

(Part II—Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

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LOK SABHA

Friday, 17th December, 1954

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the Clock

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(See Part I)

12 NOON

MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT

HUNGER STRIKE OF POLICEMEN IN WEST BENGAL AND CALLING IN OF MILITARY

Mr. Speaker: We will now take up further consideration of the question of the admissibility of the adjournment motion, notice of which was given by Shri A. K. Gopalan, and others. The hon. the Home Minister promised to make a statement.

The Minister of Home Affairs and States (Dr. Katju): Following the removal by the Company Mess Committee from the post of Mess Secretaryship over alleged loss of mess money, one constable of the Calcutta Armed Police was refused mess food on credit by the Committee. Following this, the constable wanted to go out for food during duty hours and was refused permission. The constable then pleaded sickness and was sent to hospital, where he resorted to hunger strike and refused to eat even after requests by two Deputy Commissioners of Police. The constable stated that he had grievances but refused to disclose their nature. On the 10th December, 1954, the other men of the Company to which the constable belonged, went on sympathy

hunger-strike, but were carrying out normal duties. By the evening of 10th December, the hunger-strike spread to all the three Armed Police Battalions of the Calcutta Police affecting 3,000 men. Later 2,000 unarmed Police also joined the hunger-strike. The hunger strike was limited to constables only. One contingent of hunger-striking policemen on guard duty at Alipore Mint refused to be relieved by unaffected substitutes in the evening. To control the situation, the Government of West Bengal considered it essential to immediately disarm the disobedient guards of the Mint and take over control of all police armouries. For this purpose, a formal request was made on the night of 10th December to the officiating Commander, 20th Division, Fort William, Calcutta, for military aid. At 7 a.m. on 11th December 1954, army units took over guard duty at the Alipore Mint and all the Police armouries in Calcutta after disarming Police guards without any incident.

Later the same day, the Commissioner of Police and the Inspector General of Police spoke to the constables on hunger-strike. On an assurance from the State Government that their decision on their pay and other emoluments would be announced by the 30th of April 1955 and that the arrested persons would be released, the hunger-strike was completely called off on the evening of the same day. The military was withdrawn from the Alipore Mint and the armouries. The withdrawal was completed by 9.40 p.m.

Subsequently the constables of the armed branch of the Howrah Police force resorted to hunger-strike from

[Dr. Katju]

the 12th December 1954 and demanded immediate announcement of the increase in pay and emoluments that would be granted to them. In spite of the assurances given by the Inspector General of Police and the issue of a Press Note by the Government to say that the Government decision regarding pay and emoluments would cover the West Bengal Police as well, the men refused to give up the hunger-strike. By 8 P.M. on the 13th evening, some 800 men joined the hunger-strike. At this stage, a formal request was made by the West Bengal Government on the night of the 13th December for military aid. At 7 A.M. on the 14th December, the military completed disarming of the District Armed Police and took over charge of the police armoury at the Howrah District Police Lines and at the Sibpore Engineering College. The static guard at the Howrah Treasury run by the Imperial Bank was also replaced by the military.

On the evening of the same day, viz. the 14th instant, by 8 P.M., the military guards were taken off and guard duties were taken back by units of the armed police.

Meanwhile, reports of a number of constables on hunger-strike in the District Police Lines were received from the districts of Hooghly, 24-Parganas, Murshidabad, Bankura and from two Sub-divisions of the Midnapore district, viz. Jbargram and Tamluk. Latest reports show improvement in the Hooghly, Bankura and Midnapore districts. In Bankura all constables that refused their mid-day meal on the 14th had partaken of their night meal the same day. In Hooghly the number of men on hunger-strike had come down from 1,000 to about 400. In the Jbargram Sub-division and in the Hijli police station of the Midnapore district, the hunger-strike has been called off. On the other hand, men of the Sealdah railway police and 96 members of the armed police battalion of the Police Training College, Barrackpore, are reported to have started fasting

from the 15th instant. The men have all reported for work and the situation has been peaceful. The armouries and the treasuries at Howrah, Hooghly, 24-Parganas and Murshidabad are all being guarded now by the units of the armed police.

My latest information received about an hour ago is that last night the West Bengal Government requested military assistance for the arrest of about 400 strikers. The arrests were effected in the early hours of this morning. To assist the civil police in carrying out this task, troops were called out from 1 A.M. to 5.30 A.M. to cordon off the affected area. The arrests were made without any incident. The situation at present is reported to be peaceful.

In addition to these, about 100 arrests were made at other places in Howrah by the West Bengal police without any assistance. There were no incidents anywhere.

As regards other places, the hunger-strikers had called off the strike and started taking food at Barrackpore and at Sealdah.

Shri A. K. Gopalan (Cannanore): May I make a submission?

Mr. Speaker: There is no military force in operation at present?

Dr. Katju: No, no. They came only for the purpose of making arrests.

Shri A. K. Gopalan: My submission is that as the military had been called first and, according to the statement of the Minister, yesterday also the military had been functioning although the function of the military is not as before, namely, to take charge of the police duties, on that point, as far as the urgency of the situation is concerned, the question is whether it is a matter of urgent public importance. This is not the first time that there has been such kind of unrest among the armed police. One year ago in Madras also there was some such thing....

Mr. Speaker: I am concerned with admissibility of the motion at present.

Shri A. K. Gopalan: So what I say is that this is a matter of urgent public importance because unrest among the police, among the armed police, in one place will certainly affect the armed police all over the country. You may just consider it.

Mr. Speaker: The real position is that the police, armed or otherwise, have been under the jurisdiction of the West Bengal Government, and whatever grievances the police may have, it is the duty of the West Bengal Government to attend to those grievances. If I mistake not the military authorities have instructions to go to aid the civil authorities only for the purposes of maintaining peace. But, so far as the question of police administration is concerned the military authorities of the Central Government have nothing to do in the matter. Therefore, the subject raised is really a subject of the State to deal with and can better be raised in the West Bengal Assembly and not at this place.

The only question which induced me to call for a statement was the mention of the military being called for. I for one do not see how the military aid could be refused and a worse situation could be allowed to grow when a request is made by the Government of Bengal. I do not think it can be expected that the military authorities when approached by the Government of West Bengal could sit in judgment as to whether the request was proper or improper. They are only to obey. There is nothing now, especially because the military is withdrawn, to go into discussion.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty (Basir-hal) rose—

Mr. Speaker: I have heard one Member and no further submissions on that point are necessary.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: Sir, just a clarification from the Minister. It appears that the Eastern Frontier Rifles have taken over from the troops. I believe the Minister says: "No; that is not a fact." I just want on a point of clarification of the statement, whether it is a fact that the Eastern Frontier Rifles have taken over from the troops. The Eastern Frontier Rifles do not form part of our military, or do they?

Dr. Katju: I have no such information.

Mr. Speaker: Therefore, I do not think I need give consent to this motion.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

AMENDMENTS TO MINERAL CONCESSION RULES

The Minister in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Scientific Research (Shri K. D. Malaviya): I beg to lay on the Table, under section 10 of the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948, a copy of each of the following Notifications making certain further amendments in the Mineral Concession Rules, 1949:

- (1) Notification No. MII-152(48)/54, dated the 23rd September, 1954.
- (2) Notification No. MII-152(239)/53, dated the 13th October, 1954.
- (3) Notification No. MII-152(45)/54, dated the 5th November, 1954.
- (4) Notification No. MII-152(13)/54, dated the 24th November, 1954.

[Placed in Library, See No. S.498/54.]