

a wonderful innovation introduced by the Congress Government without any basis in the Constitution.

I object to the continued erosion of the democratic process in our country. I hope the House will throw out this resolution by showing its utter contempt for the manner in which the Government have been using or abusing the constitutional machinery for meeting their own narrow party ends.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House will now take up the half-an-hour discussion. Shri Guha.

—

19.17 hrs.

#### HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION

##### EFFECT OF POOR CONDITION OF COKE OVEN BATTERIES ON PRODUCTION IN DURGAPUR STEEL PLANTS

SHRI SAMAR GUHA (Contai): Sir, the reply given by the hon. Minister to a question about the Durgapur Steel Plant has created some serious suspicion in me that, on the plea of some labour trouble which has resulted according to their version in thermal shock and the breakdown of the cokeoven batteries in Durgapur, perhaps Government is contemplating to stall or scuttle the expansion project of Durgapur steel plant. The late Shri Kumaramangalam in a speech on 12th April at Dhanbad said:

"A new atmosphere is prevailing at Durgapur which augurs well for the entire industrial complex here including the steel plant and the alloy steel plant. We have turned back on bad days and better days are ahead for Durgapur."

He also further said on 14th March that the Central Engineering Design Bureau was bringing upto date the feasibility report prepared earlier for expansion of the Durgapur's capacity

to 2.5 m tonnes. There was a controversy whether the capacity was exactly 1.6 or 1.4 m tonnes. Even if we take it as 1.4 m tonnes, the late Shri Kumaramangalam expected that the production would be raised to a higher level. He said that the feasibility report prepared by CEDB should be taken into consideration and the expansion project should not be scuttled. Even the Planning Commission did not mention a word about the labour trouble which has been attributed as the cause of the major failure of Durgapur steel plant. We also know that whenever it ruins the Government, they always make labour trouble a scapegoat for their own failure. The Pandit Committee Report, which was prepared in 1967, categorically stated that the failure of the Durgapur steel plant to reach its production target was mainly due to bad management, bad equipment, bad supervision, bad maintenance and also bad supply of equipment spare-parts from foreign countries and perhaps from indigenous production also. That was the main reason mentioned in the Report. At that time they did not mention about labour trouble. The Planning Commission also did not mention about labour trouble. It talked of technical constraints which include the poor condition of the coke oven, equipment, inadequate maintenance etc. It also said that lack of proper or adequate production as expected in Durgapur was due to the failure of power supply. It said:

"A special problem in the last one year in Durgapur and Rourkela has been that of the difficulty of power supply. It has been estimated that Rourkela lost 61,780 tonnes and Durgapur 12,527 tonnes of saleable steel production in 1972-73 because of power restriction. The problems continued even now."

Unfortunately, what is the reply given as one of the causes for failure of production at Durgapur and for the break-down of the oven battery?

[Shri Samar Guha]

It is stated that the batteries deteriorated due to poor maintenance in the initial stage. Then comes the labour management relationship, the labour problem, the villain of the piece. The reply says:

"Subsequently, due to frequent thermal shocks suffered by the batteries due to labour indiscipline..."

When labour indiscipline arose? It was not in 1967 but in the latter part of 1969 or 1970. I do not say that the labour trouble did not contribute to the failure to reach the targeted production in Durgapur. But too much has been made of it always to create an impression all over the country as if it was because of the failure of labour that Durgapur was not able to reach its target. The Pande Committee in 1967 did not mention about labour trouble. It mentioned mainly about failure of the management, failure of maintenance and failure of the equipment. Now, in addition to frequent thermal shocks, a new word has been added, namely, some design defects. After so many years they have discovered a new thing, design defects. The Pande Committee report says:

"The Durgapur Steel plant received a great setback due to the neglect of all categories of staff of the coke oven and the service departments concerned and due to the gross neglect of the top management in failing to appreciate the seriousness of the situation in time."

The Pande Committee again say in another part of the report:

"The possibility of damage of the coke oven batteries was again brought to the notice of the management during the month of October 1965. That was received on the 5th November 1965 and was again discussed by the top management. It is a matter of deep regret

that even then the seriousness of the situation was not realised and immediate action decided upon."

I would again like to quote the Pande Committee Report about the coke oven. It says:

"The coke oven production which was 101 per cent of the target capacity in 1963-64 and 100 per cent in 1964-65 fell down to 50 per cent in 1965-66 and in the first three quarters of 1966-67, it has come down to 64 per cent due to serious damage to coke oven. The damage has been caused by wrong operating practices, neglecting maintenance, ineffective inspection and this is in spite of ample warnings being received in the past."

I do not want to quote the Pande Committee's Report at length.

About the thermal shock, there is nothing new. For any steel plant, I should say, thermal shocks do happen not only due to labour trouble but also due to other mechanical failures also. I quite agree that there may be wild-cat strikes. It happened in Bhilai; it happened in Rourkela; occasionally, it happened in Tata also and in other countries of the world where they produce steel at the rated capacity. Even there, something does happen. May be due to mechanical failure or due to certain labour trouble. But what is the function of the management? The function of the management is to see that refractory bricks do not suffer much due to fluctuation of heat as a result of which the thermal shocks occur. The management has to take certain steps against all these possible failures. Whether it is due to labour strikes or due to some mechanical failures, it is their look out to take all the consequential steps to

see that thermal shock is not to the extent that refractory bricks break down and create a serious damage.

I do not want to go into details now. The warnings were given in 1967. Now, in 1973, about the break down of the coke oven, their reply is that they are taking some steps. When? They say that the first part of the battery will be repaired by August, 1973 and the other half by October, 1973, and that major repairs to battery No. 2 and battery No. 3 are also in hand. About battery No. 4, what will happen I do not know.

I want to ask the hon. Minister: Who is responsible for all this? What happened to the warning which was given in time by the Pande Committee in 1967? How many years have elapsed? From 1967 to 1973, it comes to seven years. Were they hibernating? What were they doing? Who is responsible for all this? Is it labour? Are they doing it? I want to remind the hon. Minister that even late Mr. Mohan Kumaramangalam had said in the Rajya Sabha that labour was not wholly responsible for the mismanagement and the failure of production in Durgapur steel plant.

I want to conclude by saying that there was a suspicion, a fear, an apprehension, that these question have been couched in a way that you may use them as a cover to stall or scuttle the proposed project of expansion of Durgapur steel plant to the capacity of 25 million tonnes. I want a categorical assurance from the hon Minister that, under no circumstances, this projected expansion of Durgapur steel plant should either be delayed or stalled or scuttled.

According to late Mr. Mohan Kumaramangalam, the good days are ahead of Durgapur and the climate is very favourable. But you have to look into your own machine. You have to look into the real sources of failure of management and other associated

factors. There is the Dastur & Co., a very international reputed firm; there is also the Design Engineering firm. You can take the help of anybody.

Lastly, I want a categorical answer from the Minister that, under no circumstances, the Durgapur Steel Plant Project would be allowed to be scuttled or delayed or chopped off.

श्री रामाबहार शास्त्री (पटना) : सभा-पति महोदय, यह दुर्भाग्य की बात है—श्रीर अफ़सोस की भी—कि दुर्गापुर इस्पात कारख़ाने की स्थिति इतनी दयनीय हो चुकी है। किसी भी अमफ़लता के लिए सरकार सारा दोष मजदूरों पर मढ़ देती है। जो चार बैटरियाँ 1959 में 1967 तक बिटाई गईं उन में जो ख़राबी आई है, क्या उस की एकमात्र और सब से बड़ी ज़बाबदेही मजदूरों पर है? अगर इस बात में कुछ भी तथ्य है, तो क्या सरकार ने मजदूर संगठनों या वहाँ काम करने वाले मजदूरों के प्रतिनिधियों को बुला कर कोई रास्ता निकालने का प्रयास किया है, अगर किया है, तो उस को क्या ज़बाब मिला है और क्या मदद मिली है? क्या यह सच है कि वहाँ के प्रबन्धक मजदूरों से विचार-विमर्श किये बिना मनमाने तौर से कार्य करते हैं, जिस का लाजमी नतीजा यह हुआ है? क्या ऐसा तो नहीं है कि इस कारख़ाने में सरकारी कारख़ाने की निति में विश्वास न करने वाले लोग बैठे हुए हैं और वहाँ बैठ कर इस का भीतरघात कर रहे हैं? क्या सरकार ने कभी इस बात की जांच करवाई है; यदि हाँ, तो वह किम नतीजे पर पहुँची है?

क्या ऐसा तो नहीं है कि सरकार को कोकिंग कोल पर्याप्त मात्रा में नहीं मिल रहा है और इस कारण भी कारख़ाने को सुचारू रूप से चलाने में कठिनाई हो रही है? मैंने यह सवाल इस लिए पूछा है कि मैं बाँकारो के बारे में मंत्री महोदय को एक पत्र लिख चुका हूँ कि वहाँ इस तरह की बात हो रही है, वहाँ एक बैटरी बिल्कुल चुपचाप बैठी है, गैस चाल है, लेकिन

[श्री रामावतार शास्त्री]

कुछ काम नहीं हो रहा है। मंत्री महोदय ने बजाब दिया है कि यह बात बहुत सीरियस है, मैं इसका पता लगा रहा हूँ। क्या उसी तरह की बात दुर्गापुर कारखाने में तो नहीं हो रही है ?

मैं श्री प्रोफेसर साहब से सहमत हूँ कि क्या ऐसा कोई षड्यंत्र तो नहीं चल रहा है कि सरकार इन तमाम बाहनों को बना कर सब से बड़ा मजदूरों का बहाना बना कर, इस कारखाने को बन्द कराना चाहती है ? क्या सरकार का ऐसा तो इरादा नहीं है ? अगर उस का ऐसा कोई इरादा है, तो वह हमारे देश के लिए सब से दुर्भाग्य की बात है।

SHRI KRISHNA CHANDRA HALDER (Ausgram): Mr. Chairman, Sir, first of all I want to quote from Pande Committee's report and then I will put my questions.

I am quoting from page 12, paragraph 3:

"The Durgapur management seems to have neglected many essential responsibilities which are incumbent for good performance. Mention may be made of neglect of proper maintenance."

Then, on page 25, paragraph 3, it is said:

"The coke ovens being the mother plant have, however, a vital role because not only do they supply coke to the blast furnaces which is next only to iron ore in importance but they also supply coke oven gas for the steel melting shop, for soaking kits and for so many other heating furnaces. The coke oven gas is also the primary source for the recovery of the by-products which, if properly manufactured, are a big source of revenue and high profits."

The good health of the coke-ovens is therefore of the highest importance and should be a matter of

great concern to the plant management."

In para 6 the Committee said:

"The Committee would again like to emphasise the malady in the coke ovens was a longstanding one. The negligence of the top management in position in Durgapur from 1961 onwards must also come for special mention."

It is unfair and improper to malalign the workers and employees of Durgapur. As Prof. Guha mentioned, out of 4 coke oven batteries number one was shut down since November 1968. One portion of that battery I.B. was supposed to come under operation in December 1971, but the Minister in his reply said that half of No. 1 battery is going to be commissioned by August 1973 instead of December, 1971 and nobody knows when the entire battery will come under operation. No. 4 battery was constructed in August, 1967 under 1.6 million tonne expansion phase and the present condition of the battery is the worst. It is not a fact that the entire bucks stays has bent down and the battery needs rebuilding? Sir, the normal life of a battery is 20 to 25 years. I want to know why within 6 years that is from 1967 to 1973 the life of No. 4 battery has almost been exhausted? I want to know whether the serious construction lapses were responsible for this type of wretched condition of No. 4 battery. At present three batteries are functioning. Is it not a fact that out of 234 ovens 34 or 35 ovens remain in down condition for all the time? And, in my opinion, this is absolutely a high figure.

To achieve the yearly production of 1 million tonnes of ingot steel the standard norm of pushing is 270 per day. Is it not a fact that the present rate of average pushing is 190 to 200 per day? Is it not a fact that according to the design of ovens the coking time should be 18 hours but now the coking time has increased to 24 or 25 hours?

Finally I want to know whether the present capacity as well as the performance of three batteries will achieve, not to say of 1.6 million tonnes, even 1 million tonnes. Will the Government take the cooperation of the employees to overcome the difficulties and to implement the expansion scheme?

THE MINISTER OF HEAVY INDUSTRY AND STEEL AND MINES (SHRI T. A. PAL): Sir, my hon. friend would be happy if I am prepared to own the deficiencies that have been observed in the management of these plants. But, that does not absolve the other deficiencies that have been pointed out. I am not interested in finding fault with one section or the other. But, what is patent is that looking at the working of any of our plants, there seems to be a greater thrill in buying valuable machinery and installing new plants. But, there does not seem to be any thrill in looking after it and getting the maximum production out of it. Therefore, it is strange that in this country maintenance does not get the same attention as perhaps an expansion programme or creation of a new asset gets. After all Durgapur Plant, like any other steel plant, was created for production of steel. If it does not produce steel, it means that it has failed. Nobody can say who is responsible for it. It is our primary responsibility to see why these things have happened. The country cannot afford to make this loss—not in terms of rupees, annas and pias but in terms of what it has not produced. Why? All countries of the world have gone far ahead in the manufacture of steel. For a country like ours, which is rich in iron ore, which is rich in coal, if we are not able to produce steel as we ought to have—one of the foremost producers of steel—then it is a serious concern for us to look into it and see why the past mistakes should be allowed to continue? And why they should not be rectified.

I am aware that the Pande Committee had pointed out certain deficiencies.

In fact, I can also say that the damage has been caused by wrong operating practices neglecting maintenance and ineffective inspections and in spite of ample warnings that have been received in the past. But, earlier, if you look to the very paragraph it says that the coke production was 102 per cent of the target capacity in 1963-64 and 100 per cent in 1964-65 and 10 to 95 per cent in 1965-66, and in the first three quarters of 1966-67 it has come down to 64 per cent due to serious damage to the coke ovens. So, it is not as if Durgapur began with a sorry spectacle of less production. It does show it has capacity to produce what we had targeted. But, unfortunately, certain things had happened. But, for the thermal shocks—whether my friends agree with me or not—it could have produced more. There are other countries in the world which do not experience those shocks as often as we do. Perhaps they are forewarned. I am not able to take care of it—I am not holding any justification. But, I would like to point out that the labour must also appreciate that any action on their part, if it is going to damage the very assets that sustain them, in which they should have vital interests to-day, they are not only damaging themselves but for the country for which they are expected to work. I have already stated that I do not hold any brief for any inefficiency in any plant. I would certainly like to see that those who are in management, at any level of management, if they find out deficiency and if they do not take care of those assets as they ought to and if we take firm action, I would very much like that I am supported. Nobody justifies this saying that it is inevitable. Unless the Parliament supports such a stern action on the part of anybody in this country, I do not think we shall be able to even reach the goal of solving the problems of this country.

So, I would first of all appeal to all of you that it is not a question of how and why Durgapur has not worked. Is it because of labour? I won't say

[Shri T. A. Pai]  
that labour has been responsible. But, the history shows that there were any number of wild cat strikes or bandhs. Nobody might be responsible for it. There might be politics behind it. But the fact is that the damage to these assets has been done. It is, I think, now purely academic to go back into it and say whether the deficiency was there in the machinery.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: You do not explain. I quite agree there were strikes afterwards and there was a labour trouble. But, till 1967 there was no labour trouble. Even earlier the Pande Committee pointed out so many deficiencies.

SHRI T. A. PAI: Even before, the amount of care that should have been bestowed in maintaining these plants was not there. Ultimately the combined effect of both must have aggravated it. I think the matter has been discussed on the floor of the House very often. It is not for me to go into the history with the idea of defending anybody I have already admitted that any kind of inefficiency in these plants, which comes in the way of production is not going to lead us very far. I also feel that it is not only the labour trouble which is responsible. In fact, in the months of February, March and April, we had gone into the question of the production in Durgapur, and we find that perhaps if the production had been kept up, we would have been able to reach at least 1.1 million tonnes. Again, it is academic to say whether the capacity of Durgapur is 1.8 million tonnes or 1.1 million tonnes. It is purely academic, because very often in the public sector, there is a tendency to readjust the capacity to what they achieve, while in the private sector we are accusing people of exceeding what they have been licensed for. I would very much like to make an honest effort to see,— which is in the best interests of the utilisation of the capacity, rather than get into this academic discussion that

Durgapur must produce the maximum. For, that is one of our assets.

I may also bring to the notice of hon. Members that ultimately it is not the new investments that create employment but the fuller utilisation of the existing capacity also becomes very relevant. It is no use creating a capacity, if the management does not look after these assets as it ought to and the labourers think that these are not assets which belong to them and which should not be damaged by any kind of attitude. I hope that that chapter belongs to the past.

Now, the management and labour relations have considerably improved. Most of these problems ought to be resolved. Now, the immediate concern is to improve or repair the coke ovens and see that they are utilised fully. I appeal to all the Members...

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: I started the discussion and also concluded it with the words 'expansion project'. Will the expansion project for 25 million tonnes be taken up?

SHRI T. A. PAI: I know that the hon Member is anxious to make me say that it will be done. But let me go by stages. After the completion of these ovens, I would require his help to see that it is not beset by any kind of trouble either by the Durgapur labour or anybody else, because any delay here is going to affect the production of the plant. I personally believe that more employment and more prosperity is created with the fuller utilisation of the plant than by mere expansion.

Who would not care to expand a plant which can produce more? We are not interested in keeping Durgapur as it is. It would be a red-letter day in the history of steel in this country when Durgapur finds its feet back again and is able to produce what is expected, and becomes the pride of all.

The question has been asked of me 'what about the expansion project or the expansion programme of Durgapur?' My hon. friend Shri Ramavatar Shastri was absolutely correct in drawing my attention to another factor. Today, our washeries are not working as well as they ought to. Coking coal is not made available as it ought to be. The difficulties of railway transport engaged in transporting of commodities sometimes create bottleneck for the efficient functioning of these plants. What I am really worried about is that we should solve the basic problems by improving the working of the washeries, and by producing more non-coking coal and remove the obstacles that stand in the way so that these supplies are continuously fed to the factory and the production is ensured.

Then, there is the problem of power. If there is power failure, just as when the labour goes on strike, there can be thermal shocks. I am sure that frequent breakdown of power and discontinuous power supply also can create much more damage to the plant, and this is a matter for serious concern. For, lately there has not been adequate power supply from the DVC, which has affected even the washeries, which has affected coal-mining. I do believe that more than any further expansion of any plant immediately, all the resources that are available and that we have should go to strengthen our transport system to remedy the bottle-necks and to build up a power system so that this bottleneck is removed.

So far as expansion of steel is concerned, we have not yet drawn up our programme as to what is possible to be done because a heavy investment is called for. I can only assure you that no kind of step-motherly treatment will be meted out to Durgapur on the plea that because there were labour troubles, Durgapur is not able to get its share.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: The late Shri Kumaramangalam assured us about the 2.5 million tonnes expansion scheme.

SHRI T. A. PAI: I may tell him that so far as my former colleague's assurance is concerned, it was that it would be expanded. I am afraid he did not say when. If he is satisfied with that assurance, I am prepared to give it. But I believe in giving a definite time-table as to what has got to be done. I stand by the assurance of my former colleague, but I am unable to say when this will be taken up because my first concern is to set the Durgapur plant perfectly all right so that labour might get the best productivity out of it and they can improve their lot. I assure the House that we shall be as keen in expanding Durgapur as any other steel plant.

19.52 hrs.

*The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Thursday, August 9, 1973/Sravana 18, 1895 (Saka).*