

and other materials have been gathered. The people there have also contributed but they are not in a position to understand things properly. So, he says that unless he is present there, there will not be any progress. At the same time, if the work is not taken up just now, the cement will be spoiled. He has also stated that he is prepared to forego his salary for his absence. In that connection, this Committee cannot say anything. In the circumstances, the Committee thought that leave should be granted to him. He had now been informed that though it may be community project work, it is not a sufficiently valid reason for the purpose of granting leave. For the time being, the leave was granted. This fact has been brought to his notice by the Committee and a letter is being written to that effect.

Shri Punnoose (Alleppey): The House should not accept that explanation....

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. I do not want to spend time over this matter. If the hon. Members want to look into the previous history of this gentleman before granting leave, I will allow this particular name to stand over till day after tomorrow. They may read the report and come to conclusions. They should also bear in mind that after a long period of absence, one hon. Member was rusticated here and there have been all sorts of comments in the Press. We are at the fag end of the Session. That may also be taken into consideration. He has to come all the way from that place and it is also to be seen whether another person will be available to represent that area. These are all factors to be taken into consideration. Anyhow, I have no desire to hustle this matter. Let the hon. Members think over if a colleague of theirs ought to be sent out or kept inside. I will omit that name and put the other names, including that of Basu, before the House. The case of Rt. Rev. John Richardson will stand over till day-after-tomorrow. I take it that the House agrees.

Shri Mathew (Kottayam): If an hon. Member is absent only for 39 days at a stretch, is it necessary for him to get leave at all? He was absent only for 39 days.

Mr. Speaker: We are not going into that question. The hon. Member will kindly look into the Constitution and the rules. We do not know how long he was absent and all that. The hon. Member does not have the facts. What is the meaning of raising hypothetical questions like this? It may be that he was absent during the last days of the previous session and 39 days of this Session. A few days of the next session and then he will be absolutely out of court. I take it that the House agrees with the recommendations of the Committee about the others.

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: The Members will be informed accordingly—those who have been granted leave (*Interruption*). Why should the hon. Member be childish? I am afraid childlike. Now, we go to the next business.

BROADCASTING FACILITIES FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

The Minister of Information and Broadcasting (Dr. Keskar): Sir, the question of giving broadcasting facilities to the various political parties for the general elections has been engaging the attention of the Government....

Shri K. K. Basu (Diamond Harbour): A little louder.

Dr. Keskar: If the hon. Members do not speak, it will be quite audible.

During the last general elections the Government found on careful consideration, that it would not have been possible to provide such facilities without rousing criticism of unfairness and partiality from one group or the other.

[Dr. Keskar]

However, after the elections Government have given careful thought to the matter. Practices prevailing in other democratic countries have also been studied and compared. It is well to remember that examples of other countries that can be cited in this behalf are not uniform and are based on conditions which differ radically in many important respects from country to country. The practical aspect of the question has also great importance. The area of the country, the form of Government—federal or unitary—and the number of parties involved, all are factors which have been kept in mind by various countries in taking a decision. In USA where broadcasting is run by private enterprise, though certain principles of equal opportunity have been laid down by the Federal Communications Commission, in practice it is a rare occurrence because time has to be purchased and a great deal of bickering and dissatisfaction always exists. In Great Britain only since the war opportunities have been provided for a few election broadcasts, the allotment of time being subject to the strength of the parties and other practical considerations. In countries like Switzerland no time is permitted for election purposes on the radio, while in France it is given, though the time allotted is extremely short—five minutes or less.

It is clear from a study of foreign practices that each country has taken the conditions prevailing there and also the number of parties and other factors into consideration. The analogy of other countries, therefore, is of not much validity in coming to any conclusion as far as India is concerned. Taking into consideration the conditions prevailing in our country, Government feel that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make satisfactory arrangements for giving such facilities to all political parties. Besides the points mentioned above, another important factor has to be considered. In other countries, for national broadcasting only one language is used and that too only in national elections. The exception is

Switzerland where there are three languages and it is one of the important reason that Switzerland does not permit the use of the radio for election purposes. In India we are confronted with the task of providing facilities in 12 languages besides English and they would be asked to give equal facilities from stations of All India Radio which are 26 in number. Moreover, in working out any practical formula, it has to be remembered that the number of parties which will have to be provided with these facilities comes to nearly 27.

The apportionment of time between the various political parties and at different stations of the A.I.R. would be a task of extreme difficulty and is bound to lead to criticism and imputations of partiality. The determination of the principle for purposes of allocation of time will also lead to much controversy. Language stations and regional centres of A.I.R. might have to cater to a large number of parties and provide them with time for broadcast in at least two to three languages and sometimes more.

Apportionment of time is made in different countries in different manner, some doing it one the number of votes polled, others on the number of candidates put up by parties. We feel that any such apportionment would result in recriminations and criticism of Government. On the other hand, if all parties have to be provided with equal time, the normal activities of the A.I.R. stations will have to be drastically curtailed during the election time. The proposal to provide broadcasting time in a fair and reasonable manner therefore seems almost insoluble in practice. In view of these practical considerations, Government have come to the conclusion that it would not be possible to allow political parties generally to utilise the facilities of the radio for election purposes.

However, Government feel that an experiment permitting such utilisation on a restricted scale might be tried. In order to see whether such

facilities can be used for specific election purposes without taking a major part of the time of the radio and also without leading to a charge of discrimination or partiality, it has been decided that the four all-India parties recognised by the Election Commission might be allowed the facility of supplying a summary of their election manifestoes, prepared by themselves, which will be broadcast by A.I.R., subject to usual rules. Such summaries might not exceed ten minutes and will be broadcast in English and in all the regional languages. Efforts will be made to see that the statements of the parties would be broadcast on the same day, if possible, in English and Hindi from Delhi and in the respective regional languages from other Stations of A.I.R. Arrangements for such broadcast will be made by the All India Radio in consultation with the authorities of the parties concerned.

Government will review the position in the light of the experience gained during the course of these elections to see what future steps might be taken afterwards.

Shri Kamath (Hoshangabad): Last Monday or, I think, it was 10 days ago, the hon. Minister promised to make a statement and I requested you that the statement might be in such a form that we might be able to get it clarified by questions or otherwise.

Now, this statement raises many complicated points, whether the Congress Party have only that right of broadcasting their manifesto or whether besides speeches of Congress leaders, big or small will be broadcast by the A.I.R. From that point of view at least, I would very much earnestly request you to allow a half-an-hour discussion on this matter, because this is the eve of election and after 2 or 3 days, we will disperse....

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. Hon. Members will kindly read the statement. The hon. Minister said that the manifestoes would be broadcast in the Radio, and that there would be no speeches. The statement read out by the Minister was in English. I did not hear it in Greek and Shri Kamath did not hear it in Roman. What I understood from the statement is this: This is the first experiment. Hon. Members and the Government came to the conclusion, having regard to our special peculiar and re-creation and then there would be difficulty about allotting the time according to the strength of any particular party. If you take the future strength of the parties, it may be bad this time or it may be good this time. Taking this as an experiment, they say that they would allow not more than 10 minutes whatever may be the strength of the party. Whatever may be the manifesto of parties, they will be curtailed to a period of 10 minutes and they will be broadcast from Delhi in English and Hindi and in various other languages in the other States, in their local language and Hindi and simultaneously with the consent of all the four parties they will all be relayed on the same day. This is how I understood it. What further clarification is necessary....

Shri Kamath: Congress Party also?

Mr. Speaker: Is not the Congress Party a political party? There are 4 main political parties which are recognised by the Commission.

Some Hon. Members rose.—

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. I am not going to allow questions on a statement of this kind.