

It is well understood by our people that the right to vote is their instrument for achieving progress and prosperity.

However, in the context of recent events in Punjab, the electoral process has also acquired a new national significance.

The fundamental issue now before all political parties committed to the democratic system is :

Shall we allow the exercise of the free will of the people to be obstructed, frustrated and subverted by the forces of extremism and terrorism ?

On a correct response to this question hinges the fate of the democratic system in India.

Either all political parties unitedly face the sinister challenge of terrorism by strengthening democratic process or they succumb to the threat from terrorism and extremism.

In Punjab all else is secondary.

How individual parties fare is of little consequence. It does not matter who wins, and who loses.

What matters is that the lamp of democracy is not extinguished : what does matter is that India wins.

The people of India have shown that they value democratic rights and freedom above everything else : the political parties that represent them value democracy no less.

A democratic election is the people's answer to the brute force employed by a small section to impose their will on the masses.

We shall not allow divisive forces to prevail.

We shall serve as the instrument to enable the democratic process to triumph whatever the risk to ourselves.

As the custodian of the people's will and mandate, I am fully committed to this course.

Our democratic society has the inner strength to close its ranks to face the dangers that confront it.

We shall demonstrate that we are capable of rising above expediency.

Let us, who value the ideals that have built this Nation, together accept this challenge.

14 43 hrs.

RAILWAY PROTECTION FORCE (AMENDMENT) BILL

[English]

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS
(SHRI BANSI LAL) : I beg to move :

“That the Bill to amend the Railway Protection Force Act, 1957, be taken into consideration.”

Sir, the Railway Protection Force, before the Act of 1957 was a watch and ward department of the Railways. After 1957, it became an organised force. At present, the Railway Protection Force has little powers to discharge its functions properly. After the passing of this amendment, the Railway Protection Force will be able to discharge its duties properly and more effectively. The Railway Protection Force will be an Armed Force and prosecution against them in certain cases will be done away with.

With these words, I commend the Bill for the consideration of the House.

MR. SPEAKER : Motion moved :

“That the Bill to amend the Railway Protection Force Act, 1957, be taken into consideration.”

PROF K. V. THOMAS (Ernakulam) : Sir, I rise to support the Railway Protection Force Bill.

Railway is one of the biggest organisation which is catering to the needs of the passengers and also moving the very heavy goods traffic. When Shri Bansi Lal took charge as Minister of Railways, we believed that he will be able to run this big organisation in a better manner as he is one of the well known administrators, but, I am very painful to see that while you have introduced this Bill, the Railway Protection Force Bill, the Railway Protection Force cannot protect the people.

I come from Kerala which is on the southern most part of the country. From my State, there are three long distance passenger trains; one is K K Express, the second is Jayanti Janta Express to Delhi and the third is Jayanti Janta Express to Bombay. The passengers in these long distance trains are very often plundered and manhandled. Anti-social elements enter these trains and take away the valuables of the people.

My humble suggestion is that the passengers of short distance should not be allowed to enter the long distance trains.

There is another suggestion that I have to make. When we complain to the Railway Protection Force, they say that they are helpless, they will hand over our complaints to the State police which will take action. But nobody knows what action is taken by the State police.

I also want to bring to your notice the very poor catering in the passenger trains. In K K Express, there is no proper catering service. Usually, as you know, our trains are very late, so we will not be getting food at all on some days. Kindly look into this aspect also.

Many of the Members of Parliament have very bitter experience in the passenger trains. When we complain

to the Superintendent of the Station, he does not pay any attention. The Superintendents should be given directions that as soon as they get any complaint, suitable action should be taken by them.

14.49 hrs.

[**SHRI SHARAD DIGHE** *in the Chair*]

You are a good Minister. When we give a representation to you, you immediately give either a positive answer or a negative answer, but along with your answer, you give a lengthy reply saying the reasons for your answer. We are very happy, but when a similar complaint is given to the officers in your Department, they do not take any care to give a suitable reply. You should give instructions to the officers in your department that whenever there is any complaint, they should give proper reply, and they should also look into these complaints and take necessary action.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY (Midnapore) : I oppose the Bill which has been brought forward by our Minister. (*Interruptions*)

PROF MADHU DANDAVATE (Rajapur) : Kindly tell them that the Government of the united Congress never allowed this Bill. They did not want to expand the armed forces.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : So, they have changed their position. Very good. Because the situation has changed their position.

The RPF was a Watch & Ward organization before independence. These days, RPF is called by people, not as Railway Protection Force but as Railway Plundering Force or Railway Pilferage Force. (*Interruptions*) Actually, the hon. Members on the other side also know this, also say the same thing when they speak outside. There are saying something else inside the House.

SHRI RAM PYARE PANIKA (Robertsganj) : We have no double standards.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : They have triple standards—one for the AICC, one for this House, and one for the Central Hall.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : I would like to draw the attention of the Minister to the fact, which he knows very well, that at the top level of RPF, there is a lot of corruption. In the matter of postings and transfers, there is real big corruption at the head office and the divisional offices.

Wagon-breakers are there from amongst them. *(Interruption)* The hon. Member here is simply telling me what I should speak. He is prompting me. Wagon-breakers are there from amongst them. RPF people are linked with wagon-breakers, smugglers and receivers of stolen property. You can very well find out the names.

You have to gratify the head office if you want to get a good posting, in a good marshalling yard. Suppose you want to have a posting in Mughal Sarai Yard, or Kharagpur Marshalling Yard or the Waltair Yard, you have to gratify the head office, with a monthly income or payment.

I think you know it. I had suggested one thing based on my own experience. I know that in the railway workshops or factories where they are keeping watch-dogs around the wall, theft is very much less. Sometimes it seems that trained dogs are more dependable in the matter of giving protection to property than our own personnel. I would request the Minister to consider this—whether at least in one small factory, one small wagon shop or loco shop you can try it. I think you will make again, if you can keep 2 or 3 dogs around the wall of these factories. Then the theft there will be much less because, in Kharagpur I have seen it. It is my experience. In factories where we keep dogs, theft is very much less compared to those factories which are keeping security guards. You know well that in Howrah, Kharagpur, Asansol and Mughal Sarai which have got big walls around, there is

24-hour armed vigil, with armed constables or armed guards. Even then, you will find that if you repair a wall to-day, tomorrow you will find it broken. To-day you repair a cleft; tomorrow you will find a hole. How do these things happen? Without the connivance of the RPF people, how can these things happen? These things can never happen otherwise.

I told the Minister something personally, regarding Howrah. He took note of it. But even then I see that nothing has happened. To-day you repair a wall; tomorrow you will find that it is broken.

I wanted to tell you one more thing. Now you are trying to give them more powers so that they can arrest a man without any warrant and they can enter into any place. I do not think that will be fair because their records are not very good. Already they have got enough powers. They can arrest any person with the help of police. That means in Bihar, they have to take help from the Bihar Police, in Bengal, they have to take help from the Bengal police and in Uttar Pradesh, they have to take help from the U P Police. Now you want to say that they can do the policing, the law and order duty which is the prerogative of the State. Now you want this prerogative to be given in respect of this force also. I think it will be incorrect, when you have appointed a Sarkaria Commission, to think of giving more powers to these people.

This is not the only background. You should think thrice before giving more powers to these people whose records are not at all very bright.

Then Sir, another very bad thing is that you are going to withdraw whatever right they have got to form their associations. They have no unions as yet, they don't join any union. They are neither Members of this union nor the INTUC or any other union but they have got their own associations. Today, you are going to withdraw that thing, perhaps you are switching to more democracy at the

[Shri Narayan Cnoubey]

grass-root level. They have their own grievances. You know pretty well, that these common people are not in a happy mood. They have to keep their mouth shut. Big officers torture them, if they try to do their duty dutifully. That is not to be counted. The officers do not take into account of what they do properly. The officers count only what they want to be done. If any RPF person daily goes to the house of the officer makes a salute to the Memsahib and take his son to school without doing any duty, then he will not promotion. But if a man wants to do his duty properly and if he does not submit to the whims and caprices of the officers, he is punished. In such a situation, the association which is there with very limited powers cannot speak. They can only appeal, they cannot strike, they can only make representation to you. If you withdraw that thing also and if you speak more of democracy, election in Punjab, election in Assam, I do not think this Bill will suit to the talks you do make here about democracy. Naturally, for all these reasons, I say that this Bill should be withdraw and should not be brought now. I oppose this Bill tooth and nail and I hope you will kindly consider these things. You cannot give more protection by giving more powers to these persons. It is impossible. If you cannot motivate them but give them arms and the right to arrest, then it will only breed more corruption, nepotism and favouritism. Already the common people are suffering a lot. We poor people are now safe, at least from the RPF; there is enough police to attack us; there is enough BSF to attack us. If you again bring in RPF also, then it will be a third force. Hence I request you kindly to withdraw this Bill. It is meaningless for this purpose. I hope you will consider my proposal and withdrawing this Bill.

[Translation]

*SHRI R. JEEVARATHINAM (Ara-kkonam): Hon. Mr. Chairman, Sir, on the Railway Protection Force Amendment Bill, which has been introduced by

our hon. Railway Minister, I wish to make a few suggestions. I wholeheartedly welcome this Bill. Through this Bill, the Railway Protection Force which has been in existence for the past 28 years is being converted into the Armed Forces of the Union. It is very necessary to have the Armed Forces to protect Rs. 9500 crores of investment made in the Railways by the Government. From 1979-80 to 1983-84, during this period of five years, the Railway materials and fittings worth Rs. 735 lakhs had been stolen and only Rs. 342 lakhs worth of the materials and fittings have been recovered so far. During the same period, Rs. 2939 lakhs worth of consignments had also been stolen, out of which only Rs. 272 lakhs worth of consignments have been recovered. If the railway materials and fittings and the consignments are continued to be pilfered in this way, naturally there will be compulsion to increase the passenger fare and freight rate. This adversely affects the common people. By referring to to these statistics, I have emphasised the need for having under the direct control of the Government such an armed Force so that the railway properties and the consignments sent through Railways are protected.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. R. Jeevarathinam, you stop here and may continue next time, because now it is 3 p. m. and we have to take up Private Members' Business.

15.00 hrs.

COMMITTEE ON PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS AND RESOLUTIONS

[English]

Fifth Report

SHRI HUSSAIN DALWAI (Ratnagiri): I beg to move:

"That this House do agree with the fifth Report of the Committee on

*The Speech was originally delivered in Tamil.