma rice, the freight from Rangoon to India further reduced, and local consignments permitted to be carried by rail and inland steamers at concession rates. And if, as a condition of reduction of freight Government have to pay subsidies to the carrying firms, I trust Government will ungrudgingly bear the burden.

“Sir, so far we have suffered many of the disadvantages of a system of control, without benefiting by its merits. The evils of partial control have been described by Mr. Clynes, then Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food, who made the following statement in the House of Commons on the 16th August, 1917 :—

‘We are but now erecting machinery for carrying out very big schemes relating to food supply and food control. The schemes involve, in regard to many important foods, the fixing of prices at every stage. It has been found that failure, so far as failure can be discovered, in the case of Germany and other countries, has arisen largely from partial control, and from not having fixed prices at every stage for commodities handled and sold by those who are in the business.’

“I hope, Sir, the warning given by Mr. Clynes against partial control will not be lost upon Government, in connection with their schemes for the supply of Burma rice.

“To add to the difficulties brought about by the rice situation there is the intense suffering caused by the abnormally high prices of cloth. I beseech Government to take immediate and effective steps for making Burma rice and standardised cloth available to every man, woman, and child at reasonable prices. If Government fail to rise to the occasion, I shudder to think of the consequences.

“With these remarks, I support the Resolution which has been moved by the Hon'ble Mr. Chanda.”

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[*Mr. A. H. Ley ; Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya.*]

[16TH SEPTEMBER, 1919.]

11-2 5 A.M.

**The Hon'ble Mr. A. H. Ley** :—“ Sir, I have been asked to say a few words on the subject of cloth, which figures prominently in the text of the Hon'ble Member's Resolution. I listened very carefully to his speech when he introduced the Resolution, but I am bound to say I did not even hear the word mentioned the whole time he was speaking. It may be said then, that it is superfluous for me to mention the subject. But I do think it is a matter of some importance, and that the ques on ought to be ventilated and ought not to be passed over entirely in silence. That, Sir, is my only apology for addressing the Council.

“ I confess that I came to the Council yesterday with a sense of anxious expectation, hoping that, from the words of wisdom which I expected to fall from the Hon'ble Mover's lips, some constructive proposals, some concrete suggestions, might be gleaned. But I had not listened for more than two minutes when I realised that my hopes were going to be dashed to the ground. I think the Hon'ble Member started by saying . . . . .

**The Hon'ble Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya** :—“ Will the Hon'ble Member kindly speak up.”

**The Hon'ble Mr. A. H. Ley** :—“ I think the Hon'ble Member started by saying that he did not propose to go into details, he was not going to make any definite suggestions, and, in fact, I think he said he did not know anything about the economic side of the question, but that his intention was merely to draw attention to the height of prices. I certainly sympathise with him. The question is an extremely difficult one, but I think its main features can be expressed fairly simply and fairly shortly. The case of cloth is, to my mind, exactly the opposite, in one aspect at any rate, to the case of foodstuffs, with which the Hon'ble Mr. Mānt has dealt. In the case of foodstuffs India is an exporting country, that is to say, she produces normally speaking more than she consumes; the opposite is the case with cloth. Her production of cloth, although considerable, is only about half her requirements. It is quite true that she does export a certain amount of piece-goods to Persia, Arabia and neighbouring markets, but the proportion of her exports to her total production is so small that, even if you did restrict the export of piece-goods, I think it is extremely doubtful whether such a measure would have the smallest effect upon internal prices. Possibly the only result would be that you would lose an opportunity of developing what is after all a promising market without any compensation at all. However, to return from that point to my main point, I think the mere fact that India is an importing country in the matter of cloth renders any Government attempt at interference with the normal laws which govern prices more difficult and more dangerous than it would be in the case of a commodity which India exports in large quantities. It is to my mind obvious that it is impossible to maintain for any length of time internal prices in India out of all their normal relations with external prices, that is to say, with world's prices, without checking the flow of imports,—that is to say, without doing precisely what it should be your object to avoid, increasing and accentuating the shortage of supplies. It is the shortage of supplies which is the crux of the whole situation; it is the shortage of supplies, which is the profiteers' opportunity. Well, I think in circumstances of this kind, Government can hardly take measures other than purely temporary and partial palliatives. And this they have done, or have attempted to do, by the passing of the Cotton Cloth Act in this Council last year, and by the manufacture of standard cloth. As long as the Cotton Cloth Act is on the Statute-book,—and, as far as I know, there is no intention at present of repealing it,—Government can compel manufacturers in this country to manufacture and sell to Government a certain proportion of the product of their looms at prices which preclude

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profiteering ; and they can, with greater or less success, effect the distribution of that cloth among the classes which they wish to reach. But my point is that this can only be done, and is only intended to be done, on a very limited scale and to a very limited extent. If you widen the scale or if you increase the extent, you run up against the danger which I have endeavoured to explain, namely, of ultimately merely accentuating the shortage of supplies.

“ Well, I need not go into what has been actually done under the Cloth Act ; it will be unnecessary to take up the time of the Council by mentioning these details. But I think that, broadly speaking, it can fairly be said that the mere passing of the Act and the exercise of control which the Act conveyed was one of the factors,—not by any means the sole or principal factor, but it was one of the factors,—which brought down the price of cloth from over Rs. 3 a pound last year to Rs. 1-5 a pound. It is quite true that after the slump prices began to stiffen a bit, they rose again somewhat, I think, about the end of April or the beginning of May last ; after that they remained fairly steady, but for the last two or three weeks there has been a well-marked and welcome falling off in prices. The downward movement may have been largely caused, or if not largely caused, at any rate largely assisted by the rise in exchange. I will not go into the exchange question at present, but I think it can fairly be said now that the present wholesale prices of Indian cloth are not unreasonable, when the price of cotton is taken into consideration ; and as a matter of fact the margin between the price of standard cloth manufactured under the Cotton Cloth Act and the price of ordinary cloth is now so narrow, and has been so narrow for some time past, that the manufacture of standard cloth is at present in abeyance. I think also it can be said that the operations of Mr. Noyce, the Controller of Cotton Cloth, and of the various provincial Controllers in those provinces which indented for standard cloth, have on the whole been very successful. In fact, in two provinces their operations were so successful in reducing prices of cloth in the districts that the Local Governments concerned experienced considerable embarrassment and difficulty in retailing their stocks, and at the present moment they hold large stocks of standard cloth sufficient to last them several months. As far as the Hon'ble Mover's own province, Assam, is concerned, all I can say is that all the indents that Assam has made for standard cloth have been complied with up to date, and arrangements have been made to meet future indents from the surplus stocks which at present exist in the province of Bihar and Orissa.

“ My only object in making these remarks, Sir, is to try and show that the Government have not been sitting idly doing nothing ; they have tried to tackle what everybody admits to be an extremely difficult question. But they are not like a surgeon who can cut out the root of the disease with the knife ; all that they can do is, to administer temporary palliatives till the fever subsides in the normal course. History repeats itself in this matter. It is always the case that wages are slow to respond to prices ; they do respond, and they will respond, in the long run, but the interval is always a period of distress and suffering. I do not want my remarks to be taken as in any sense in opposition to the Hon'ble Mover's Resolution, or to the object which he seeks to attain. Far from it. I am only trying to point out that there are difficulties, and I am quite sure that any suggestions which the Hon'ble Member or anybody else has to make which can be reasonably expected to mitigate the evil without involving a remedy worse than the disease, will be unreservedly welcomed by every member of this Council.”

**The Hon'ble Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya :—**“ May I ask, Sir, if Government has made any efforts to stimulate the production of cotton in this country and, if so, what ? ”

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Bahadur.*]

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**The Hon'ble Mr. A. H. Ley** :—“ I think that is a question, Sir, for the Revenue and Agriculture Department, the question of cotton cultivation. But I believe it has been done.”

11-35 A.M. **The Hon'ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur** :—“ Sir, I have every sympathy with the spirit of the Resolution. My heart goes out in deep sympathy to my distressed countrymen in their present sufferings due to the abnormally high prices of foodstuffs. Whoever heard of such unprecedentedly high prices of rice as Rs. 13 or Rs. 14 a maund, as were prevailing in the districts of Dacca and Mymensing only a short time ago? When in 1897 and 1898 prices of rice went up to 6 or 7 rupees a maund, it was called the greatest famine of the century, and numerous meetings—large and small—were held throughout the country to raise money for relieving the distress of the people. But when to-day the prices are more than double, we are still apathetic and indifferent to the sufferings of our countrymen and have hitherto done very little, nay nothing, to relieve their sufferings! But that is another story. What we are now really concerned with is, whether we should approach the Government and ask them to artificially reduce prices of foodstuffs. Is this possible or is this desirable? I must state at the very outset that I have every sympathy with the Resolution that the price of foodstuffs should be reduced. But is this possible? Is this desirable? There can be no question that it would be a great blessing if something could be done which would have the effect of bringing down the prices of foodstuffs. Admitting for the sake of argument that it could be done, would it have the desired effect? Would it not have a contrary effect? I may here point out that the policy to control the price of rice has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. In two districts of Bengal, namely, Dacca and Mymensing, an attempt was made by Government to control the price of rice with the result that Mahajans refused to import rice and the market price went further up.

“ A policy of interference with the free movement of food grains and an attempt to control their price might have disastrous effects on the consumers. A policy of non-interference hitherto pursued has led traders to freely move rice and other foodstuffs from one place to another as necessity demanded. A contrary policy would surely prevent Mahajans from exporting or importing foodgrains from one place to another according to the exigencies of the times. Once the policy of artificially controlling prices of articles of commerce were followed and adopted, it would be difficult to define to what articles alone such artificial reduction of prices should be confined. In my humble opinion it would be laying a very dangerous precedent. Jute is a monopoly of the Bengal rayots. It is their chief income—it is the chief means of living of the cultivating classes in many districts of Bengal. Even in this present difficulty with the high prices of jute continuing, the jute cultivators did not fare so badly, i.e., did not feel the effect of the high prices so much as the other classes of people. Now if the price of jute were to go above rupees 20, as it actually did only a short time ago, what would prevent my esteemed friend the Hon'ble Mr. Crum and other jute-mill owners from approaching His Excellency the Governor of Bengal and asking him to reduce the price of jute from Rs. 20 to Rs. 8 or Rs. 10? If such a course were followed would not a hue-and-cry be raised against the Government that they are going to sacrifice the rayots in the interest of the mill-owners? Even without artificially controlling the prices of rice the present high tension could be eased in different other ways and by different other means. In my opinion if the export of rice from Bengal had been prohibited earlier, or if the import of rice from Burma

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[*Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur; Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma.*]

had not been restricted or even if so many restrictions had not been imposed, *i.e.*, if there had been a free import of rice from Burma or if facilities had been given by way of tonnage or shipping for transport of rice from Burma then, I take the liberty to assert that the prices of rice could not have risen so much. From my little experience I can say that at the present moment there is not a sufficient stock of rice in Bengal. The only factors which can reduce the prices of rice are to do away with all artificial restrictions, to abolish the post of Controller of Civil Supplies—though I have nothing to complain against the present holder of the post,—to allow a free import of rice from Burma into India and to provide facilities for transport of Rangoon rice. Why, the market has already eased down to some extent as soon as it has become known that large imports of rice are coming from Burma? I could cite several concrete cases to show how unnecessary restrictions have prevented generous-minded people from buying Burma rice for relieving the sufferings of the distressed people. However, without dilating further on the subject, if all unnecessary restrictions imposed were immediately removed and the several posts created for controlling the movement of foodstuffs were abolished, and if free import of rice from Burma were allowed and the import not confined to four firms in Calcutta—three European and one Indian—I say the market would automatically go down as it has already done to some extent.

“We are thankful to Government for what they have done. But, unless further measures are adopted to bring down prices, the sufferings of the people will be more terrible and may lead to more food riots and serious loss of life. Already there are dark clouds gathering on the horizon and my Hon'ble friend Mr. Chanda has referred to several cases of looting in Bengal. I, therefore, urge the necessity of adopting further measures to relieve the distress due to abnormally high prices.”

**The Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma:**—“Sir, we are indebted to the Hon'ble Mr. Mant for the admirable exposition of the Government case on this very important question, which has been engaging the attention of the Government and the people so seriously of late. It has been rightly said that this question is of far more importance to India than even the question of reform, than the question of currency, than in fact any other question that can engage the attention of the Government of India, and this, I can assert, is the case from my personal experience of what is going on in my province and from what may be adduced from the figures supplied by the Government themselves. The Hon'ble Member very rightly commented on the world causes which have brought about the present situation; I quite appreciate the object with which he has done so. I shall also imitate him for this purpose that we are not so much concerned with the past, but with what has to be done in the immediate present and in the immediate future. The question is not whether we shall be able to improve industries in the remote future, but whether the Agricultural Department will be able to increase the food production, whether we can reduce prices, whether we can bring sufficient food within the reach and ability of the people to buy so as to ease the situation. The question is what is the Government to do in order to improve the condition of the vast masses of the people of India? Now the currency situation in foreign countries was alluded to and the growth of prices in foreign countries. If I refer to this it is only for the purpose of showing that there is no chance of any mitigation of the situation in the near future. We find that last year it was stated that currency in belligerent countries was increased five-fold; it rose from 935 millions to 5,438 millions. The gold at the back of this currency has dropped from 63 per cent. to 37 and 20 per cent and even lower. It might take ten years or more to enable the gold production to supply the needs, to go back to the normal conditions. The inflation of prices due to the currency will continue for

[*Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma.*]

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some time, although the effect would be mitigated by increased production of foodstuffs throughout the world. We in India fortunately are better situated from the currency point of view than other countries. We have a rupee to back up every rupee note issued, we have a metallic backing. The problem for the Government is how to prevent an increase in prices in India proportionately to what obtains elsewhere without a corresponding increase in wages in India. That is the real situation. The Hon'ble Mr. Mant has alluded to the increase in prices in foreign countries, but we see clearly that it is largely due to this artificial inflation of currency. People have got this artificial money and consequently the percentage of increases is not greater than the increased wages in England, for instance. There has been issued a parliamentary return last August, this shows that there has been an increase of nearly 100 per cent. in some, more in other industries in wages and 100 per cent. in food prices approximately. Therefore, the British workman has not been so hard hit as the Indian workman, because I venture to say that wages here have not gone up in proportion to the increase in prices. My first proposition is that at the lowest estimate there are at least 50 million people in India who are able to procure only one meal or half rations and some are actually starving. On what data do I make that statement? Taking the figures furnished by the Department I find turning to page 15 of the Appendix A of the Foodstuffs Committee, it has been computed that there is an average annual consumption per head of 4.9 maunds in rice-using areas and 5.6 on other diet, *i.e.*, it is one and one-tenth and  $1\frac{3}{8}$  pound per day per head. We find on page 19 that the actual estimates for Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Karachi are much higher, for Calcutta they are 1.83, Bombay 1.4, for Karachi 1.35 and for Madras 1.48. I shall take the lower estimate for the purpose of my calculations and will take a family of five persons; we have 48 million households with a total population of 244 millions. As non-wage earners we may take children below 10 and some from 10 to 15 and men over 60. According to this we find that a family of five would require to pay at least  $12\frac{1}{2}$  annas for rice alone, at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  seers per rupee which obtains in some districts and 10 annas at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  seers; on other diet, 8 annas 8 pias at 6 seers. Well, the wages are not more than 4, 3 and 2 annas and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  annas in many places, and these are stated to be for unskilled labour. If we look at the figures given for the year 1916 wages have risen after 1916, but by no means can the rise be said to bear any proportion to the rise in prices. We find there that even if the whole family members were to work, they cannot make more than 10 or 11 annas in many parts of the country, and we have to reduce that figure by at least 1-6th or 1-7th for the non-working days. If we do that, then their income does not average more than 8 annas for the whole household, whereas they have to pay at least  $8\frac{1}{2}$  annas to  $12\frac{1}{2}$  annas for foodstuffs alone, to keep body and soul together, let alone their expense for fuel, oil, housing, clothing and other things. If we deduct the latter expenditure, and even without doing so, in many cases, the earnings are insufficient to procure a full meal. Therefore, Sir, I think that would substantiate my statement that a very large number of unskilled labourers and poorer agriculturists and so on, have only one meal a day or live only on half rations. I estimate that about 40 to 50 millions drag on a miserable existence or are on semi-starvation. I include under this head of about 40 to 50 millions the following classes:—

Farm servants and field labourers	...	...	...	32.4
Domestic servants	...	...	...	3.4
Insufficiently described	...	...	...	6.5
Industries connected with refuse	...	...	...	1.1
Beggars	...	...	...	2.2
Shepherds	...	...	...	2.7
Fishing and hunting	...	...	...	1.5
Rice fields	...	...	...	1.8

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“ Now these would come to more than 50 millions, and I think we shall have to include the smaller pattedars who also practically come under labourers. Well, if we take all these classes into account, the figures will swell enormously, and there is the growth, however small, of the population since 1911.

“ I think, therefore, Sir, that my statement that about 40 to 50 millions of people are on semi-starvation rations cannot be challenged. In view of the figures that I have quoted, can you say that the average income of a family is more than Rs. 180 or Rs. 200 ? and according to these figures you would require at least that much, if not Rs. 360 for foodstuffs alone, let alone ghee, pulses and other things. Therefore, Sir, I hope that the Government will inquire into this question as to whether concomitantly with the large growth of wealth in presidency-towns and elsewhere of particular classes including the industrial classes, concomitantly with such growth, there is not a vast body of people in this country who are on the verge of starvation to-day. I had to verify this when I had gone to one or two districts of my own presidency, and what did I find ? I found a large concourse of people gathered about the riceshops, fishermen and coolies, people from all classes, some very much emaciated, and I was asked by a fisherman at one gathering ‘ why not shoot us, why make us lead this lingering death.’ I went to another village, a suburb of a town, and there I heard a story of a family, of which two died of semi-starvation because they could not get sufficient rice or food to eat, and they ate some rotten vegetables that grow in the swampy soil and rotten fish, crabs. The same was the case in the mofussil ; to my surprise, I found that we could get women labourers for 1½ annas a day, and rice was selling at prices ranging from 3½ seers to 5 and a young woman belonging to the agriculturist class in somewhat affluent circumstances not long ago came to me and said ‘ Oh, I had no food at all for two or three days and begged for food for her little child. I therefore submit, Sir, that the position is very critical not merely in Bengal but in other districts of India also. I was therefore sorry to find in His Excellency the Viceroy’s opening speech as well as in the statement made by the Hon’ble Mr. Mant an optimistic tone running through it. I do not say that the Government should lose heart, but I think they should realise the full situation and also tell the plain facts to the people so that they may realise what the situation is.

“ Then allusion has been made to the fact that the number of men on Famine Works is small, but I would ask whether the wages that are paid to them according to the Famine Code are a living wage. I do not complain very much about these men not being able to find sufficient work for themselves, for there is generally work to be found especially after the immense mortality of last year, but it need not be surprising if there is no readiness to go to the famine camp, where the wages are no better if not lower than elsewhere. The point is that though the prices of foodstuffs have increased enormously, the wages of labourers have not increased proportionately, and millions of people cannot earn a living wage. If that is the situation, what has to be done immediately ? I have alluded to the fact that the Hon’ble Mr. Mant was perfectly right in saying that we cannot cease to control to a certain extent the movement of these foodstuffs unless we see what the relation of prices of various articles in this country is with reference to those in foreign countries. I admit that in ordinary circumstances it would be wrong to control foodstuffs, the export of foodstuffs, especially as such a rule would affect prejudicially Burma. But I would ask the Burmese people to remember that we in the past have helped them considerably, that Indian labour goes largely to improve the Burmese conditions, and therefore they should not grudge a little sacrifice even if that were necessary.

“ But, Sir, I would respectfully submit that the internal distribution of the foodstuffs as between India and Burma and as between the several provinces

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should, as far as possible, be allowed to run free. More than one Hon'ble Member has alluded to his own presidency. In these days when we are talking of a United India, of a Federal India, I think we should rise above these petty considerations of province, district and town, and I do not think any Hon'ble Member of this Council would be justified in pleading the cause of his own presidency to the exclusion of other provinces and districts. Therefore, we shall have to see the interests of India as a whole, and I would advocate most earnestly the free movement of foodstuffs throughout India and the removal of restrictions on the conveyance of foodstuffs, and of placing additional facilities by the Railway Department at the hands of the distributors of foodstuffs. I know that it is a bitter complaint everywhere that it is the Railway Department that is partly responsible for this unequal distribution of foodstuffs especially when freights are so high. The department may have had very good excuses during the war that wagons were urgently needed for the carriage of coal and so on, but there is no doubt that the Railway Department is responsible to a certain extent, or at any rate they have not discharged their responsibilities to the extent desirable.

"In one place it is 6 seers, in another place  $4\frac{1}{2}$ , in another place  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , not far from one another . . . . ."

**The Hon'ble Sir George Barnes** :—"Will the Hon'ble Member give any instances of these delinquencies on the part of railways? Will he give me a definite instance?"

**The Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma** :—"I cannot charge particular officers with corruption or delay. I know as a matter of fact that high officers of Government (I do not wish to allude to it here because I do not know whether the officers authorise me) have said that they find considerable difficulty in getting railway wagons. Latterly the position has been considerably eased because the Railway Department has been in communication with the Directors of Supplies and tried to do what it could. Sir, I would submit that I am not impeaching the conduct of the highest officers of the country, but I would ask the Hon'ble Member to remember that he has a number of subordinate officers who have virtually in their hands the distribution of these wagons, Station Masters and others, who, according to public report, have been making immense sums of money in recent years . . . . ."

**The Hon'ble Sir George Barnes** :—"Can the Hon'ble Member give one single instance of the imputation he has made?"

**The Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma** :—"I can mention it to the Hon'ble Member in private and I cannot disclose the names unless I have the authority of the officers concerned. But I think inasmuch as the Hon'ble Member has asked me, I shall try to meet him at the earliest possible date on this question . . . . ."

**The Vice-President** :—"I would suggest to the Hon'ble Member that he has already exceeded his 15 minutes and ask him to bring his remarks to a close."

**The Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma** :—"I would ask therefore for these proposals to be taken into consideration. I would beg, I would implore, the Government to consider whether they cannot increase their irrigational activity and public works activity, and increase the wages they allow to unskilled labour so as to set an example to the provinces and raise wages throughout the country. I would ask them to give their employees as well as others a living wage notwithstanding that it may cause additional taxation. I would ask that special facilities may be placed by the Agricultural Department for the provision of capital for the improvement of land. I would ask

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that no provincial restrictions be continued, though control as between India, Burma and other countries would have to be kept for some time longer, and I would ask that there should be no further inflation of the currency unless it is necessary in order to bring this country up to a level with other countries. With regard to cloth, I would ask that, if the agriculturist is reaping large profits by exporting his cotton instead of the cotton going to manufacturers in India at a reasonable price, so as to enable them to supply cloth at reasonable rates, it may be desirable to impose an export duty, not otherwise. And I would ask that special facilities be given to manufacturers to enable them to improve their mills and to get machinery, and possibly import duties may be removed in respect of the machinery. I do not think there is any other way of improving the situation in regard to cloth."

**The Hon'ble Chaudhri Muhammad Ismail Khan:**—"Sir, yesterday the Hon'ble Mr. Mant discussed the causes of the high prices at some length and referred to certain world factors. I do not think these have more than an academic interest now, and may be safely left to the economists to deal with. Whatever the reasons may be, there is an abnormal rise in the prices of necessaries, and means must be found to bring them down. Government claim that they are doing a good deal in this matter. So far as can be seen, beyond arranging for a supply of Burma rice they have done little in Bengal. In Bihar and Orissa, however, Government have all along been anxiously striving to alleviate distress in various ways: But in Bengal, the authorities are mainly concerned with the manufacture of excuses for inaction. They have so long followed a policy of drift. Though I represent the Muhammadans of Bihar and Orissa in this Council, I happen to be the Chairman of the District Board of Backerganj in Bengal. And I may say that we could have made satisfactory and early arrangements for the cheap supply of food-grains throughout the jurisdiction of the District Board, if Government gave us financial aid in time and granted other facilities. Now that much precious time has been lost, the District Board have been permitted in Barisal to import Burma rice 5,500 maunds for sale at cost price. But we have not as yet succeeded in getting more than a small fraction of the quantity which has been allotted to us. So the control system must be improved. It seems to be assumed by Government that cultivators derive some benefit from the rise in prices. From an intimate knowledge of at least one district of Bengal, I can say that this is far from truth. The cultivators have long parted with their old stocks, and it is the speculator who is getting rich. In the district of Backerganj, which was reputed to be the granary of Bengal, the *Aus* crop has been disappointing, and we are now looking forward to Burma for rescue. Whatever rice there is in the district is being exported, with the result that most people are on the verge of starvation. It is an irony of fate that in Backerganj, which has been known to be the land of plenty, people have died of starvation. Instances of looting of rice are becoming common, and those arrested on such charges are confessing their guilt, and going to jail with a smiling face. All these are indications of the gravest situation that can be imagined. And if there is any spark of humanity and statesmanship in Government, they should step in and prevent disaster that is staring us in the face."

12-4 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Major Malik Sir Umar Hayat Khan:**—"Sir, I cordially support the Resolution of my friend on the left.\* From it will be seen that, when in my opinion he brings a reasonable Resolution, I am always with him, though not as the Resolution stands now, but in the form in which it is going to be amended as suggested yesterday by my Hon'ble friend Mr. Mant. Our Hon'ble friend Mr. Mant made a very good speech yesterday, and we Punjabis are proud of him because he is a Punjabi. I think by that speech of his those in the Council as well as people outside will be able to

12-7 P.M.

\* The Hon'ble Mr. Chanda.

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know how much Government has already done and is doing in this direction. In the same way as regards the Hon'ble Member who has spoken to-day about cloth, the people will know that Government is doing its best. But unfortunately, neither can the speech of Mr. Mant be eaten by those who are very hungry, nor the speech of the other gentleman be worn as clothes. What is wanted is, that something should be done immediately to relieve the trouble which people are experiencing in various provinces, so that they should not starve and should not go naked; and that can only be done if immediate steps are taken. My province has been suffering throughout the time of the war, and, I think, the other provinces have just begun to suffer, and they have already come forward and spoken on their own behalf, while we have kept quiet up till now. Of course one cannot keep quiet for ever, and now we ask the Government to do something in the matter. It has been said that we do not suggest any particular way out of the difficulty, but simply ask for the thing. Well, some time back when foodstuffs were not sent so much out of the country, I mean exported, prices used to be very low and the people used to be content. I think when this has been once seen to be the case we may ask why it should not be done again. If you put a stop for a time to the wholesale exporting of foodstuffs, I think the prices are sure to come down and the situation will be improved. The same way about cloth. I think all the places where cloth is made should be controlled by the Government, and they should make very cheap stuff for the people and not only give it to the *banias* to keep in their shops and sell, but I think that Government officials like *tahsildars* would be doing far better work than they are doing now if they were sent sufficient cloth for the poor and if they were to distribute it themselves as was done when there was a difficulty in this direction during the war. There are Government shops in the districts and also cheap grain shops, but they are not sufficient; something, as I have said, ought to be done on a very big scale.

" Well, this, of course, will naturally bring down prices, and it may not be out of place to put forward one matter and that is, that Government has counted on high prices and the demands of Government in regard to land revenue have risen because it was thought that the poor zemindar has got lots of money and should be further taxed. I hope that if Government takes any action which will result in prices going down, the poor zemindars will not be burdened, and the revenues which are now paid to Government may be brought down to such a level that they do not suffer. The monied classes will gain if prices go down because they will be able to buy things cheaper, but there is a difficulty in the case of a zemindar who produces and sells the same stuff. If he has got two or three biggahs of land which do not produce sufficient food for himself or for his family, even then he is taxed. That means that his food is taxed. I hope Government will, when looking into the case of a man who only possesses land enough for his bare food, see their way to exempt that land from the payment of Government revenue.

" With these few remarks, I support the Resolution. "

12-21 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya** :—" Sir, I heartily support the Resolution of the Hon'ble Mr. Chanda. The situation is a very critical one and calls for most anxious consideration on the part of Government and the people. In the first instance, that the prices of food and cloth are unprecedentedly high and that there is a great deal of suffering in the country are admitted and do not require to be dwelt upon, unless it be to show the great need, the pressing need, for action in order to give relief. At the start I may say that I acknowledge the steps which the Government have taken and I would have no objection to meet Mr. Mant's wishes by putting in the word 'further' before the word 'steps' in the Resolution of the Hon'ble Mr. Chanda. It is not a question where we have met to find fault

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with the Government unnecessarily or unreasonably ; it is not a question where we have met simply to justify the existing state of things or to show that there is nothing more that can be done. The unfortunate fact is, there is indescribable suffering owing to very high prices in the country. I, personally, have not the least doubt that millions have died because of the want of sufficient food and clothing during the last few years. This being the situation, the question is to find out the causes, to diagnose the disease, and then to think of the remedy. In diagnosing the disease the Hon'ble Mr. Mant has referred to three factors, world factors, all-India factors and local factors. The world factors are of primary importance. So long as India was not open to the rest of the world, India produced its grain and fed its people. India's misfortune is this that, while she has been thrown open to all parts of the world, while people, who are much more civilised, much more advanced, are free to trade with India, India has not advanced equally in material respects in relation to Europe and other countries. Europe, Japan and the United States have made tremendous progress. The average income per head of the population in these countries has risen tremendously. The average income in England is 20 times that of the average income in India, so also it is nearly the same in the United States, so also, though not quite exactly but about that, in some other countries of Europe. While, therefore, the average income of people in other countries has risen so high, the average income of the Indian people has remained low, if it has not gone down very materially. The result is that, there being a shortage of food-grains in Europe, the richer people of Europe can and do pay a higher price for the grain that they need than the people of India can pay, and the people of India have been brought into competition with them in the matter of the supply of grain. Now, if steps had been taken to enable the people of India to advance materially, by developing indigenous industries and manufactures and in other ways, if the average income in India had risen, the rise in the price of food-grains and cloth would not have pressed so hard upon the people of India as it does. But what has been the fact? While these other countries have advanced, the people of India have not advanced in a corresponding measure, in fact their advance has been so poor that it is hardly worth comparing. This is the great world factor. The Government have afforded facilities for shipping for conveying goods to other ports. They have provided railway facilities and shipping facilities, and this is not a matter entirely of complaint. I am not sorry that railway facilities have been provided, I am not sorry that shipping facilities have been provided ; I am glad that they have been provided. I would not be sorry if more railway facilities and shipping facilities were available to the people if these facilities enabled the people to improve their condition as much as they have helped or they have contributed to impoverishing them. I submit that in the absence of an advance in material civilisation and material prosperity among the Indian people, these facilities which have made it easy for the people of other parts of the world to import the produce of India and to export their produce to India has been a world factor of tremendous significance in creating the situation that has been created in India. Now, Sir, that being so, the remedy to consider is how to meet the situation now which has been so created, and I submit that when the fact has been found that, owing to various causes, not merely to the failure of the monsoon last year, but also owing to other causes, the prices of commodities have risen, the first thing which I suggest to the Government is to consider why they should not lock their door against export to other countries, until the needs of the Indian people have been satisfied. I maintain, and I maintain with confidence, though with great regret, that the food production of India is not sufficient to meet the needs of the Indian people. I maintain that what is exported of the food production of India is exported at the expense of the lives of many millions of Indian people in this country. It may be said that there is a surplus, an exportable surplus in the country. I say that surplus is obtained

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because the people have not money enough available to them to buy as much food as they should buy in order to maintain themselves in health and strength. The poor Sepoy who has served in His Majesty's Army, who has shed his blood for the honour of His Majesty's flag finds that he is not able to purchase enough food to feed himself and those dependent upon him. Many other people, a considerable number of people, do not find themselves able to purchase food for two meals a day. Lord Sinha, speaking at the Conference of the Overseas Press in 1918 said: 'Literally, millions in India were on the border of starvation. Half the population never had a full meal in the day and means must be found to remedy this state of affairs.' Mr. Blant, writing in the 'Edinburgh Review' in July 1918, also observed 'the average of human lives that are wasted entirely in India is about 7 millions.' Mr. Montagu also in speaking of the influenza epidemic in India pointed out that 60 lakhs of people had been carried away by influenza in India, and dwelt upon the fact that the insufficiency of food and clothing was one of the factors which was responsible for this enormous loss of life. Now, I will not refer to earlier statements regarding the number of people who go through life day after day on insufficient food. But I say, Sir, it is a fact which, if the Government will place all the figures available to them or if they appoint a committee to inquire and report upon, it is a fact which will be established that a vast number of people in this country are not eating a sufficient quantity of food, not because they do not want to, but because they have not the means to purchase the food necessary for them. Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram, C.I.E., M.V.O., in his valuable pamphlet on Agricultural Problems in India, said 'We are producing in a normal year just enough to meet—(he has done this after calculations which he has put in his paper)—our requirements of food consumption with no surplus to meet any emergency which may arise in the ensuing year.' That is a statement which Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram has made. Now, I submit this, Sir, that when people talk of the balance of trade, they ought to remember that this balance of trade would be larger if those who want to purchase grain from outside India would be able to pay higher prices and thus draw away the grain, the life-sustaining food-crop from India; the balance of trade would be larger in our favour and bring in many more millions; but those millions will represent the loss of so much life, the loss of so much blood from the people of India. We ought not to be so easily satisfied with this balance of trade being in our favour. The first question which I would ask Government to confront is, to make an inquiry and to find out from definite data whether this statement that the people of India are not having sufficient food is or is not true. If it is not true none will be happier than myself; I will apologise to the Government for having made the statement I have; but I fear that this opportunity is not going to be given to us. I fear that the facts are as I have stated, as I believe them to be. Now, if that is so, then, Sir, I say Government ought in view of the world forces to take into account the fact that our brethren outside who require food—and they will increase as the years go on—are in a much better position to pay than the people of India are. If there was a sufficiency of food in India, if we could produce more than we are producing and might produce if the Revenue and Agriculture Department of the Government of India did its duty by the people of this country, if we did produce as much as we could, I say I should be happy that we, Indians, should be able to serve food to our fellow-men in all parts of the world. I should be happy if we could supply in a larger measure than we do the necessities of other parts of the world. But the Department of Revenue and Agriculture have not, as I say, done their duty to the people, and up to this time the yield of produce in this country has been miserably poor. The yield per acre of produce in India is much lower than in other countries. The figures are given by Rai Bahadur Ganga Ram at page 12 of his pamphlet and are instructive. The average-

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yield per acre of wheat in Bombay and the United Provinces was 1,250 lbs., in the United Kingdom it was 1,973 lbs., in Belgium it was 2,174 lbs., in Denmark it was 2,526 lbs., in Switzerland 1,858 lbs. The average yield per acre of barley in the United Provinces was 1,300 lbs., in the United Kingdom 2,105 lbs., in Belgium 2,953 lbs., in Denmark 2,456 lbs., and in Switzerland 1,940 lbs. The average yield per acre of maize in the North-West Frontier Province was 1,356 lbs., in Canada it was 3,487 lbs., and so on. You will find that the average yield per acre of rice in India is only half of what it is in Japan. The possibilities of development are great. Attention has been drawn to this again and again; but the Revenue and Agriculture Department has concerned itself more with matters which will help the department to derive more revenue than as much as they should have done in stimulating the production of crops. I submit, Sir, that this is a matter which should receive attention. I have no pleasure in attacking the department. My grief is that the remissness of the department has created a situation that is causing immense loss, immense suffering and loss of life. It is for that reason that I draw attention to these things. The food problem in India is a very difficult one, and as a writer in the Nation Food Journal, to which attention has been drawn by the 'Leader,' points out the entire surplus productivity of the western hemisphere is totally incapable of meeting the present deficiency in European production if it is long continued. Now, he estimates that the population of Europe is at least 100 millions greater than could be supported without embarrassment. They expect that the United States and India will partly contribute to the needs of Europe. Well, I fear that India as constituted at present cannot meet her own needs, and therefore with very great regret, with no desire whatever that our fellow-men in other parts of the world should not have the benefit of deriving some part of their food from India, but simply because it is necessary to see that the people of India should not starve and should not die premature deaths, I suggest that the first step which the Government of India should take is, unless production is largely, considerably increased, unless there is a certainty, a positive certainty that there is a real, a true surplus which the people do not require after having full meals supplied to them, until then, I say the Government owes it to the people of this country that they should stop export of food-grains to other countries.

"That is my first point. The second is this. There have been other causes at work which have contributed to this. Among these, the step taken with the very best of intentions, namely, the arrangements made by the food controllers, have contributed to the situation. The present system of control was initiated more in the interests of England and the Allies than in those of India. Some of the members present here will remember that a foodstuffs conference was held at Delhi on the 15th October 1918. Mr. Mackenna there moved the following resolution:—

'This conference recognises the necessity of conserving the food-grain and fodder supplies of India with a view to meet the military obligations and commitments in the interests of the people of India . . . . .'

So my point is that the first desire was to meet the military obligations and commitments of India to people outside. Now when the conference met in Delhi in 1918 the monsoon of 1918 had failed and yet the conference was devising means to exploit India's food materials in the interests of Europe. The termination of the war led this department to modify its arrangements, and unfortunately it began to mobilise the resources of India by controlling internal supplies. I submit, Sir, that internal movements of food-grains from one province to another should not have been checked. I submit that it was a great mistake to exercise any restriction upon the movements of food-grains from province to province, and my next suggestion is that these restrictions should be abolished once and for all . . . . .

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[The Vice-President; Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya; Sir Dinshaw Wacha; Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma.]

**The Vice-President** :—“ I wish to remind the Hon'ble Member that he has already exceeded his time. I hope he will bring his remarks to a conclusion. ”

**The Hon'ble Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya** :—“ The subject is a very large one, Sir, and I fear that I shall not be able to do any justice to it. You will see that there are two subjects mixed up, cloth and food. I do not think that within the time limit I can do justice to these questions. ”

12-29-19

**The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha** :—“ Sir, as I understand, the Resolution of Mr. Chanda is that steps might be taken, as far as possible by the Government, to reduce the high prices of food and cloth prevailing in several parts of the country. In so far as I have heard the speeches of my friends, Mr. Malaviya and Mr. Sarma, I find that they have travelled beyond the real subject of this Resolution.

“ They have confused two questions, the high prices of food and the condition of India so far as food supplies are concerned. But the question is, what can the Government do to mitigate the rise in prices and not the condition of India and its people and their food supply? If the last were the question to be discussed here, perhaps, I could say a good deal in reply to the observations made by my Hon'ble friends. But that is not the subject before us, and I refrain from saying anything thereon. A very good answer could be given to the question. It is a matter which I have studied for 30 years and more. There are various factors that go to the bottom of it which would expose their fallacies and sweeping generalisations. But I do not at this moment propose to refer to them. We know that for 30 years and more the condition of India, so far as foodstuffs are concerned, has not been wholly satisfactory, but at the same time statistics show that whatever Government can do to increase the production or increase the area of food crops is being done. As a matter of fact the area for all sorts of crops has greatly increased, specially the area under merchantable crops, has been increased to a large extent but the food crop area has not been extended or developed to the same extent. In his lucid and well-informing speech which Mr. Mant delivered yesterday, he traced the causes of the present rise of prices. Of course it is taken for granted that the prevailing price of foodstuffs in India is what it is. Nobody is to be blamed for it—neither the Government nor the people. Mr. Mant in his exceedingly informing speech traced the causes of the rise in prices . . . . .

**The Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma** :—“ The question was whether the people could pay at that price. ”

**The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha** :—“ Exactly : but that clearly is a different question to that before the Council. At the present moment the question is, how far it is possible to mitigate the high prices; how far the people can afford to pay those high prices is a different question. It is an economic question of an exceedingly complicated character which you might discuss for the next 20 years and not be able to find a solution. That is my answer to the Hon'ble Mr. Sarma's interposition. Therefore, I say that the three factors that the Hon'ble Mr. Mant mentioned are there. The question is, what are we to do? How far can we mitigate the rise in prices? It is the immediate concern of the people that we have to take into account, not what may happen in the next 20 years, or what may happen in the next 5 years, or what may happen to-morrow? The people are just now crying out against the high rates. That is the question. What is the answer to the question? So far as I know no answer has been given to it. I do not know what reply Mr. Mant may give so far as the Government are concerned. Of course, for my part I

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must say at once that it is a very difficult question to answer ; and however much we may sympathise with the present condition of the masses and however we may deplore their hardships which are entailed by the abnormal prices, we are helpless to provide a reasonably satisfactory solution. How to reduce the prices of food so as to mitigate the hardships of the poor people is a very difficult matter. If you take this pressing question into consideration you will be unable to suggest what is to be done. Supposing the exports of food-grains were restricted or altogether stopped the question is, and I hope my Hon'ble friend Mr. Mant will answer it, would he be able to reduce prices ? Looking at the statistics of the exports of rice and comparing them with those of the past three years, we find that *jowar* and *bajra* are not grains that are exported. The only grain that is exported in large quantities is rice, and that is exported from Burma. Supposing that the whole of the exports of rice and other grains were restricted, the question is how much the restriction can reduce prices to effectually mitigate the hardships of the poor people ? That is the question, but a most difficult one. It is very easy for Hon'ble Members to say that Government ought to do this or do that. It is, however, what most looks simple on the surface which is very difficult of solution. But how far can the Government go ? Were they to restrict the inter-provincial movement of grains it is possible we might see prices reduced somewhat in some places. So long, however, as the present conditions last and so long as the effects of the war last, whatever the external factors or the internal factors may be, I consider that the Government and the people will be able to do very little in the direction of a sensible reduction of food prices. That is my opinion."

**The Hon'ble Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal :—**"Sir, I am afraid 12-37 r.m.  
many economic difficulties have to be faced before the Resolution as it stands can be given effect to. The Hon'ble Mover suggests that exports should be further controlled or imports facilitated. I do not know if the Hon'ble Mover of this Resolution is aware how the import and export duties at present stand. Import duties as fixed by the Tariff Act, 1916-17, are levied, if I mistake not, at  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent *ad-valorem*. Sugar, however, is taxed at 10 per cent and the following articles hitherto in the free list will hereafter pay duty at  $2\frac{1}{4}$  per cent *ad-valorem*—Grain and pulse at 8 annas per ton which is roughly equivalent to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent *ad-valorem*. The statutory free list is now confined to such articles as raw cotton, raw wool, etc. I do not know whether Government would be able to facilitate the imports further. If we look to export duties we will find, if my information is correct, that rice in and without husk is already charged at annas 3 per Indian maund, though with the exception of jute (raw, cuttings sacking and hessians) all other articles are free. It is also a fact if I mistake not that the export of wheat is strictly forbidden. I thus do not see how we can further control exports as is implied by the Hon'ble Mover of the Resolution. Then the question arises as to whether it is possible to check the rise in prices in any other way. I am afraid this is not so easy as is expected. General rise in prices is not the result of any artificial method of control either of export or import, but is due mostly to the high standard of living and the corresponding fall in the value of a rupee. If we were to check this rise by any artificial means, as is suggested by the Hon'ble Mover, it will carry with it a corresponding evil which we have to guard against in every such economic question. I do not see any justification in accepting a Resolution like this unless the Hon'ble Mover can point out tangible methods of redress which the Council can consider. It is purely a question of give and take. If you disturb export or imports you will have to suffer from the corresponding evil that such a course will automatically bring into play, inasmuch as exports and imports have to be paid by imports and exports respectively. The action taken by Government, as pointed out by the Hon'ble Mr. Mant, has gone a great way towards mitigating the evil, yet in my opinion there is ample room for improvement.

[*Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal ; Mr. Kamini Kumar Chanda.*]

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I, therefore, strongly urge upon the Government the necessity of appointing a Committee to go into this question in detail and to suggest further means, if any. With these words, I oppose the Resolution in its present form. "

12-41 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Mr. Kamini Kumar Chanda** :—" Sir, I wish to conclude as I began. I simply wanted to call the attention of the Government to the state of things that now exist, and I therefore do not feel tempted to discuss the points raised by my Hon'ble friend, Bai Saheb Seth Nathmal, who has just sat down. I frankly confessed at the beginning that I did not understand these questions, but I simply wanted to call the attention of the Government to the state of things that now exist and appeal to the Government to improve matters, as in this country in almost everything it is the Government which does everything for the people. Sir, I ought to apologise to the Council, and express my regret that I did not touch on the question of high prices of cloth which was part of my Resolution. It was due to the fact that I was prevented from doing so owing to my miscalculation about the time-limit, and by the time I had nearly finished what I had to say about rice, my time was up, so I could not touch on the question of high prices of cloth. I wanted to mention the fact that the position with regard to cloth was such that it is well known that there have been cases of suicide by women for failure of obtaining cloth to cover their shame. I know it is a difficult question. So long as the price of cotton is high, it will be very difficult, nay even impossible, to reduce the price of cloth. But I only appeal to the Government that, in view of the abnormal situation that has arisen, some palliative measures ought to be taken to ease the situation. Of course, I frankly confessed at the beginning that I had nothing new to suggest, but I simply wanted to call the attention of Government to the existing state of things, and I shall be thankful if my Hon'ble friend, Mr. Ley, will only advise some palliative measures to ease the situation which need not be permanent.

" Now coming to the main part of the Resolution, Sir, I must in the first place congratulate my Hon'ble friend, Mr. Mant, on the very full, fair and informing statement which he made, and I wish also to thank him and the Government for the very sympathetic attitude that has been adopted on this Resolution of mine. I did not mean to suggest, Sir, that Government had done nothing. Of course, the wording of the Resolution might imply it, but my only object was to ask the Government to take further measures to improve the situation, and in this view I shall be quite prepared to accept the wording which my Hon'ble friend, Mr. Mant, suggested provided he in his turn would be pleased to accept my Resolution as amended. Sir, in view of this I do not think I shall be justified in detaining the Council with any lengthy remarks, but I would ask the indulgence of the Council just for a few moments on one or two points. "

" In the first place, my Hon'ble friend, Mr. Mant, has criticised my suggestion about fixing the price of Burma rice and mentioned the orders that were passed under martial law in Lahore. I may say at once that I am entirely at one with him about the unsoundness of these orders. I only wish he could see eye to eye with us as regards the other orders passed under martial law in Lahore. However, I fully appreciate that it is extremely unsound, nay even dangerous, to have passed orders like those passed under martial law fixing the price at figures much below the prices obtaining in the neighbouring districts. What would be the result of that? Suppose for instance, the price of atta was fixed at 2 annas in Lahore under martial law, while the price of atta in the neighbouring districts was 4 annas. Well, we know what happened. The people in Lahore were under martial law, and for fear of being whipped the shop-keepers were more than anxious to sell the whole quantities they had at the price fixed by Colonel Frank Johnson. But what happened when it was known that the price

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at Lahore was fixed at 2 annas? Did any body import atta into Lahore? No, the result was inevitable, that in a short time when the stock in Lahore was exhausted there was nothing but starvation. Therefore I could not possibly support these orders, and I did not for a moment suggest that such orders should be passed, but what I said was this, that when you controlled the source of supply as Burma rice, what was the harm in fixing the retail prices when you fixed the wholesale prices. That was my humble suggestion, and I do not think that was very wrong. The merchant was not entitled to import any Burma rice unless he accepted the conditions, and when you fixed wholesale prices I submit you ought to have gone further and fixed retail prices also. That was my first submission.

"In the next place, my Hon'ble friend said that the distress in Bengal and Assam was very recent compared with the other provinces. Well, that is so. We had a bumper crop in Bengal and Assam in 1918, and the result was there was no market for our rice. That was the reason why my Hon'ble friend the Maharaja of Kasim Bazar put that question last year on this point, and I might mention to the Council that in my division, which had the benefit, if I can say so without any bad taste in his presence, of the experience of my Hon'ble friend sitting on my right who was the Commissioner of my division would bear me out, the condition was such that I think I had mentioned to him that we might suggest to the Munitions Board to take over our stocks of rice last year. Well, Sir, simply because we had a surplus stock of rice last year, will that appease our hunger to-day when there is no rice to-day? The fact that I had a sumptuous feast on Sunday will not appease my hunger to-day if I do not get food to-day. Therefore it is no consolation to say that we had large stocks of rice last year.

"My Hon'ble friend also compared the condition of India with other countries, and showed that in India the rise in the price of food-stuffs is much less than in other countries. It is about 57 per cent. That is so. But is it any consolation to us that other countries are in a worse condition than ourselves? In the next place, Sir, it would be very fallacious and misleading simply to compare the rise of prices of food-stuffs in India with other countries unless you compare the average income per head in other countries and the rise of wages during war time. Well, Sir, so far as income goes, of course it is well known that India is the poorest country. Well, in an article in the *Journal of Indian Economics* in December last year, Mr. O'Byrne, I.C.S., Assistant Wheat Commissioner, says that for ten years ending 1916 the average income of India was Rs. 45 to Rs. 50 annually. And the price of food grains was just under Rs. 4 per maund and the expenditure on food grains alone per head absorbed between 42 and 43 per cent. of the annual income. Now that food grains sell for Rs. 10 per maund every pice is taken for food grains if they can get enough and there is nothing left for any other purpose. Similarly, in regard to wages, as has been mentioned by Mr. Sarma, we know that in other countries, especially in England, they have been very much increased. Therefore it would be very fallacious to compare the condition of things in other countries with that in India if you do not compare the income and the increase in the rise of prices. The deaths from starvation in Bengal and suicide due to it were mentioned by me yesterday and we have to-day heard from Hon'ble Members who have spoken to-day. The Hon'ble Maharaja of Kasim Bazar has mentioned not only deaths and suicides due to starvation, but the abandoning of children owing to want of food. Well, that is the position of the country, and I submit, Sir, that abnormal measures will have to be adopted. With these remarks I have much pleasure in amending the Resolution as has been suggested by my friend, Mr. Mant. The Resolution as amended will read thus:—

This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council to consider whether any further steps can be taken for the reduction of the unprecedented high prices of necessary

[*Mr. Kamini Kumar Chanda; Mr. R. A. Mant; Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma; Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur.*]

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articles of food and of cloth which obtain in several provinces either by further controlling exports or facilitating imports, or both, and by such other means as may be considered fit and proper.

“ I trust the Resolution will commend itself to the Council.”

12-52 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Mr. R. A. Mant** :—“ Sir, I have very little to add to what I said yesterday on this subject. I explained then the steps that Government were taking to deal with the situation and said that we should be very glad to avail ourselves of non-official advice. I have listened to a debate of about two hours to-day, with, I must say, a feeling of great disappointment, because I did hope that we should have had some more constructive suggestions from Hon'ble Members. We have heard a good deal about the hardships, which are admitted, we have heard a good deal about the poverty of the country. In fact, some Hon'ble Members, certainly the Hon'ble Mr. Sarma and the Hon'ble Pandit Malaviya, seemed to speak to item No. 8\* of the Agenda part of the time, discussing whether the people have enough to eat, but of suggestions for remedies I could find very little. The Hon'ble the Maharaja of Kasim Bazar did make a constructive suggestion. I think he said Government should sell Burma rice in every village of India. I do not know how many villages there are in India. If he would consider what an establishment and what an expenditure that would entail, he would surely realise that it is not a feasible suggestion. Then one or two Members suggested the abolition of internal control. I explained yesterday that we hoped shortly to be in a position to do that, but it cannot be done all at once. It has been the experience in Europe, I believe, that demobilization was nearly as difficult a business as mobilization, and we find much the same difficulty in demobilizing control. Two Hon'ble Members, Mr. Sita Nath Ray and I think, Mr. Sarma, suggested that we should abolish the control on Burma rice . . . . .

**The Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma** :—“ No, I did not.”

**The Hon'ble Mr. R. A. Mant** :—“ It was Mr. Sita Nath Ray. I am not sure whether the Hon'ble Member meant that we should withdraw all restrictions on the Burma rice trade, because it is perfectly clear from the figures I gave him yesterday that India would not get a grain of Burma rice in that case; it would all be bought up by countries outside who are willing to pay three times as much as India . . . . .

**The Hon'ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur** :—“ What I meant was that, so far as Bengal was concerned, the restrictions on the import of rice from Burma should be withdrawn.”

**The Hon'ble Mr. R. A. Mant** :—“ I understand the Hon'ble Member to mean that we should maintain our control over exports, but we should maintain no control over the price; that we should not utilize our control for the purpose of bringing down prices. I understand that is his intention. Well, that is a possible course, but it will not help the situation. We have in Calcutta employed as distributing agents for the sale of rice, a few large firms, because we found that the small firms were profiteering and were not helping at all to bring down prices. We found that by using a smaller number of firms it was possible to see that they sold at reasonable rates. However, that is a matter which, as I said yesterday, we left entirely to Local Governments.

“ There were really very few other suggestions made. The Hon'ble Mr. Sarma, as I understood him, said we ought to raise wages. Well, I wish we could do it, but I really do not see how we can. I have no doubt wages in time will be raised and will adjust themselves to prices, but I do not see how Government is going to expedite the process . . . . .

\* This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that a Committee be appointed to enquire into and report at an early date :—

(a) upon the adequacy of the food production of the country to supply the legitimate needs of the people ;  
(b) what proportion, if any, of the population in British India is unable to procure sufficient food either owing to lack of food supply or of pecuniary inability to purchase it.

RESOLUTION *re* HIGH PRICES OF NECESSARY ARTICLES 229  
OF FOOD AND CLOTH (CONCLUDED); RESOLUTION *re*  
APPOINTMENT OF A COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER THE  
QUESTION OF PROFITEERING.

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**The Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma** :—" I said the Public Works Department should increase the irrigational activity and other activity. "

**The Hon'ble Mr. R. A. Mant** :—" We do what we can when we get the money to spend, but we cannot certainly pay higher wages above market rates on public works. The only other suggestion that I need notice is that of the Hon'ble Pandit Malaviya. I did not quite catch the accusation that he directed against the Revenue and Agriculture Department, but if he merely means that the Agriculture Department in India is too small, I admit the fact and plead guilty to this extent, but I would point out we have been trying to increase the Agriculture Departments for a long time and we have not been able to get the men. It is thoroughly realised that much greater activity is required, much wider research and stimulation of production, and in so far as the Hon'ble Pandit suggests the increase of production as a cure or partial remedy at any rate for the present evils, I am entirely with him, but when he says, block exports, I thought I disposed of that theory yesterday. I did my best to, but I must have been preaching to deaf ears . . . . .

**The Hon'ble Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya** :—" May I explain ? I meant exports should be stopped when prices reach a certain level. When prices go to a certain level, exports should be stopped at least then. "

**The Hon'ble Mr. R. A. Mant** :—" I do not know how the Hon'ble Pandit would work an arrangement like that. It is certain that somebody would make money out of it. But I have not really anything more to say on this subject of exports. I showed clearly yesterday that if you stop exports, you stop production. If the argument is that the production of food-grains of the country is too small, well you are taking the best way to make it smaller. You will not increase production by a single grain. I am afraid therefore the debate has been somewhat fruitless, because when I asked or hoped for suggestions, one of the last speakers, the Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha says, he hopes that I myself will find a remedy. Well I wish I could. But I think the fact is that a debate in this Council is not really the best way of tackling a problem of this kind. The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha has proposed in another Resolution that we should have a Committee, and I hope we may be able to meet him to some extent in that way. I should very much like to take advantage of the presence of members here from all parts of the country to explain to them more informally what our difficulties have been. It is much more difficult to do so in a formal speech, and if we can get a talk round the table, I hope that we shall get more mutual understanding and more mutual benefit."

The motion was put and the Resolution, as amended, was adopted.

**The Vice-President** :—" I think it will probably conduce to the public business if we take up next Resolution No. 7 which stands in the name of the Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha. It is a kindred subject, in which the Council is interested, and I understand that an agreement has been arrived at between the Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha and the Member of Government. "

**RESOLUTION *re* APPOINTMENT OF A COMMITTEE TO  
CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF PROFITEERING.**

**The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha** :—" Sir, my Resolution reads 1 . . . .  
as follows :—

' This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that a Committee consisting of the Hon'ble Sir George Lowndes, the Hon'ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur, the

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CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF PROFITEERING.

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Hon'ble Sir George Barnes, the Hon'ble Rao Bahadur B. N. Sarma, the Hon'ble Sir William Vincent, the Hon'ble Pandit M. M. Malaviya, the Hon'ble Mr. R. A. Mant, the Hon'ble Major Malik Sir Umar Hayat Khan, the Hon'ble Mr. Shafi, the Hon'ble Mr. W. E. Crum, the Hon'ble Mr. E. M. Cook, the Hon'ble Mr. N. F. Paton, the Hon'ble Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal, the Hon'ble Mr. J. P. Thompson and the Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha be appointed to investigate and report, as soon as possible, on the extent to which profiteering is prevalent in India, with particular reference to the question of clothing and articles of daily consumption ; and to suggest such remedies as may be possible to mitigate the hardships from which the poorest and lower middle classes are suffering.

“ Sir, after the discussion that has already taken place on the Resolution of the Hon'ble Mr. Chanda which was just passed, and which, of course, relates to a kindred subject, I have nothing more to say on it, although a good deal might be said on the general question of profiteering. Profiteering, at the present moment, is universal, though to what extent profiteering, particularly in food-grains and in articles of consumption of the poorer classes in India, has taken place, it is very difficult to say. The cry everywhere is 'profiteering,' 'profiteering,' 'profiteering.' There may be profiteering in one commodity and there may be profiteering in another commodity. But, at the present moment, we do not know much about it ; we all speak superficially on the subject. I assume that there is some profiteering, and to what extent it may be asked, is it possible to suggest a remedy so far as food and cloth are concerned ? There are some factors to which the Hon'ble Mr. Mant referred while speaking on the Hon'ble Mr. Chanda's Resolution. But speaking frankly I was somewhat staggered by that Resolution and I did not know what I could practically suggest. The Hon'ble Mr. Mant in his reply observed that he was disappointed at the absence of any really 'constructive' proposal from the Hon'ble Members who spoke. He is right ; I had fully anticipated that it would not be possible to offer a practical suggestion. It is a very difficult problem, and, therefore, Sir, I do say that possibly a large Committee of the character I have proposed in which, perhaps, most of the provinces will be represented and on which there will be some of our friends of the Government, because they are greater experts than ourselves, may be able to arrive at some remedy, whereby the same excellent object which my friend the Hon'ble Mr. Chanda has in view, could be attained. The Hon'ble Member for Commerce and Industry wishes that I might drop the Committee that I have named and that another Committee may be appointed, a small Committee of real experts, who may perhaps sit at a round table, and might, before this Council dissolves, try to suggest and submit to the Council some remedy in the direction we all desire. I hope, Sir, that we may be able to do something in this matter. The public cry is very loud, and the ignorant multitudes do not, of course, know how difficult the situation is. It is a difficult economic phenomenon which is prevalent in England and other countries. India is peculiarly situated in this respect, especially in its economic aspects, to some of which the Hon'ble Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Hon'ble Mr. Sarma referred. But, whatever that may be, I do earnestly hope that, as far as this immediate question is concerned, we may be able to solve it so as to mitigate the hardship entailed on the poorer classes of people. Therefore, Sir, I propose this Resolution. ”

14 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Sir George Barnes :—**“ Sir, I had an opportunity a few minutes ago of discussing this Resolution with the Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha. Of course when Sir Dinshaw Wacha put down his Resolution, he had not had the opportunity of hearing the very luminous address which the Hon'ble Mr. Mant gave us yesterday . . . .

**The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha :—**“ Exactly.”

**The Hon'ble Sir George Barnes :—**“ I believe that he agrees with me in thinking that it is hopeless to appoint a Committee of this kind to

RESOLUTION *re* APPOINTMENT OF A COMMITTEE TO CON- 231  
SIDER THE QUESTION OF PROFITTEERING ; RESOLUTION  
*re* UNIVERSITY AT NAGPUR.

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Nathmal.*]

investigate and report on the extent to which profiteering is prevalent. I was very glad to hear the Hon'ble Mr. Mant's last words on the subject of personal discussion round a table, and I think, if other Hon'ble Members agree, a round table conference on this subject would be very useful. We believe, as a Government, that we have explored every avenue which leads to possible remedies for the present high prices, but it may be that we are wrong, and if we are wrong, we shall be very glad to have a new avenue pointed out to us. I have no wish to suggest any change in the membership of the Committee except to warn my friend, Sir Dinshaw Wacha, that I am afraid that some of the officials will find it practically impossible to attend meetings at the present time, and I think that the Committee might have liberty to add to its members, or that the Government might have liberty to add to the proposed Committee in such a way as they may think fit, because there may be other Hon'ble Members who take a deep interest in the subject whom Sir Dinshaw does not chance to have mentioned. I would, accordingly, suggest that the following words be substituted for the words which stand at present in the Resolution, if the Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha will agree to them, that a Committee consisting of . . . . . be appointed 'to consider the high prices which at present prevail in articles of daily consumption, and to suggest such remedies as may be possible to mitigate the hardships from which the poorest and lower middle classes are suffering.' "

**The Hon'ble Sir Dinshaw Wacha** :—" Of course, I agree to that. "

The motion was put and the Resolution, as amended, was adopted.

RESOLUTION *re* UNIVERSITY AT NAGPUR.

**The Hon'ble Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal** :—" Sir, I beg to 19 P.M.  
move the following Resolution :—

' This Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that a Bill for the establishment and incorporation of a University at Nagpur be introduced into this Council at an early date.'

The question of the establishment and incorporation of a University at Nagpur for the Central Provinces is by no means a new one. During the last few years it has repeatedly attracted the attention both of the public as well as the Government. My object in moving this Resolution is not to raise a discussion on the desirability or otherwise of establishing a University at Nagpur, but in order that it may simply serve as a reminder for early steps being taken towards the execution of a project which is admitted on all hands to be an urgent necessity.

" In view of the happy termination of the world-wide war and the conclusion of the work of the Calcutta University Commission, 1917-19, I think this

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[*Rai Sahib Seth Nathmul.*]

is the most opportune time to push forward this scheme. The proposals regarding the University were submitted to the Government of India by the Central Provinces Administration long ago, and they held them up pending the report of the Calcutta University Commission. I know, Sir, the Government of India is as anxious as any of us to promote the cause of higher education everywhere as quickly as possible, and I will therefore close this with a very few observations.

“ The question to which the Resolution which I have the honour to move relates is one which has a long history behind it. The contemplated University for the Central Provinces was referred to in the Report of the Education Commission of 1882. The Universities Commission of 1902 also adverted to it in paragraph 29 of their Report and bore unequivocal testimony to the fact that the proposal to create a new University at Nagpur had received both official and non-official support. Later on, the Government of India in their Resolution dated the 21st February 1913 while declaring the educational policy said that, with a view to satisfy the aspirations of the people, they contemplated the establishment of a University at Rangoon, Patna and Nagpur. Not long after that the Central Provinces Government by their Resolution No. 682, dated the 8th July 1914, appointed a strong Committee consisting of officials and non-officials to consider a scheme for the creation of the University at Nagpur. The Committee gave a very close and thoughtful consideration and after seven months' labour produced an elaborate report embodying a detailed scheme for the constitution of the proposed University. The Local Government invited public criticism on the said report and gave the people an opportunity to express their own views on the subject. The report was discussed thread-bare at the meetings of the 4th Provincial Conference, Central Provinces and Berar, and a deputation was arranged to wait upon the Hon'ble the Chief Commissioner and placed before His Honor the views of the Conference. This was done and a favourable and sympathetic reply was received from the Government. The Hon'ble Mr. Dixit also interpellated the Local Government on the subject on 18th March 1916 and received the following reply :—

‘ (a) The Government is not aware that the proposals for the Dacca and Patna Universities and for a University for Burma have reached the advanced stage which is mentioned in part (a) of the question.’

(b) and (c) With regard to parts (b) and (c) of the question I would refer the Hon'ble Member to the reply which was given by the Chief Commissioner to the deputation which waited on him in January to present the resolution of the Provincial Conference. The reply was published in the Press. The Hon'ble the Chief Commissioner is aware of the interest that is taken on the subject in the Province, that in view of the voluminous criticism received and of the necessity at a time like the present for putting forward proposals which should be as practicable as possible he must await the detailed report on the scheme which is to be furnished by the permanent Director of Public Instruction. Until the report has been received and considered, it is impossible to make a further statement on the subject.’

“ Again, Rai Bahadur B. D. Shukul asked the Government of India on the 19th September 1916 if they had received any definite proposal regarding the establishment of a University at Nagpur from the Local Government and the reply received was in the negative. He repeated his question on the 12th September last and further asked the Government as to when a Bill for the establishment of a University at Nagpur was likely to be introduced in the Council. The Hon'ble Member in charge of Education then replied to the effect : ‘ Proposals have been received from the Local Government for the establishment of a University for the Central Provinces and are now under consideration. It is therefore undesirable to publish the proposals at present and impossible to give a definite reply to the question when a Bill for the establishment of the contemplated University will be introduced.’ No provision

[*Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal; the Vice-President; Mr. Shafi.*]

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was, however, made for the establishment of the proposed University in the ensuing year's budget, consequently a Resolution was moved by Rai Bahadur B. D. Shukul in this Council on the 12th March, 1918, to provide a sum of rupees four lakhs as a preliminary measure for the establishment of a University at Nagpur, when he took advantage of the opportunity to give a short review of the whole history . . . . .

**The Vice-President** :—" I think if the Hon'ble Member would speak a little slower we should all hear him better. "

**The Hon'ble Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal** :—" To give a short review of the whole history as to how the question of the Central Provinces University has been hanging fire for the last 37 years, *i. e.*, since 1882, when the Education Commission presided over by the late Mr. William Hunter suggested the establishment of a separate University for the Central Provinces at Nagpur. In reply to this the Hon'ble Sir Sankaran Nair was pleased to observe : ' Even with reference to the Patna University the question arose whether it would not be wise to defer the consideration of the Patna University scheme pending the report of the Calcutta Commission who were expected to deal with all these questions. Further, we also hoped that we might be able to submit the Nagpur University scheme if not to all the members of the Calcutta Commission, to some members at least. Therefore we have put it off till the receipt of the report from them. That is the reason of the delay. '

" Sir, the report of the Calcutta Commission to which the Hon'ble Sir Sankaran Nair referred has already seen the light of day and the recommendations made by the Commission are now before the Government of India. Sir Sankaran Nair, I presume, must have consulted all the members of the Commission or at least a few of them as he already expressed in his reply which I have just quoted and in my humble opinion the time has come when the legislation for the establishment and the incorporation of a new University at Nagpur on the lines suggested by the Calcutta University Commission be introduced into this Council. Fortunately, the terrible war has also ceased to the greatest relief of us all and with better financial prospects in future. I do not think any pecuniary considerations would now deter the Government of India from granting to the people of the Central Provinces a boon which has been long overdue. I think it is a very reasonable and modest request and my entire province is looking forward to an announcement on this particular subject. It is in that hope, Sir, that I have ventured to move this Resolution before this Council. "

**The Hon'ble Mr. Shafi** :—" Sir, in dealing with the Resolution which has been moved by my Hon'ble friend, I need not detain the Council long. Hon'ble Members are aware that on 21st February, 1913, the Government of India with the previous approval of the Secretary of State issued a Resolution embodying their educational policy. In that Resolution they made a comprehensive survey of the whole field of education, summarised the policy which in regard to almost every branch of education had been followed in the past, and laid down the basic principles upon which the educational system in this country was to be developed in the future. In paragraphs 44 and 45 of that Resolution they dealt with University education and after instituting a comparative analysis of the resulting benefits of affiliating and teaching Universities, they laid it down as a general rule that the Universities of the future should be of the teaching and residential type. Then they went on to say :

' At present there are only five Indian Universities for 185 Arts and professional colleges in British India besides several institutions in Native States.

' The day is probably far distant when India will be able to dispense altogether with the affiliating University, but it is necessary to restrict the area over which the affiliating Universiti es

[*Mr. Shafi ; Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal.*]

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have control by securing in the first instance a separate University for each leading province in India and, secondly, to create new local teaching and residential Universities within each province in harmony with the best modern opinion as to the right road to educational efficiency. The Government of India have decided to found a teaching and residential University at Dacca and they are prepared to sanction under certain conditions the establishment of similar Universities at Aligarh and Benares and elsewhere as occasion may demand. They also contemplate the establishment of Universities at Rangoon, Patna and Nagpur.

“Hon'ble Members are aware that the Universities of Patna and Benares are already accomplished facts and the movement for the establishment of a university at Rangoon, I believe, has reached a fairly satisfactory stage. Had the promoters of the Muslim University acted wisely, I have no doubt that the proposed University at Aligarh would have already been in existence. So far as the proposed University at Nagpur is concerned, the position is a very simple one. I need not enter into the history of this question as my Hon'ble friend has already given us a fairly clear resumé of the whole problem. As he has reminded the Council, when the Hon'ble Mr. Shukul moved his Resolution on the 12th March 1918, advocating the establishment of a University at Nagpur, the Hon'ble Sir Sankaran Nair in his reply, after referring to primary facts, proceeded to observe :—

‘The result was that we felt that these questions required very careful consideration. At that time the Calcutta Commission was appointed; even with reference to the Patna University the question arose whether it would not be wise to defer the consideration of the Patna University scheme pending the report of the Calcutta Commission . . . . .  
‘In those circumstances the Government felt that it would not be right to go on, pending the report of the Calcutta Commission who were expected to deal with all those questions. . . . .  
Therefore we have to put it off till the receipt of the Report from them. That is the reason of the delay.’

As has been mentioned by my Hon'ble friend, the Calcutta University Commission have now presented their Report. Therefore, Sir, I am in a position to go a step further and on behalf of the Government of India to accept the Resolution which has been moved by my Hon'ble friend with two slight reservations, the reasonableness of which I am sure he will recognise. I am sure he will understand that the bearings of the Calcutta University report on the proposed University at Nagpur have to be decided upon by the Department and those interested in the establishment of this university. In consequence it is impossible to specify any date on which the necessary legislation will be undertaken. There is one further point in this connection, the reasonableness of which also, I am sure, the Hon'ble Member will recognise, *i.e.*, the question whether the necessary legislation ought to be undertaken in this Council or in the Provincial Council to be established under the Reforms Scheme. In all probability the necessary legislation will be undertaken in this Council, but it is a question that requires consideration, and therefore I cannot at this moment give an undertaking on the point. With these slight reservations I have pleasure in accepting on behalf of the Government of India the Resolution moved by my Hon'ble friend. Meanwhile, he may rest assured that the Government of India are in the fullest sympathy with the object which he and the people of Nagpur have in view and will, in so far as circumstances permit, take every reasonable step to bring about the establishment of a University at Nagpur as early as possible.”

1-24 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Rai Sahib Seth Nathmal :—**“Sir, we quite realise the position of Government which has been given expression to by my Hon'ble friend who is in charge of the Education Department, and I offer my hearty thanks to the Government of India for accepting my Resolution, as pointed out by the Hon'ble Member. With regard to the latter remark that this legislation ought to be undertaken in the Provincial Council, I might point out that we ought not to wait till the new Reforms Scheme has come into operation. We have to consider the time that would be required

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in the preliminary arrangements as, *e.g.*, construction of buildings and the arrangement of the staff, etc., and the earlier we start the better and so far as the first condition is concerned, I think it has my full sympathy."

The motion was put and the Resolution was adopted.

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**The Hon'ble Mr. W. E. Crum :—**" Sir, I beg to move :—

1-25 P.M.

'That this Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that the question of removing the Calcutta Mint to another site be taken into consideration.'

Sir, if this Chamber were provided with a black board and chalk I would be able to explain my Resolution to the Council in five minutes. As, however, a good many of the members here are not acquainted with Calcutta, especially with the locality of Burra Bazar, it may take me a little time to enable them to visualise the position. Calcutta may be divided into three parts, that is northern, central and southern. I shall deal with the central portion. Here there are two main roads, Harrison Road running from east to west, from Sealdah station to Howrah station *via* the Howrah bridge, and the Strand Road running from north to south, from Chitpore nearly to Kidderpore. The district of Burra Bazar is bounded on the south by Harrison Road, on the west by Strand Road, on the east by the Chitpore Road. Since the part of Burra Bazar that we have to deal with is only the southern part, I propose to take the northern boundary as a street called Darpanarayan Tagore Lane. The frontage of this portion of Burra Bazar on the Strand Road is 750 yards, and it has also got a frontage of 750 yards along Harrison Road. This part of Calcutta, so far as density of population is concerned, is the second most dense. It has got a population of something like 220 to the acre, which is considerably higher than any part of London. It is rather peculiar in its construction. The houses in Burra Bazar have godowns on the ground floors with living premises on the upper floors, and therefore it is probable that the real density of the population per area occupied is equal to, if not more than, that of any other part of Calcutta. Now, Sir, some years ago Dr. Crane, the Health Officer of Calcutta examined very carefully the conditions of the various wards of Calcutta for density of population and for the number of the sanitary and insanitary houses. He divided the houses of Calcutta into three different classes, sanitary, moderately sanitary, and insanitary. He found that Ward 5 which is Burra Bazar, with which we have to deal, was the section with the largest number of insanitary houses, and the smallest number of sanitary houses of any part of Calcutta. He also found that whereas the average deaths from tuberculosis in Calcutta were 3.2 per thousand, in Ward No. 5 they were 4.2 per thousand making that ward the second worst ward for tuberculosis. He went on to say: 'Still one could not help being struck with the extremely overcrowded condition of many of the large tenement houses in Burra Bazar section. Here one actually finds rooms sub-divided by partitions and whole families occupying the resulting tiny dens. A great deal of the insanitary property is overcrowded simply because a considerable portion of it is so horrible that it is abandoned, the inmates all crowding into two or three upper rooms.' In a letter addressed to the Government of Bengal by the Improvement Trust—I do not know if it has come to the Government of India, if it has not it will come later—it is said that 'the existing roadways are quite insufficient to meet the requirements of the traffic; a large percentage of the buildings, even though of costly construction, are insanitary, and Burra Bazar is a standing menace to the health of Calcutta.'

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" Now, Sir, there are at present running east and west in the Burra Bazar about six streets over a frontage of 750 yards. All of these streets go down as low as 15 feet in width in places, and in fact Burra Bazar which as its name implies is one of the most important business centres of Calcutta, is nothing but a rabbit warren. It is absolutely essential for the health of Calcutta that Burra Bazar should be improved by Town Planning Experts as soon as possible. I have told the Council that the frontage of Burra Bazar, or rather of that part of Burra Bazar with which I am dealing, is about 750 yards on the Strand Road. No less than 330 yards of this frontage is occupied by the Mint; and the result is of course that any new roads running east and west through Burra Bazar are stopped in their egress to Strand Road by the Mint.

" A plan for improvement has been drawn up by the Improvement Trust, and slight alterations have been suggested by the Municipality in conjunction with the report drawn up by Professor Geddes, and this plan proposes that eight new roads should be driven from east to west. These roads will vary in width from 70 feet in the case of the broadest road to 35 feet in the case of the narrowest road. No less than three of these suggested roads converge on to the Mint, and therefore they cannot be extended towards the Strand Road which, as I have said, is the main traffic artery running north and south.

" Therefore, I think from the point of view of the health of Calcutta and also the trade of Calcutta, it is most important that the Mint should be removed.

" Now, Sir, the history of the Mint, or rather the history of the question of moving the Mint, as far as I can make out, is as follows. In 1906, Sir Charles Allen, who was then the Chairman of the Corporation, proposed to the Government of India that the Mint should be removed, because it was proposed to go on with the improvement of Burra Bazar as soon as possible, and it was necessary that more space should be given to the people who were turned out of their houses by the improvements. A Committee was appointed, and five conditions were laid down which must be fulfilled by any new site. I will deal with them later. The report of that Committee seems to be shrouded in mystery. The Improvement Trust say that no decision was come to. I understand that the Government of India have told the Improvement Trust that a decision was come to; but unfortunately the Government of India forgot to tell the Government of Bengal or the Improvement Trust as to what that decision was.

" Now, be that as it may, conditions have materially altered since the year 1906, and it does not at all follow that the decision which was come to in 1906 should now be followed. The position at present is that the Improvement Trust have written through the Bengal Government to the Government of India, and the Government of India, I understand, have replied saying that the decision arrived at from 1906 to 1908, which was that the removal of the Mint was impracticable, cannot be reconsidered.

" Now, Sir, I would like to deal with the reply of the Government of India, and they give no reason why they should not reconsider their former decision, so that my only course is to deal with the conditions which were to be fulfilled in 1906, by a new site. The first condition was that the Mint should not be more than three miles from the Comptroller General's office. Well, I must say, Sir, that I do not quite see the reason for this requirement. We have got motor cars in these days, and I really do not think that it matters very much whether the Mint is three miles from the Comptroller General's Office or ten miles.

" Then they go on to say that it must not be less suitable than the present site for the purposes of Government including the import of bullion and

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the Currency Office work. Well, I entirely agree with the Government as regards the import of bullion, and it is absolutely necessary that the Mint should be on the railway. As regards the question of Currency office work, I understand that that means that when coin is made it has to be removed from the Mint to the Currency Office. In 1906, I think that motor lorries hardly existed and everything, I presume, was then taken by bullock carts moving about two miles an hour. Well, supposing that three miles was suitable then, that is to say, that a bullock cart would take an hour and a half to take coin from the Mint to the Currency Office and *vice versa*, I submit that a motor lorry could do about fifteen miles in that time, as it would run at something like ten miles per hour; so that there is no real objection on that point.

"Then we come to the third condition, that the present site should not be less convenient for the Banks and the commercial public. I think the answer to this is found by studying the personnel of the Calcutta Improvement Trust. When this suggestion was made by the Improvement Trust, there were as Members of the Improvement Trust Mr. Dods of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, which, I think, is the bank most concerned with movements of bullion in Calcutta; Mr. Murray, the Vice-president of the Chamber; Sir Frank Carter, another member of the Chamber Committee; Raja Rishi Kesh Law of the Bengal National Chamber, and there was also my friend on my right\* who, I am sorry to say, told me yesterday that he was going to oppose the Resolution; I have not yet discovered his reason though no doubt we will hear that later. I have spoken to a good many Marwari gentlemen and they are all exceedingly anxious that the Mint should be removed. If then the commercial public of Calcutta as represented by the gentlemen I have mentioned are not opposed to the removal of the Mint, I think that condition No. 3 really falls to the ground.

"Then we come to condition 4, namely, that the proposed site is capable of being at least as efficiently defended in case of disturbance as the present building. Well, Sir, if I were asked to draft a programme for defence for the public buildings in Calcutta, I think I should have to ask somebody else to deal with the Mint. I have the authority of the Commissioner of Police in Calcutta, who says that for this reason he would very much prefer that the Mint should be removed elsewhere.

"Then we come to No. 5, that the cost of removal, both initial and recurring, should not be prohibitive. Well, it is difficult to prophesy and I am not an expert on land values in Calcutta, but the Mint occupies an area of some 50 bighas, that is to say, about 17 acres. It is reckoned that the value of land in that part of Calcutta is something like Rs. 10,000 per kotah, i.e., 1-20th of a bigha, and I leave Members to work out that if they wish; but it comes to this, that the value of the Mint premises is something between 75 lakhs and a crore of rupees. Now I do not think there would be any difficulty in getting a site outside Calcutta, a bit further out, not necessarily outside Calcutta, for a tenth of that cost and a considerably larger site. And then there is this to be considered: The present Mint is a Mint which has been built up gradually and is more or less patchwork. The work it does is extraordinarily efficient, but I cannot help thinking that if a new Mint, a real modern Mint was built elsewhere, the cost, the recurring cost, would be very much less than it is at present; that is to say, that a Mint considerably more thorough than the present one could be built elsewhere. There is one point however, Sir, which has not been mentioned as one of the conditions, and to my mind it is far the most important, I mean the question of labour. As far as the present Mint is concerned, it is admitted at once that it is in a very central position as far as labour is concerned, and of course a Mint has to work to a

\* The Hon'ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur.

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certain extent spasmodically, and therefore it is very important that a place should be found where casual labour can be easily got. But the present Mint has this disadvantage, that the area is almost entirely occupied by the Mint buildings and that a large number of the staff, the superior staff, the supervising staff, have to live elsewhere. I consider that if a site could be found somewhere else and a larger site, it would be possible to accommodate not only these officers, but also a large portion of the labour actually on the Mint premises.

“Now, Sir, that is really all that I have got to say on the subject, but I should like to quote one more paragraph from the letter which the Improvement Trust have sent through the Government of Bengal, to the Government of India. They say this:—

‘The Board of Trustees for the Improvement of Calcutta are of opinion that it can be shown that the sanitary improvement of Bara Bazar will be greatly facilitated by the removal of the Mint, and that the removal of the Mint would improve the conditions under which the trade of Calcutta is carried on, and that these considerations are of such great importance to Calcutta as a port and centre of commerce that they should outweigh any administrative difficulties which may arise in connection with the removal of the Mint.’

“That is the position, Sir, and I very much hope that Government will see their way to accept this Resolution and have a thorough inquiry afresh into the conditions of Bara Bazar, and the question of removing the Mint.”

1-43 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Mr. Abdur Raheem :—**“Sir, I have pleasure in supporting this Resolution so ably moved by my Hon'ble friend, Mr. Crum. I am afraid, Sir, Mr. Crum has left almost nothing for me to add to the reasons he has put forward in support of his Resolution. Therefore, instead of recapitulating the whole thing, I beg to endorse every word that has been said by him, and in doing so, I wish to add only this much that as a Commissioner to the Calcutta Corporation, I fully recognise the necessity of removing the Mint to a more suitable site than that on which it now is.”

1-44 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi :—**“Sir, I have much pleasure in supporting the Resolution which has just been moved by my Hon'ble friend Mr. Crum recommending the removal of the Mint from its present site. It is well known to every one in this Council that Bara Bazar is a very dense quarter of Calcutta, and it is difficult now for carts to pass through the small streets which exist at present in that locality. The Improvement Trust have contemplated that there should be roads from East to West, and these roads would be 35 feet wide and there would then be no difficulty in the passing of carts and *thalis* and motor vehicles through this quarter. At present it is very difficult, sometimes it is impossible, to pass through the existing roads. People live in that quarter and it is also a business quarter, and, I think, it would be better if the Mint were moved to a different place near Calcutta, where the necessary space for the houses of the guards and other officials would be available. This would lead to an improvement in the condition of Bara Bazar. I, therefore, support this Resolution of my Hon'ble friend, Mr. Crum.”

1-45 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur :—**“Sir, I regret that I cannot see eye to eye with Mr. Crum in this matter. It is not that I am very much opposed to the idea of removing the Mint; but I beg to say that the removal of the Mint will not conduce to the health of Calcutta, *i.e.*, to the health of Bara Bazar, as has been suggested by Mr. Crum. The genesis of the Improvement Trust, the reason why it was created, was that congestion in Bara Bazar should be removed, that the dirt and filth from that quarter should be removed and thereby the health of Bara Bazar improved. In the first place, Bara Bazar now-a-days is not confined to the four corners of Harrison Road and Chitpur Road and the Strand Road. It is really expanding.

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“ Now coming to the point of health, I may mention that the object of the Improvement Trust being to improve the health of Bara Bazar, the removal of the Mint would not conduce to that object. The modern idea of removing the Mint has originated from the fact that the Calcutta Improvement Trust has undertaken to open several roads and to create open spaces, and as a large number of insanitary houses and over-crowded houses would have to be demolished, the site of the Mint should be taken up and Marwari gentlemen permitted to build new houses there, to provide accommodation for the disturbed population of Bara Bazar. If that be so, then instead of removing the congestion and improving the health of Bara Bazar, it would rather promote congestion and endanger the health of that portion of Calcutta. The Mint occupies a very large space, nearly 17 acres of land. It is something like what the Maidan is to Chowringhee. It is the lung of Bara Bazar and if, instead of creating more open spaces, the idea is to fill up that place with large three, four and five-storied houses, then the sooner the idea is abandoned the better. I do not see why sites should be created near Bara Bazar to provide accommodation for the de-housed Marwari gentlemen. They are now-a-days not confined to the four corners of Bara Bazar; they are expanding; they have invaded the southern quarters of the town, Kalighat, Bhowanipore and other places. They have been expanding and buying building sites and erecting large houses in every part of Calcutta. Formerly they liked the idea that they should remain very close to one another in Bara Bazar. But that is an exploded idea now, that idea has now been abandoned, and they are now expanding everywhere. In these circumstances, it is not necessary that any attempt should be made to find space—especially near Bara Bazar—to provide accommodation for the dislodged population. As I pointed out before, the object of the Trust is to create more open spaces and they have undertaken to provide several squares in Bara Bazar. It would be disastrous, it would be dangerous, to the health of the people, if this space was filled up by the houses of Marwari gentlemen, which are always three, four and five storeys high.

“ Not only from the financial point of view, but also from the political point of view, it is not very safe to have the Mint in an isolated place. From the financial point of view, the cost would be very great indeed. Now-a-days, especially since the last ten years, the price of land in Calcutta has been going up. It has gone up by how many per cent I cannot say; it has been going up by leaps and bounds. Formerly, lands even in my quarter, which used to sell for Rs. 2,000, are now selling for Rs. 10,000 a cottah. In Beadon Street and other places lands which were sold for Rs. 2,000 are now selling for more than Rs. 10,000, and in the area which has been improved by the Improvement Trust, which is known as Soorti Bagan, lands have been selling lately at Rs. 30,000 a cottah. Even in the suburbs this phenomenal rise in prices has taken place. So it would from the financial point of view, from the point of view of the Government, be extremely expensive to find out adequate and necessary space close to Calcutta. Of course, if the Mint is located in an isolated place, the cost would be less. But I doubt very much whether it would be wise to locate the Mint in an isolated place. There is another aspect of the question. However high the authority may be—I bow of course to the authority of the Commissioner of Police—I beg to maintain that it would not be very wise to remove the Mint out of Calcutta. In the case of a disturbance or riot the first object of the mob is to loot the Treasuries. If that is possible, from that point of view, the Mint should be located as close as possible to the headquarters of the Commissioner of Police and the Fort. Now-a-days, the Mint is very conveniently situated. It would be dangerous, I should say, to allow the Mint to be removed to a long distance in the suburbs. I have no particular objection to the removal of the Mint, but my opposition simply arises from the fact that it would be dangerous to the health of Bara Bazar to have the Mint removed and to allow that space to be taken up by our Marwari friends.”

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[*Mr. H. F. Howard.*]

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1-54 P.M.

**The Hon'ble Mr. H. F. Howard** :--“ Sir, I need not detain the Council very long over this matter. The Hon'ble Mr. Crum has explained the objects of his proposal very clearly and I do not wish to adopt any *non-possumus* attitude in the matter. I think that, first of all, I had better remove one or two misconceptions. Firstly, I had better state what the history of this previous Committee was. The Committee did sit, as the Hon'ble Mover says, but after holding two or three meetings the Committee seemed somehow or other to have fizzled out and, though they came to no decision on the subject, they met no further, and Sir James Meston, who had been on the Committee, eventually, some time in 1908, wrote the following note about it :

‘ The Committee never met again. The whole scheme was an impracticable one : and none of us could see anything in favour of it, with the exception of its originator the Chairman of the Corporation, who had the somewhat half-hearted support of Mr. Bertram. The cost of moving the Mint would have been prohibitive : the reasons for it were feeble, as it provides far more air space than the buildings by which the Corporation would have replaced it ; and before any decision could possibly have been come to, Government had sunk a large amount of additional capital on the site. Finally, there was no evidence that the Calcutta Improvement Trust, when it begins its labours, would have required the Mint site ; or that, if it had, it would have been able to offer Government any compensation for removal. ’

As the matter was noted on in this informal way, no communication on the subject was unfortunately made to the Government of Bengal at the time.

“ Coming to the recent reference from the Bengal Government, they did not, as we read their letter, ask us to proceed with the matter in any way, but merely put to us an inquiry as to what had been done. We understood that the Bengal Government merely desired to be informed of the previous decision of the Government of India in the matter, and accordingly, proceeding on what Sir James Meston had said at that time, we told them what had been decided and said we did not propose to re-open the question. I do not however wish, as I have said, to resist the Hon'ble Mr. Crum's Resolution, because I recognise that, even from our point of view, the present Mint site is not ideal for all the purposes he has mentioned and the site is in some ways cramped and inconvenient. But, in agreeing to the question being re-opened, I must not be understood in any way to commit the Government of India to agreeing to its final removal, if we are not provided with an equally suitable site for all our purposes or if it is considered on inquiry that there are other obvious weighty objections which prevent the proposal being proceeded with.

“ I agree with the Hon'ble Mr. Crum as to the points of importance to be considered in connection with the site of a Mint. The question of the distance of three miles from the Comptroller General's office can now be dismissed as of no importance. The Comptroller General's Department now has nothing to do with the Mints ; they are now under the Controller of Currency. But I attach considerable importance to the Mint being within very easy reach of the Currency Office, as well as of the Banks and of the commercial portions of the town. I think Mr. Cook will confirm my statement when I say that last year, when the currency crisis and the rush for rupees was at its height, it was a matter of minutes whether we could get rupees from the Mint to the Currency Office in time, and there can be no question whatever of having the Mint at a distance where, with a motor car, it would take an hour and a half to get rupees to the Currency Office. I may say that I am rather surprised at the attitude of the Bengal Chamber representative in the matter and of the Banks. I would just like to detain the Council for a few minutes while I read what they said with regard to previous proposals for the removal of the Mint. The Hon'ble Mr. Crum has not gone into that previous history as he might have done. In 1902, there was a proposal to close the Calcutta Mint and to remove the Bombay Mint to another site at or near Bombay. The Bengal Chamber of Commerce, writing on the 9th of July 1902, strongly resisted the proposal for

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[*Mr. H. F. Howard ; Mr. W. E. Crum.*]

closing the Calcutta Mint and with regard to removing the Bombay Mint outside Bombay said :—

‘A very strong feeling exists, especially amongst the banking community, against the removal of the Bombay Mint from its present site. The Committee are decidedly of opinion that the risk to banks, merchants and the public generally, of having to convey to, or from a Mint situated outside Bombay large amounts of coin and/or bullion is one that they should not be called upon to undertake.’

“The Bombay Chamber of Commerce on similar lines objected to the proposal, and in their letter it was said ‘I am to say that it is the unanimous and strong opinion of my Committee and of the Banks consulted that the site of the Mint should be central and close to the Banks. It need scarcely be stated that the transmission of treasure of any kind to a Mint outside or on the outskirts of Bombay would entail grave inconvenience and risk.’

“I do not think I need go beyond the opinion of the commercial communities themselves in this matter.

“There was one argument that Mr. Crum brought forward, and that I cannot think was quite justifiable. He said that some of the Mint supervising staff have to be accommodated elsewhere. But the reason for this is, that in order to improve commercial facilities, we gave up some years ago a considerable portion of our land to the Port Trust thereby displacing many of our staff. Mr. Crum’s argument seems to amount to this : that because we have given up some of our land for commercial facilities in Calcutta, we should therefore now remove ourselves bag and baggage from the site.

“There is also the important question of cost. When the question of the removal of the Calcutta Mint was under consideration in 1906 or 1907, it was estimated that this would cost between 25 to 30 lakhs at the least. Sir James Meston, knowing as we do how these estimates are apt to be pitched rather low, estimated that at the lowest the cost would be 35 lakhs. It is certain at the present time that the cost would be considerably more; and though it is true that Government might in time be compensated by the money received from the site made over to the Improvement Trust, it is obvious that in the meantime they would be out of pocket for a very considerable sum.

“In accepting Mr. Crum’s Resolution I must be understood to do so with these qualifications, that I am quite prepared to have an inquiry, but we cannot commit ourselves, the whole question will have to be carefully gone into and a decision arrived at when we know what site it is proposed to give us and what the cost is likely to be and so forth.”

**The Hon’ble Mr. W. E. Crum:**— “Sir, I must thank the Finance 23 P.M.  
Minister for the sympathetic way in which he has received my proposal, and I quite understand, of course, that nothing this committee might do would absolutely commit Government.

“There are one or two points, however, to which I should like to refer. I never knew of Sir James Meston’s note, and I submit that the position is entirely changed since Sir James Meston wrote that note. That was in 1908, and as I said we are now in the days of motor transport, which entirely alters the position. The same consideration applies to the distance from the Currency office, and as regards the question of distance from the banks which the Hon’ble the Finance Minister alluded to and which was discussed in 1902, I think my comparison between the bullock cart doing two miles an hour and the motor lorry moving at ten miles an hour comes in, because it is evident that it is much more difficult to safeguard a string of bullock carts than it is to safeguard one substantial motor lorry.

“With regard to the remarks of the Hon’ble Member on my right,\* he likened the Mint to a maidan, that is to say, he said that the Mint is to Burra Bazar

\* The Hon’ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur.

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OTHER SITE.

[*Mr. W. E. Crum ; Rai Sita Nath Ray  
Bahadur ; the Vice-President.*]

[16TH SEPTEMBER, 1919.]

what the maidan is to the rest of Calcutta. Well, I am afraid that I cannot see the similarity. The maidan is an open area without any single building, with green grass and nice clumps of trees. The Mint has a very considerable number of buildings, is almost covered with buildings. The maidan is hardly peopled during the day except for a few people wandering about. During the day the Mint is very fully populated indeed ; a very large number of men work very hard. The only similarity that I can see is, that the Mint premises have a tank in the middle of them, and the maidan has several tanks ; but the tanks on the maidan are nice clean tanks where you see people fishing, while as regards the tank in the Mint premises, it is dirty and unclean with steam always issuing from it and is a most unsavoury place altogether . . . .

**The Hon'ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur** :—" May I interrupt my Hon'ble friend ? "

**The Vice-President** :—" The Hon'ble Member will address the Chair. "

**The Hon'ble Rai Sita Nath Ray Bahadur** :—" May I interrupt my Hon'ble friend for a moment ? I said that the western portion of the Mint was quite open. "

**The Hon'ble Mr. W. E. Crum** :—" I think that I may well content myself with leaving my Hon'ble friend to the tender mercies of the other members of the Improvement Trust when he returns to Calcutta. As I say, Sir, I thank the Hon'ble the Finance Member for accepting my Resolution, and I quite understand the terms under which he accepts it. "

The motion was put and the Resolution was adopted.

The Council then adjourned till Wednesday, the 17th September, 1919, at 11 A.M.

SIMLA ;

The 24th September, 1919. }

(Sd.) H. M. SMITH,

Offg. Secretary to the Government of India,  
Legislative Department.