

[Shri H. N. Mukerjee]

and, therefore, I feel the Government should shed its hesitations.

But my purpose in bringing this Resolution was to bring this matter under the scrutiny of the House. It is extremely gratifying that members of the House from different parts of the House have expressed themselves in favour of the Resolution for one reason or for another. Even the Minister has suggested, even though in a halting way, that he has sympathy with the idea of the Resolution, and he cannot go any farther.

I am sorry the Prime Minister is disabled, by her having gone to Bhutan or Sikkim or somewhere up in the Himalayas to be present here. If she had been here, we possibly might have got her to make a more definitive pronouncement in regard to some tentative steps which they can take. At least they can open a State Trading Corporation office in a very different way than they are doing at the present moment. He has not suggested one single concrete step which would be a step in the direction of recognition in the near future.

That is why while I am disappointed with his speech, I do not propose to press this Resolution, because I do not wish to let idea abroad that the House does not support it. The House does support it and that is why I do not press it.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : There are two amendments. Does Shri Nahata wish to press his amendment ?

SHRI AMRIT NAHATA : While I would seek the leave of the House to withdraw my amendment, I would point out to the hon. Minister that when I said that the argument advanced against recognition of GDR is a complicated matter, the hon. Minister interrupted 'Who says it ?' He himself has said it.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Has he the leave of the House to withdraw his amendment ?

Amendment No. 1 was, by leave, withdrawn.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Shri Indrajit Gupta is not here. I will put his amendment to vote.

*Half-An-Hour discussion.

SHRI UMANATH : when the amendment is not pressed, why should it be put to vote ?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : The procedure is clear. What can I do ? He is not here. That is the trouble. Otherwise, he would have sought leave of the house to withdraw it.

I shall put it to the vote of the House.
The Amendment No. 2 was put and negatived.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Has the hon. Member leave of the House to withdraw his resolution ?

The Resolution was, by leave, withdrawn.

18.30 hrs.

RESOLUTION RE : POSTS IN CIVIL AND MILITARY DEPARTMENTS

SHRIMATI TARKESHWARI SINHA (Barh) : I move :

"This House is of opinion that with a view to ensure efficiency and economy, a high-powered committee be appointed to examine the question of creation of highly paid posts and selection of personnel in the Civil and Military Departments, including the existing procedure obtaining in regard thereto."

SHRI D. N. TIWARY (Gopalganj) : The next Resolution also should be allowed to be moved.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : No ; there is no provision. We shall now take up half an hour discussion.

18.31 hrs.

*PRICES OF IMPORTED NEWSPRINT

SHRI K. M. Koushik (Chanda) : It cannot be denied that the newsprint produced in our country is scanty and we have been importing it from foreign countries every year.

[Shrimati Tarkeshwari Sinha in the Chair]

The State Trading Corporation has been authorised to enter into negotiations with foreign countries for importing and fixing the price of newsprint that we get every year. In the years 1962, 1963 and 1964 it has struck bargain with foreign countries for importing newsprint. We have the Newsprint Control order; 1962 to control the distribution of newsprint so that there will not be any blackmarketing or unequal distribution. Licences have been given looking to the requirements of persons asking for newsprint. When big importers get a licence, they have their own importing agency, and so, they have no trouble in getting their quota given in the licence. Trouble arises in the case of smaller and medium sized importers because they do not have their own agency to import newsprint and they have to take recourse to the importing agents. It is well known that these importing agents are licensed and recognised by the Commerce Ministry and it is only through these importing persons, the smaller and medium sized importers can get newsprint quota allowed to them. Taking advantage of the ignorance of these people, these agents charge more for the paper than what the STC has contracted for and levy excessive amounts as incidental charges.

There are no means by which a small or a medium sized licensee can verify whether the charges he has paid are correct or not; original documents are denied to them even for verification. Even true copies are not given to them with the result that those persons who take recourse to the import agents have no material whatsoever to verify whether the amount charged as price or incidental charges are correct or not.

These are the circumstances in which these importing agents actually hit these people, harassing them and making money. Complaints in these regards have been several times made to the Controller of Imports and Exports the Commerce Ministry and various other authorities and in fact, the Home Minister was also apprised of this matter, and a request was made to make an enquiry into this through the CBI. But even then, nothing was done and no pains were taken to enquire into these complaints. Taking the matter as it

is, it appears to me absolutely clear—as I shall presently show from a specific instance—that there is collusion between the officials of the Chief Controller of Imports and Exports, the Commerce Ministry and the importing agents forming a racket to squeeze the licences who take recourse to them. Great anxiety is shown by these officials to shield these importing agents. In spite of the fact it has definitely been shown that the agent has charged for the paper Rs. 8 more for a metric ton than the one the STC has already stipulated for—the contractual price—action is taken by the authorities which will clearly show that there is something fishy about the whole thing, and it needs a thorough enquiry. And if the Government were really honest and keen—it is necessary that an enquiry must be held in this connection.

I will now take up a case in which I have got from the Government all the documents which I can place on the Table of the House. These documents show that these importing agents have been charging Rs. 809 for metric tonne of newsprint.

There is one newspaper called *Sudarshan* a Marathi daily. This Marathi daily applied for an import quota of newsprint. Five metric tons of paper were allotted, and of course, being a small licensee he could not directly import it, and had to resort to importing agents who have been licensed and registered with the Commerce Ministry. He could not get it otherwise. So, they are supposed to be very good Persons because the Ministry itself accepts and holds them out as honest persons. He had to accept one of them. So, he took recourse to one Fida Ali of Bombay, he got the paper. First he gave a consolidated bill without disclosing the details. Then the editor asked for the details, and he then gave a detailed bill. The first and the second bill showed a difference of Rs. 250, and actually, he had charged Rs. 4,250 for the paper in the first bill. In the second bill, he had raised it to Rs. 4,280; about Rs. 50 or 60 more in regard to incidental charges also, were charged.

This gives rise to suspicion that there is something fishy. Therefore, original documents to verify whether the details given by him were correct or not were asked for. But the fellow would not give me the original document. True copies

[Shri K. M. Koushik]

under his signature were asked for. He would not give it. This again, increased my suspicions that this agent was playing some fraud. I went to the STC and asked them to scrutinise the bill, but they said, "he charged very much more," I again approached that fellow and he reduced it by Rs. 250. I do not know how he could do that unless he has been playing fraud. How he could change from time to time the details of the bill given, is a matter which is very difficult for me to understand. Not being satisfied with it, I again moved the Chief Controller of Imports and Exports.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Your time is up. You have already taken 10 minutes. There are some questions to be put.

SHRI K. M. Koushik : I will take just another three or four minutes.

MR. CHAIRMAN : There are four questioners. Kindly finish in two minutes.

SHRI K. M. Koushik : I will take only four minutes more.

I moved the CCI's office. They said, he has charged you only Rs. 829. The price of paper is Rs. 825. He has charged you less and you have no cause for grievance. After that, I approached the STC and they said, the price is only Rs. 801; he has charged you more. What am I to do? When I went to them and pressed them again, they tried to wriggle out of it. Again I pressed them further and they said, "Rs. 825 which we have charged includes packing charges." Again, it was found that, that was not the correct position, because Rs. 801, which is the contractual price of the STC includes packing charges and everything. A starred question was asked in this House by Mr. Kamath. Those questions and answers will show that the Commerce Ministry has been giving evasive replies only to shield the importing agent, for what reason, it is for one to infer. Actually, the officials of the commerce Ministry, the officials of the office of the Chief Controller of Imports and exports and the importing agents have formed a racket, fleecing the people with a view to divide the spoils.

Unless a thorough enquiry is made into this matter through the CBI, the facts will not come to light. I hope the minister will take this matter a little more seriously and get an enquiry done so that the real state of affairs may be known.

MR. CHAIRMAN : I will call upon the minister to reply. Then I will call upon the members whose names have come in the ballot to put questions.

SHRI ANANTRAO PATIL (Ahmed Nagar) : That means he will have to reply twice. It is better you allow the members to put their questions also and than he can reply at the end.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Rule 55 (5) is very clear. It says :

"There shall be no formal motion before the House nor voting. The member who has given notice may make a short statement and the Minister concerned shall reply shortly. Any member who has previously intimated to the Speaker may be permitted to ask a question for the purpose of further elucidating any matter of fact."

SHRI SHIVAJIRAO S. DESHMUKH (Parbhani) : Rules do not say that only 4 members shall ask questions. All these are conventions which have been developed.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The hon. member is an authority on the rules and he himself quotes them frequently. The words "further elucidating" show that first the minister should reply and then if members want further elucidation, those who have given previous intimation may seek further elucidation by asking a question. I would give opportunity to those whose names have come in the ballot. Unfortunately, the hon. member's name is not there this time. I wish him better Luck next time.

SHRI SONAVANE (Pandharpur) : On one occasion, the Deputy-Speaker did make some concession. That precedent may be followed by the Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Let us try this now. Next time, we shall see.

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI DINESH SINGH) : I am one with the hon. member who has raised this discussion that newsprint should be supplied to the newspapers at the best possible price without anyone making any profits as middlemen. I am very happy the hon. member feels in this regard import by STC has been better than import by private people. That should give us more confidence in imports through STC. If more and more people import through the STC we could avoid the difficulties that the hon. member has experienced.

So far as the position about import of newsprint is concerned I do not think the house expects me to go into the details of it because the position is very well known. The specific question to which the hon. Member has made a reference is the case of *Sudarshan* a Marathi Daily. This matter has been brought to our notice. We did look into this case. I would say to the hon. Member that it is not fair that he feels that there is any collusion between the officials of the Ministry of Commerce and the CCI.

SHRI K.M. Koushik : I have got the original bills. He has charged Rs. 809. At that time the STC had entered into a contract directly at a price of Rs. 801. This matter was brought to the notice of the Ministry and the Chief Controller of Imports. Why was no action taken in the matter? The Minister gave a categorical answer in reply to a Starred Question that he cannot charge anything more and the price must be the same as the price agreed to by STC. My question is, why was no action taken in this matter and why an attempt was made to shield the importing agent.

SHRI DINESH SINGH : As I was saying, it is not fair to say that there is any collusion. Even if action had been delayed according to the hon. Member, it does not imply that there is any collusion. There may be difficulties (*Interruption*) Unless and until the hon. Member hears me it is not fair to say that there is any collusion in this matter.

The hon. Member mentioned a brief history of this case. I do not think it is necessary for me to go into it. On an examination of the complaint it was

revealed that the bill included customs duty, storage and clearance charges etc. and the total charges were almost identical with those levied by the STC on similar consignments and that there was no unreasonable over-charging. These are all matters of opinion and in the judgment of the people who examined this matter they found that there was no over-charging because the rate included storage clearance charges and other things.

SHRI K.M. Koushik : I am asking you only with regard to the price of paper which has been separately mentioned. I am not asking you about incidental charges.

SHRI DINESH SINGH : As this Ministry was concerned we took legal advice as to whether there was anything that we could do in this matter and the advice we received was that this was a contract between the supplier and the party and that it would not be desirable for us to go into it at that stage (*Interruption*). But may I say, before the hon. Member makes another interruption, that Government has power to scrutinise the accounts of the agents. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which is concerned with this matter is making provisions to check the accounts. They are evolving a machinery that would be necessary to scrutinise these accounts carefully. I think very soon they will be able to formulate the proposals they have under consideration and then it will be possible for them to scrutinise these cases perhaps more speedily.

Again, in this matter the hon. Member had written to the Commerce Ministry in the past and they had gone into this matter and we have given to him the details as they are available to us. Now, it is a dispute about which there can be really no end. He feels that there has been cheating. The people who have examined it found that the total charges—I am not talking of the contract charges but the total charges—that were charged by them were not very much more than what the STC has been charging. Therefore, I have been proceeding on that basis. If the hon. Member gives me any new information in this regard, I shall be very happy to have it examined again.

SHRI SRADHAKAR SUPAKAR (Sambalpur): When a particular importing agent contracts to import a certain quantity of goods at a particular price and he over-charges, as is alleged to have been done in the present case, when the party defrauds not merely the customer but also tries to defraud the customs department, as was alleged when the question was put on the 23rd April 1968, what is the remedy for the Government in that matter? In this particular case which was referred to by the hon. Member, the party not only charged extra from the customer but also tried to manipulate the invoices so as to cheat the customs department. What action will the government take in such a case?

श्री देवराव पाटिल (यवतमाल) : सभापति महोदय, प्रश्न के उत्तर से और प्रश्न पर जो चर्चा हुई उससे यह स्पष्ट हो जाता है कि स्टेट ट्रेडिंग कारपोरेशन ने आयातित अखबारी कागज का जो मूल्य निर्धारित किया था आयराइज्ड इम्पोर्टर ने उससे ज्यादा मूल्य लिया है। मंत्री महोदय ने भी इसको कबूल किया है। इसके बारे में जो एन्क्वायरी की गई है वह उन अफसरों ने की है जिनका इसमें हाथ है, ऐसा बतलाया गया है। मैं मंत्री महोदय से पूछना चाहता हूँ कि क्या वह इसकी कोई इंडेपेंडेंट एन्क्वायरी करवायेंगे क्योंकि यह मामला तीन-चार साल से चल रहा है और इसके बारे में काफी सबूत उपलब्ध है और काफी रेकार्ड मौजूद हैं। उस रिकार्ड को देखने के बाद कोई ऐसा सदस्य नहीं हमारी सभा का जो इससे सहमत न हो। जो भी हमारे डिस्ट्रिक्ट पेपर्स हैं उनको पैसे दिये बगैर कागज नहीं मिलता है और काफी कारप्शन चलता है। मैं माननीय मंत्री महोदय से प्रार्थना करूंगा कि क्या वह इसमें कोई इंडेपेंडेंट एन्क्वायरी करवायेंगे ?

श्री शिकरे (पंजिम) : सभापति महोदय, आजकल छोटे अखबारों की जैसी परिस्थिति है। उसको मेरे जैसा छोटे अखबार का प्रकाशक, सम्पादक और मुद्रक ही जान सकता है। जैसे यहां 'सुदर्शन' पेपर के बारे में बतलाया गया है

वैसे ही बहुत से पेपर्स के बारे में होता है। लेकिन चूंकि वह इस तरह की परेशानी के आदी नहीं हैं इसलिये वर्तमान परिस्थिति में वे जो इम्पोर्टर एजेंट्स हैं उनके भक्ष्य बनते हैं क्योंकि उनको जो पेपर लेना होता है वह इम्पोर्टर के एजेंट से ही मिलता है। लेकिन जैसा अभी मंत्रीजी ने प्रश्न के उत्तर में बतलाया कि पेपर का सारा व्यापार स्टेट ट्रेडिंग कारपोरेशन के द्वारा ही होता है, और श्री कौशिक ने भी वही बतलाया है। लेकिन मेरे जैसे जो छोटे अखबार वाले हैं उनको स्टेट ट्रेडिंग कारपोरेशन से कागज लेने में ज्यादा फायदा नहीं होता। इम्पोर्टर के एजेंट्स जो होते हैं वह हमको ज्यादा सुविधायें देते हैं। स्टेट ट्रेडिंग कारपोरेशन के पास जब हम पेपर लेने के लिये जाने हैं तब हमको सारा पेपर एक दफे में ही लेना पड़ता है। मैं मंत्री महोदय से पूछना चाहता हूँ कि क्या वह कोई ऐसी सेल्स बनायेंगे जो कागज को एक दम से ही न बेचें बल्कि जैसे-जैसे आवश्यकता हो छोटे पेपर वालों को उस परिमाण में बेचें क्योंकि इसी तरह से उनका फायदा हो सकता है।

SHRI ANANTRAO PATIL : Our annual newsprint import at present is to the tune of 1,20,000 tonnes out of which 60 per cent is imported by private parties and 40 per cent by the STC. The big papers can import their newsprint quota directly from the foreign countries, but the small and medium-sized newspapers have to depend on private traders like Fida Ali Fida Hussain and other agencies. When a newspaperman like me wants to import his newsprint quota, he has to hand over his licence to Fida Ali Fida Hussain or some other fellow who imports the 200 or 250 tonnes which has been allotted to him but the whole quota is not given to him because he is not in a position to pay the full amount.

The import by the STC is mainly for making buffer stock. Those newspapers which are not in position to open letters of credit are to be supplied by the STC. As Shri Koushik has said, there is difference between the price of newsprint imported by the STC and of the newsprint imported

by private traders. Mainly we import our newsprint from Canada, the United States and the Scandinavian countries.

MR. CHAIRMAN : He is only to ask a question.

from Maharashtra, namely, whether we were thinking of manhinery. That machinery as being contemplated; in fact, it is the process of being now put together.

19 hrs.

Also about the inquiry Shri Patil had asked me whether we would make an inquiry through an independant agency. I might mention that we have gone into this case and my predecessor had given the information to the House.

SHRI K. M. Koushik : Inquiry by the same person against whom it was meant.

SHRI DINESH SINGH : But I am never afraid of any inquiry as such and if Shri Patil would give me any papers that would warrant an inquiry by an independant agency, I shall certainly have it done.

SHRI ANANTRAO PATIL : If I do not say this, there will not be any meaning to my question.

There are also the eastern bloc countries, like Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland etc. from where we import newsprint. Now, I would like to know from the Minister whether it is possible or not to evolve anew mechanism by which we can exclude the private traders or private parties from importing newsprint and hand it over to such an agency which will be useful to big as well as small and medium-sized newspapers.

SHRI SHIVAJIRAO S. DESHMUKH : I want to ask one question

MR. CHAIRMAN : Under the rules only four people are allowed to ask questions. Their names are balloted. Hon. Member's name was there but he was unlucky in the ballot

SHRI DINESH SINGH : So far as the question of defrauding is concerned, I did mention that the Registrar of Newspapers is evolving a machinery that will scrutinise all these matters and we hope that it will be ready soon. There is no question of defrauding of the customs so far as it has been brought to our notice in this connection.

This also answers the question of machinery that was raised by my hon. friend

Regarding the question of import of paper through S. T. C. alone which means canalisation of the import of the paper, I shall have to go into this question before I make a commitment before the House. I shall certainly go into the question whether we can at least evolve some more efficient system of import at least for the smaller newspapers. I shall look into it.

MR. CHAIRMAN : That is all. Now, the House stands adjourned to meet again on Monday, the 6th May, 1968.

19 01 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Monday, the May 6th, 1968 / Vaisakha 16, 1890 (Saka)