

Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1950."

The motion was adopted

SHRI K. C. PANT : I introduce† the Bill.

COMPANIES (AMENDMENT) BILL*

THE MINISTER OF COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI RAGHUNATHA REDDY) : I beg to move for leave to introduce a Bill further to amend the Companies Act, 1956.

MR. SPEAKER : The question is :

"That leave be granted to introduce a Bill further to amend the Companies Act, 1956."

The motion was adopted

SHRI RAGHUNATHA REDDY : I introduce the Bill.

10.13 hrs.

NEWSPAPERS (PRICE CONTROL) BILL

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY) : I beg to move :

"That the Bill to provide for the Control, in the interests of the general public, of the prices of newspapers with a view to ensuring that newspapers continue to function, in the prevailing conditions, as effective mass communication media and for securing their availability at fair prices, be taken into consideration."

Sir, the House will recall that with the imposition with effect from the 15th November, 1971, of an excise duty of 2 paise on newspapers having a circulation in excess of 15,000, a large number of newspapers all over the country increased their prices not only to the extent of the excise duty but well in excess of it. The price increase was, however,

not uniform. It varied from 3 paise to 8 paise, including the excise duty in both cases,

The newspapers justified the price increase on the ground that even apart from the excise duty, there had been increase in cost, and that they had been contemplating a price increase entirely independent of the levy of the excise duty. This argument could not, however, be regarded as valid for at least two reasons. First, the fact that even apart from the excise duty, the price increases varied from 1 paise to 6 paise showed that these increases were not entirely in response to the cost increase which, even if they could not be absorbed by the newspapers in the normal way, could not have had such varied effect on their finances. Secondly, the cost increases, whatever they may have been, have had their influence over a period of time. I wish they should not have chosen the same date, that is, the 15th of November when the excise duty came into force, to increase the newspaper prices. This naturally arouses some doubts about their intentions.

The House will recall that this matter of increases in the newspaper prices came up for consideration on the 24th of November, 1971, in connection with the situation in Calcutta where as a result of such increases and the consequent strike of newspaper hawkers, the city has to go without newspaper for a number of days. On that day, in a statement in this House, I appealed to all newspaper-owners to restrict their price increase to the actual amount of the excise duty payable by them. I am happy that the Calcutta newspapers heeded this appeal, and by reversing their earlier decision, agreed to publish their papers at the pre-15th November prices plus the excise duty that had then become payable. The newspapers in other parts of the country did not, however, follow suit, though I had made it clear that my appeal was directed to newspapers all over the country, and that the same pattern would be followed everywhere.

The House is aware of the keenness of Government to hold the price-line, specially in the present situation, where it is more than ever necessary not to allow any runaway prices. In this effort to hold the price-line, the Government naturally look upon the newspapers for

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†Introduced with the recommendation of the President.