

[Raja Mahendra Pratap] spoken for the resolution have no right to say 'No' now.

**Shri Amjad Ali** (Dhubri): I want to vote for 'Ayes'.

**Raja Mahendra Pratap:** My vote is for 'Ayes'. My vote has not been recorded, because the machine has not worked.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member wants to vote for 'Ayes'?

**Raja Mahendra Pratap:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member objected to other Members correct- ing. Now, why does he correct?

**Shri Braj Raj Singh:** He only said that Shri Ram Krishan Gupta had perhaps voted for 'Ayes', but now after thinking over the matter, he is saying 'Noes'.

**Mr. Speaker:** We are not here on technicalities. We do want to have the vote of the House.

The result of the voting is as follows:

\*Ayes: 24; Noes; 80.

*The motion was negatived.*

16.44 hrs.

RESOLUTION RE: DISSEMINATION OF NEWS AND VIEWS BY NEWSPAPERS

**Shri Indrajit Gupta** (Calcutta—South West): I beg to move:

"This House calls upon the Government to appoint a Committee consisting of 45 Members of Parliament, 30 from Lok Sabha and 15 from Rajya Sabha, to go into the question of dissemination

of news and views by newspapers in the country with a view to making proposals for ensuring truthfulness, objectivity and good moral standards in the field of journalism."

I think, at the outset, I should briefly explain the necessity for bringing forward this resolution. As everybody in this House knows, the Press Commission has investigated the working of the press in India; it has gone into the various aspects of the working of the press and submitted a very valuable and comprehensive report in 1954. The report of that investigation, I believe, was the first and perhaps the only one of its kind that we have had in this country. That report along with the recommendations made in it were debated upon in this House, and they secured the general approval of Parliament. Therefore, I think there can be no question that the recommendations of the Press Commission are at least morally binding upon Government.

For the purposes of my resolution, I am concerned only, as the wording of the resolution shows, with those aspects of the Press Commission's findings, which deal with certain harmful effects of certain factors on the truthfulness and objective dissemination of news and good moral standards of journalism. The purpose of my resolution is to examine how far Government have taken steps in the direction of implementing the principal recommendations of the Press Commission in the direction of combating those undesirable features which were highlighted by the Press Commission in its report. My claim is that in respect of the major and important points which were spotlighted by the Press Commission, Government have failed; and the evils which were pointed out so sharply by the Press Commission have been allowed not only to continue to persist but in fact, they have got intensified in this intervening period

\*These figures were subsequently corrected as, Ayes: 23; Noes: 81; vide Debates dated 20th August, 1960.

between the publication of the Press Commission's report, and the present time.

Therefore, my resolution is, in substance, suggesting that a parliamentary committee should be appointed with two purposes, firstly, to study the continuing trends in dissemination of news and views during the period intervening between 1954 and the present times, and secondly, to make proposals to Government as to how best to implement without delay those relevant recommendations of the Press Commission which have remained unimplemented, and without implementing which, I submit, no advance whatsoever, can be made in the direction which was pointed out by the Press Commission.

Briefly speaking, that is the purpose of my resolution. In the short time at my disposal, it is not possible for me to make any extensive references to the Press Commission's report in detail. But I would request the House, through you, Sir, to recall some of the principal features which were spotlighted by the Press Commission as being harmful or injurious or at least potentially harmful to truthfulness and objective reporting by the press in India. I am referring particularly to the observations of the Commission on the following subjects. I cannot do more than just indicate them briefly. These are: the question of ownership and control and the question of competition and monopolies—these are more or less chapter headings, as the Hon. Minister is no doubt aware, from the Report itself; but these are the broad problems which they dealt with which I wish to emphasise—the question of bias and external pressure on the Press, the question of the position of editorial control, the question of standards and performance of papers and the question of news agencies functioning in this country.

If I may be allowed to summarise briefly, the central points which emerged from this inquiry of the Press Commission related to these aspects, were

these. Firstly, you will recall, the Press Commission stated very categorically that a considerable degree of concentration of ownership and concentration of control of newspapers already existed at the time, when the inquiry was made and the Report published in 1954, in the newspaper industry in India. As far as I recall, the Press Commission have stated in their Report that in 1954, that they found that 5 owners controlled 29 papers and 30.1 per cent. of the total circulation and 15 owners controlled 54 papers and 50.1 per cent. of the circulation. That was the position in 1954, according to the Press Commission themselves.

There are pages and pages in the Commission's Report, from which it is not possible for me, of course, to quote now but which led the Commission to conclude that as a result of this concentration of ownership and control, there was a very marked degree of partisanship in the presentation of news, particularly in respect of the financial interests with which these papers are connected or allied, and that the views presented by papers, the leading big papers, tended to be coloured in so far as they affected the proprietorial interests of the people who owned the papers.

Now, I would just like to point out that these figures, which were given by the Press Commission to bring out the degree of concentration in 1954 related only to what can be strictly called newspapers in the sense of daily newspapers. We find that already then there was a high degree of this concentration which on all counts, according to the Press Commission, was an undesirable feature and displayed a tendency which, they felt, ought to be checked, as far as possible.

Secondly, another major point which emerged from the Press Commission's findings was the unsatisfactory structure, that is to say, the managerial structure, the financial structure and so on, and unsatisfactory working of the *Press Trust of India—P.T.I.*—the principal news agency in our country.

[Shri Indrajit Gupta]

Several criticisms were made in the Report, particularly on the ground that the news supplied by the P.T.I. or through the P.T.I. was neither adequate nor was its presentation what it should be. Also there was a criticism made in respect of foreign news—because that is a very important aspect of a news agency's obligation, to supply foreign news—and the Press Commission was very categorical on the point that unless supplementary sources of foreign news were also explored and made available, the presentation as it was being done at that time through the P.T.I. was far from desirable.

The Press Commission also emphasised—I am now, of course, overlapping a bit in going into part of their recommendations as it were; but these are the major points I wish to stress—the need for the setting up of a Press Council. Everyone knows now that the major recommendation, if any one recommendation is to be picked out as the major, central recommendation, was that for the setting up of a Press Council. If I may be allowed to quote from the Commission's Report itself, the recommendation for the setting up of an All-India Press Council was accompanied by certain suggestions as to what the objects of this Press Council should be, a whole list of them which I have no time to refer to here; but I would just remind the House of a few of the objects which were recommended, because they reflect indirectly the problems which I have been referring to earlier. For example, object (2), to help the Press to maintain its independence; object (5), to keep under review any developments likely to restrict the supply and dissemination of news of public interest and importance, and to keep a watch on the arrangements made by Indian newspapers and news agencies with foreign newspapers and news agencies or other bodies for the reproduction in India of material obtained from these sources; object (12), to study developments in the Press which may tend towards concentration or monopoly

and, if necessary, to suggest remedies therefor; and object (14), to review the ownership structure and its impact on the performance of the Press. These give us a broad idea of the sort of problems which the Press Commission had very much in mind when they made this important recommendation for the setting up of a Press Council.

The other major recommendation was that the P.T.I. should be converted into a public corporation. The recommendation in this respect was that the Chairman should be appointed by the Chief Justice of India and at least 50 per cent. of the trustees on the board of the corporation should be people unconnected with the newspaper industry. Many other suggestions were made too.

Another suggestion, very important, in my opinion, was that attempts should be made by Government by all possible means, not necessarily legislative, but by other means, by encouragement, by persuasion, to bring about a gradual diffusion of ownership of newspapers and news agencies so that the opposite trend towards concentration would be checked or reversed to some extent.

Now, the reason why I bring forward this Resolution—and I hope it is one which will commend itself to everybody because the Report of the Press Commission has been accepted by this House—is to make an inquiry into these features. What does experience in this intervening period show? If we were to find that the trend of evidence goes roughly in the direction which the Press Commission had indicated, then there would be nothing to worry about. But if we find that the reverse is true, that in respect of the practical acceptance of the findings, and implementation of the recommendations, if anything we are going in the reverse direction, then I submit that the time is come when Parliament in its wisdom must devote its attention once more to this problem and consider how best to assist the Government in moving forward.

As far as the Press Council is concerned, we find that it has not been set up. Legislation was, I believe, brought forward, but allowed to lapse.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member's time is up.

**Shri Indrajit Gupta:** A lot of time was taken in the Division and all that. I got only 15 minutes so far.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am giving him sufficient time—17 minutes.

**Shri Indrajit Gupta:** I am moving this Resolution.

**Mr. Speaker:** How much time does he want? If he takes half an hour, and only one hour is left out of the two hours for hon. Members to speak, how many Members can be accommodated?

**Shri Indrajit Gupta:** Let me have at least 20 minutes.

**Mr. Speaker:** All right.

**Shri Indrajit Gupta:** As I said, legislation for the setting up of a Press Council was brought forward, but allowed to lapse. The P.T.I. is not only being converted into a public corporation, but it is functioning in such a manner that practically the entire board of directors at present consists of big newspaper interests. Moreover, Government have recently granted a licence to a news agency connected with Shri Goenka and his group of newspapers to start business, which is certainly not going to encourage any trend away from concentration.

17 hrs.

As far as the trend towards concentration of ownership is concerned, I do not need to take up much time. There is the Report placed on the Table of the House only a few days ago by the hon. Minister himself, the Report of the Registrar of Newspapers, which clearly indicates that the number of newspapers controlled by chains, groups and multiple units has been on

the increase. I submit that the figures in that report are not entirely correct in the sense that they deal with not only what are strictly daily newspapers but include under the heading of newspapers periodicals, monthlies, weeklies, magazines and everything. And, if we were to make an assessment of the daily newspapers alone, separately as a category, the degree of concentration, I submit, would be found to be much greater. These are the developments which are taking place. Therefore, I feel that it is necessary for a committee to study these things in further and greater detail and also to go into the question of how the Government news agencies, that is to say, the All India Radio and the news services supplied by the All India Radio and the P.I.B. have functioned.

We will find that there is definitely a running campaign being carried on in certain big newspapers by virtue of the control exercised by vested financial interests which are powerfully entrenched to suit their own particular interests as against the larger interests of the community.

I can give a large number of examples. But, for example, I would just mention that Government should be well aware of the fact that a section of the Press carries on a systematic campaign through distortion and so on against the policy of planned economy and the public sector which have been accepted by the nation and the House as part of our economic development. A campaign is carried on systematically.

A virtual black-out we have seen in some papers of the proceedings of even such an important inquiry as the Vivian Bose Commission. It is virtually blacked out, in some newspapers for the owners of whom it is extremely uncomfortable.

Similarly, there is the question of foreign news. Yesterday in the Rajya Sabha in the course of a Foreign Affairs debate, the hon. Prime Minis-

[Shri Indrajit Gupta]

ter had this to say. I am quoting from the official record of yesterday's debates.

"Mr. Jaswant Singh said something in defence of Belgium sending troops to the Congo to protect their nationals. I think the reports we received about what happened in the Congo were grossly exaggerated. I do not deny that there was trouble there. Some people were put in difficulty, were attacked, but there was an element of propaganda about the reports we received."

I submit that in respect of the supply of foreign news also through the P.T.I., it is linked up only with Reuters and the French Press Agency, and the result is that this pro-imperialist slant in foreign news is transmitted, doctored and put across in our newspapers whereas the Press Commission had clearly suggested that there should be an attempt to multiply the sources so that we can make our broad conclusions and give news on a more impartial and neutral basis.

I would only say that though freedom of the Press is a very important thing, no doubt, it is not an abstract right. It is something which must be consistent with the obligations of the Press towards society. There is such a thing after all as the freedom of the journalists also. We find now-a-days that the working journalists, those who are honest and who are democratically minded and socially conscious are more and more being reduced to the status of cogs and automatons serving other people's selfish interests.

I would remind the House of the recent example we have read about in the papers where the Government of Ceylon has announced certain steps. Of course, I am not suggesting anything half so drastic. But, they have suggested steps for the same reason. In order to democratise the Press, in order to diffuse ownership and make

it public rather than concentrated in few hands, important chains of newspapers in Ceylon are proposed to be converted into publicly owned corporations.

Therefore, my submission is that since the Government has failed in all respects to take any concrete steps towards the implementation of these recommendations, my resolution seeks the approval of the House for setting up a Parliamentary Committee so that we can go into this question in greater detail and, if necessary, help Government with suggestions as to how this stalemate can be broken and we can progress further in the direction indicated by the Press Commission.

**Mr. Speaker:** Resolution moved:

"This House calls upon the Government to appoint a Committee consisting of 45 Members of Parliament, 30 from Lok Sabha and 15 from Rajya Sabha, to go into the question of dissemination of news and views by newspapers in the country with a view to making proposals for ensuring truthfulness, objectivity and good moral standards in the field of journalism."

**Shri Warior (Trichur):** Sir, I have an amendment.

**Mr. Speaker:** He may move it.

**Shri Warior:** Sir, I beg to move:

In the Resolution,—

add at the end—

"as recommended by the Press Commission 1954."

**Mr. Speaker:** Both the Resolution and the amendment will be taken up the next day.