

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: All these amendments are before the House for discussion.

REGROUPING OF RAILWAYS

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Half-an-hour has been allotted for the discussion regarding regrouping of railways raised by Shri Mukerjee. How long does the hon. Member propose to take?

Shri H. N. Mukerjee (Calcutta—North-East): Ten to twelve minutes.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The hon. Minister.

The Minister of Railways and Transport (Shri L. B. Shastri): Ten minutes.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The rule is that other hon. Members are not entitled to make speeches. They can only put questions. I have received intimation of their names: more than 6 Members. If I allow one minute or 1½ minutes, I think I will be able to finish. It is only for the purpose of eliciting answers.

Shri H. N. Mukerjee: I wanted to have this discussion in order to secure some clarification over the answer given by the Minister to Starred question No. 91 on the 26th July. On that day, in answer to a question, the Minister was pleased to say that no fresh regrouping of Indian Railways was contemplated with the exception of the division of the Eastern Railway into two zones about which a public announcement had already been made, and he attached to the answer a copy of the public announcement. I wish to raise some questions which arise out of this answer of the Minister and the public announcement enclosed therewith.

During the discussion of the Railway Budget last February, there were certain demands for an expert examination of the working of railway regrouping and the Minister chose to say that it was a settled fact. Now, the country has accepted not only the

fact, but also the desirability of the zonal system of railways. But, what concerns us is the desirability from time to time of having a serious expert examination of the working of that regrouping. The Minister himself said that he was having the matter under continuous and constant review. My complaint is that it is very necessary today—I wish the Minister to apply his mind carefully to this point—to have a long range perspective instead of leaving it to the Efficiency Bureau or any other comparable organisation, which works necessarily within bureaucratic and other limitations. I say this because in the public announcement attached to his answer to the question in Parliament, the Minister said:

“The impact of the Second Five Year Plan on other zonal railways will be felt to a varying degree. Experience of working indicates the necessity for certain adjustments within the existing organisational set-up of some of these zones and necessary adjustments will be carried out as and when required.”

This, I feel, is proceeding in a piecemeal fashion, and piecemeal philosophy in working the railways is, I fear I must say, a kind of perversion of planning. That is to say, it is necessary for us today to have a really comprehensive approach to the whole matter, and that is why I suggest that while I cannot, because I have not got the requisite knowledge, pronounce upon the rights and wrongs of the division of the Eastern Railway into the Eastern and South Eastern Railway—I suppose it is all for the better—the whole matter deserves and requires systematic and basic study, not the kind of perfunctory review which the Minister says his advisers are making from time to time. I say this because the Railway Corruption Enquiry Committee has also, according to reports put out, suggested that there should be an examination of the working of re-grouping. Therefore,

this point cannot be brushed aside. The division of the Eastern Railway suggests—after all, the importance of the Eastern Railway, its work-load and all that sort of thing was not news to the hon. Minister, he knew all about it in 1952—that everything is perhaps not very lovely in the railways' re-grouped garden. I therefore press the point that the Minister's reply to the question in Parliament raises this point regarding the examination of re-grouping systematically, seriously, earnestly and not by such bureaucratic mechanisms as reference to the Efficiency Bureau or any other comparable organisation.

In the statement I also find certain observations and certain decisions which are rather grave. Certain offices have been transferred—offices of the North-Eastern Railway—from Calcutta to Gorakhpur. When I say this I beseech the Minister to disabuse his mind of any notion that I am speaking with a provincial bias.

Shri Raghunath Singh (Banaras Distt.—Central): No, no. Not at all.

Shri H. N. Mukerjee: As a matter of fact, I have seen in Calcutta demonstrations against the Minister's decision which are by no means exclusively Bengali demonstrations, and Greater Calcutta is a city which perhaps has a larger Hindi-speaking population than any other place in India. I find in this statement of the Minister that it is said that staff who volunteer to go to Gorakhpur will be given some preference in the allotment of quarters there. There is no categorical assurance that those members of the staff who choose to go will definitely get accommodation there. I say this because Gorakhpur is a difficult place, and those of the staff who want to go, who volunteer to go, must certainly feel that they are going to get allotment of quarters there.

I wish also to point that in the minds of the employees there is very serious perturbation because of the repudiation by the Minister in his public announcement of assurances given by the late **Shri Gopalaswamy**

Ayyangar regarding non-transfer to Gorakhpur or Delhi from Calcutta of staff who were not agreeable on their own to such transfer. This assurance was given in 1952, and the Minister says:

“The contingency then contemplated has long been over.”

I feel this is a cryptic and somewhat mystifying statement. After all, assurance is the currency of communication between Government and its employees, and if that currency collapses, then certainly the position becomes very dreadful. The Minister himself had said in this House in 1952:

“To allay the misgivings in the minds of the staff, I would repeat the assurance given by the Prime Minister and my predecessor that by reason of the formation of these three zones there will be no retrenchment and no non-gazetted staff will be transferred without their consent. It is needless for me to state that it will continue to be the constant endeavour of the Railway Ministry to preserve the rights and privileges, and the legitimate prospects of all class III and class IV staff.”

The legitimate prospects were also mentioned by the hon. Minister. And today the employees feel that not only their jobs but certainly their legitimate prospects are in a very great jeopardy. I have also found that in answer to Starred Question No. 413, the hon. Minister has said:

“For the present, only three offices and 387 staff will be affected by the transfer, but all the 387 will be absorbed on the Eastern and South-Eastern Railways.”

I want to be categorically informed as to what exactly is going to happen, because from the side of the employees, representations are coming to us, which suggest that nearly one thousand people or more are now going to be surplus, and they feel that it is not only that they are going to be surplus but also that the problem of seniority would be a persistent

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headache of such a sort that many people who are entitled to confirmation will not be confirmed, and that the prospects of others will be jeopardised. That is a point which is worrying everybody in the North-Eastern Railway today.

When the regrouping was done, many people became surplus, because the Allahabad, Moradabad and Lucknow divisions were taken away from the Eastern Railway and given to the Northern Railway. So, quite a large number of people appeared to be surplus at that time. From the figures supplied to us by the unions, we find that about 1,000 to 1,500 people are going to be affected. And in any case, there is going to be this question of seniority.

I am told that the Ministry is trying to find out some kind of formula by means of which seniority could be adjusted, and the prospects of these people would not be endangered. But I want to find out very definitely and categorically from the hon. Minister as to what he is going to do about it.

I do not wish to take more of the time of the House, but my main points are, that there must be a real serious enquiry regarding the working of regrouping, specially in view of the Corruption Enquiry Committee's recommendation, and pending that enquiry, let the *status quo* remain. The heavens would not fall if today the transfer contemplated in the Minister's order is postponed for some time. In the meantime also, temporary staff who have been suffering for so long—because many of these people belonged to the Bengal and Assam Railway; they had to go to Pandu for some time, and then they came to Calcutta, and because Calcutta is a big place, they could somehow adjust themselves to Calcutta life—are now being told to go off from Calcutta to Gorakhpur. So, the domestic economy of these people is going to be upset in a very serious manner. And that is why I say, let the *status quo* be maintained, pending a serious examination of the working

of regrouping; and in the meantime, the temporary staff should be confirmed. No transfer of headquarters staff from Calcutta to these places should be done without the consent of the people involved, and full accommodation should be assured for those people who are willing to go to Gorakhpur.

I would only conclude on this note that the railwaymen are a magnificent corps of workers—they may have their faults—and the railways are so important to the country, that it is very necessary to have a contented personnel on the railways. I have seen the demonstrations in Calcutta. Even as we are having this discussion today, I have seen in the papers that they are going to have a demonstration in Calcutta this afternoon. This suggests that something is wrong somewhere, and as far as we have been able to find out the facts, the Minister's statements are somewhat cryptic and somewhat mystifying. We want a categorical explanation of the entire position, and an assurance to the employees that they are not going to suffer.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty (Basirhat): I want to put the question, which my hon. friend Shri H. N. Mukerjee has raised, namely how Government propose to deal with this question of seniority and permanency. This is a point which is troubling both those who are in Gorakhpur as well as those who are in Calcutta. I would also like to know from Government, how many people will be affected by it, in what way they propose to solve this problem, and by what time they will be able to have a combined seniority list prepared. This is all what I want to ask.

Shri B. K. Das (Contai): In addition to the question of seniority that has been raised, I want to know whether the emoluments of the staff that will be transferred to Gorakhpur will also be affected.

I also want to know if any kind of option will be allowed to be exercised

in the matter of transfer of these officers. Again, what is the possibility as regards the number of staff that can be absorbed in the new zones that have been formed?

Shri Sadhan Gupta (Calcutta South-East): On the same question of seniority, I understand that the difficulty regarding determination of seniority arises because seniority was determined in different railways on different bases. In some railways, it was determined from the date of entry into service; in some railways, it was determined from the date of confirmation. So people in different railways on the same date of entry had different lengths of seniority according to that rule. When these two categories are brought in the same railway, there will be anomalies regarding seniority; people serving longer would be displaced by people who have served a less number of years on account of the date of entry on account of it being counted on the basis of date of entry in one case and date of confirmation in the other. Therefore, I want to know whether Government have any scheme for preventing that kind of anomaly and thereby allaying discontent. I also understand that this would affect not only the staff in Calcutta offices which are left there, but also the staff who are at present in Gorakhpur because the staff who will go to Gorakhpur from Calcutta will also affect the seniority of the Gorakhpur staff and, therefore, this is likely to create discontent in Gorakhpur. Is that also a fact?

Shri K. K. Basu (Diamond Harbour): I would like to know the exact position, as to how many of the employees are now declared to be surplus after the branch has already been shifted to Gorakhpur.

Shri L. B. Shastri: This problem of regrouping has become a bone of contention for sometime past and I have already assured the House that the question would receive our dispassionate consideration. The Eastern Rail-

way, after regrouping had especially become one of the heaviest charges and with all the new development works that are to take place in that zone, the work-load on the system would naturally increase all the more. I had referred to my budget speech to the work-load on the Eastern Railway, and I had said that the matter was receiving our earnest consideration. We gave serious thought to that matter and came to the conclusion that the Eastern Railway should be divided into two, and we have done that. I do not think Shri H. N. Mukerjee now really feels concerned over the present set-up of regrouping of the railways. He is naturally more worried about the staff which is to be transferred from Calcutta to Gorakhpur, and I can very well realise his anxiety over that matter. As regards regrouping, I would like to make it clear that I somehow do not agree with Shri H. N. Mukerjee that an expert examination of that subject is called for at the present moment. There is no point in referring that question to a committee or commission in a general way. What we have decided is that after sometime when the railways are expanding or have expanded much and the work-load has considerably increased, we might split the area of that one railway or expanded much and the work-load has two or even more. I personally do not consider it advisable to keep this question as a live issue and thus create unnecessary misapprehensions in the minds of the staff. I do not thereby mean to suggest that this matter should not be considered further. But it should be done only at the appropriate time.

Shri A. M. Thomas (Ernakulam): May I enquire whether in the light of the Railway Corruption Enquiry Committee Report Government intends to re-examine the whole matter?

Shri L. B. Shastri: Before the Railway Corruption Enquiry Committee had submitted its report I had made that announcement that we did not consider the setting up of any com-

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mittee or commission necessary for going into the question of the regrouping of railways. I had said that long before and even a few days before the Committee submitted its report I had made that announcement in Calcutta. We are considering the various recommendations of the Anti-Corruption Committee and we have taken certain decisions also on their recommendations. This matter is still under our consideration in so far as the recommendation of the Committee is concerned. I am confining it to that only. We will certainly consider this recommendation of theirs along with their other recommendations.

But, up till now from what we have thought over this subject, we do feel that it is not at all necessary to set up any committee or commission for this purpose. My reason, as I said, for doing so is that I somehow do not agree with Mr. Mukerjee. He said that the Railway Board are bureaucratic, that their mechanisms are bureaucratic and they will not be able to give fresh thought to this matter and they may take a rigid view about it. He should not say so because it was the Railway Board which came to the decision that the Eastern Railway should be divided into two because they said that the technical need was there and it was necessary that the Eastern Railway should be divided into two railways. I still think that the Railway Board will always keep an open mind on this subject. I do not mean to say that this division of the Eastern Railway is the last word on the problem of regrouping of railways. If the Railway Board will keep a closed mind on the subject, they will do it at their own cost and at the cost of the general welfare of the country. I would, therefore, appeal to Mr. Mukerjee and the House that this matter should be left in our hands and they should feel assured that if we find that there is need for further consideration or for further creation of new railways or new zones we will not simply like to sit over it because

certain decisions have already been taken.

On what the hon. Member has said about the transfer of certain offices from Calcutta to Gorakhpur, I would not like to take much time of the House. I shall merely narrate the facts in brief and, perhaps, they will answer all the points which have been raised by other Members of this House about the question of seniority, emoluments etc.

At the time of regrouping in 1952, it was decided to locate, as a matter of expediency, some of the North-Eastern Railway offices at Calcutta. Altogether 10 North-Eastern Railway offices employing 1,887 class III staff are at present located in Calcutta. Of these, 328 are ex-B.N. Railway staff although they have been engaged on North-Eastern Railway foreign accounts work, and these men will be absorbed on South-Eastern Railway when the work is taken over by the North-Eastern Railway staff. This means that there are 1,559 North-Eastern Railway staff at Calcutta at present. Five out of the ten offices employing 658 men will continue to function at Calcutta as at present. The work of the remaining five offices will be transferred from Calcutta, but in lieu, additional accounts offices employing 634 men will be opened in Calcutta. The remaining men,—the number perhaps will come to 267—will for the present continue to deal with pending claims cases of the North-Eastern Railway at Calcutta and will be released gradually and utilised for the clearance of arrears of work. It is expected that they will be absorbed in course of time in the North-Eastern Railway offices in Calcutta. It will thus be seen that less than 300 men—as I said it is 267—are likely to be affected if none of them volunteers to go out of Calcutta, and in any case all these men will be absorbed in the North-Eastern Railway offices at Calcutta itself. The arrangement which has now been made will not compel the staff to go to Gorakhpur if

they do not want it. Secondly, they will all be absorbed in the North-Eastern Railway; they will not have to be absorbed either in the Eastern Railway or in the South-Eastern Railway. So, the question of seniority, etc., will not be a serious matter and will not create any special difficulty. In a few cases there might be some difficulty, but on the whole there will be no difficulty as they will be absorbed in the same Railway in which they are working. As I have said before, I can say it even now that those who do not want to go to Gorakhpur will not be compelled to go there and it is entirely open to them to decide whether they would like to go to Gorakhpur or whether they would like to remain in Calcutta. If they remain in Calcutta, they will be absorbed; except for about 300 people who already belong to the ex-B.N. Railway and who will certainly be absorbed on the South-Eastern Railway, all the others will be on the North-Eastern Railway. So far as their pay is concerned, it is certainly protected whether they remain in Calcutta or go to Gorakhpur. The protection is there. I do not think that this should not be considered a fairly satisfactory arrangement.

As regards transfers from one Railway to another, in the normal circumstances, to my mind, that is entirely a different matter and I do not want to maintain in this respect any distinction between the Eastern, Southern or other Railways. The rules and regulations governing such transfers should remain the same for all the Railways. I have not gone back on what I had said or what Shri Gopalaswamy Ayyangar or the Prime Minister had said. On the question of general transfers from one Railway to another, although generally the practice is that class III employees are not transferred from one Railway to another, but in special cases such transfers do take place, and in that matter I do not propose to make any distinction between one Railway and another. If a Northern Railway goods clerk can be transferred to the Eastern Railway,

certainly a goods clerk of the Eastern Railway can be transferred to the Northern Railway. In that matter I have made it clear that no distinction will be made between one railway and another railway. On that point I am clear and I stick to it and I think that that is a right decision and it should be supported by Shri Mukerjee also. But as regards the shifting of the offices in connection with the division of the two railways, I have done my utmost and I am really sorry that the staff should go about making demonstrations in the streets of Calcutta and not doing their work whereas all the time since we announced this decision I have been at it any trying to accommodate the staff as much as possible and on their side instead of waiting for our decision they have been roaming about in the streets making demonstrations which were hardly necessary. I may tell Shri Mukerjee that if he could go and see the Claims Office of the North-Eastern Railway, he will find it scandalous. I do not feel happy to say so but the position there is simply scandalous in the sense that no work is done—not during the last two or three months, he may see the record for the last two years—for the past so many months. He will find that the position, as I said, is scandalous; the work is wholly unsatisfactory. No work has been done and all the time agitation has been going on. I can show him in confidence the progress of the work done in the Claims Office. I saw the report only a fortnight back. I had to hang down my head in shame. I would therefore, appeal to him and all the public leaders that they should request the staff not to ignore their work. They should in fact concentrate on their work. I went to Calcutta, I discussed every matter there and gave three or four hours and was prepared to give more time. I felt that most of the workers were completely satisfied with the decision I had taken and when they raised the question of seniority, we went into the matter further. We have considered it and the decision which I have just now announced has already gone to the

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railways; we have sent our instructions. This further solves the problem or difficulty that was felt by the workers in regard to their seniority in case they were absorbed in any other railway. All these have been practically solved.

Shri Mukerjee wants to create more zones. Does he realise what will happen to the staff if new railways are created? The staff problem will be immense. He wants us to take a step in the midst of the huge work that we are going to take up. Our Second Five Year Plan is going to be a stupendous affair. I do not want, as I said, to create confusion and misapprehension in the minds of the staff that new railways are going to be created soon.

They will all be waiting for that time and hardly be able to attend to their work. Therefore, it is not at all proper at the present moment to raise this question. As I said, I have an open mind and the Railway Board has an open mind. In case we find that the work-load in one railway has increased and it is necessary to divide the railway or to reduce the work-load on one railway, we will certainly do so. But I shall appeal to all railway workers that they should fully co-operate with us in the execution of our policies which I have just now explained.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Thursday, the 1st September 1955.