

Devanagari As Common Script for All Regional Languages

उस समय स्वीकार नहीं किया जा सका । लेकिन गृह कां० मंत्री ने मेरी भावना और प्रस्ताव के अभिमत का स्वागत किया है इसलिये मैं आपको धन्यवाद देता हूँ, और इस प्रस्ताव को लेकर देश में कोई विवाद उत्पन्न न हो जाय इसलिये मैं उस को वापस लेता हूँ ।

Mr. Speaker: There are two amendments moved by Shri N. R. Muniswamy. The amendments will have to be disposed of before the Resolution can be withdrawn. The hon. Member who moved the amendments is not here. I shall put them to the vote of the House: The question is:

"For the original Resolution, substitute—

"This House is of opinion that Devnagari script be adopted for all regional languages in order to bring them closer to each other provided that approval is given by all the State Legislatures without exception."

"For the original Resolution, substitute—

"This House is of opinion that Devnagari script be adopted as a common script for all the regional languages except Tamil, provided that State Legislatures agree to this by their respective Legislations."

The motion was negatived.

Mr. Speaker: Now, I take it that the hon. Member who moved the original Resolution has the leave of the House to withdraw his Resolution

The Resolution was, by leave, withdrawn.

RESOLUTION RE: NATIONALISATION OF COAL MINES

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty (Basirhat): Sir, I beg to move:

"That this House is of opinion that all the coal mines in private sector be nationalised."

Sir, as you know, this is a matter which has been agitated over for a long time, and from the time of the First Five Year Plan this matter has been considered on various occasions. Now that we are just on the eve of the Third Five Year Plan, it is time again for us to raise this matter, because the arguments that were put forward earlier both by those who opposed this proposal as well as the hon. Minister were that it was not a practicable proposition.

17.57 hrs.

[*MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER in the Chair*]

The question of practicability has been raised earlier by various committees also. Though they agreed that nationalisation was the only solution for many of the ills which persisted in the industry, they felt that it was a question of practicability. The Coalfields Committee had said that it should not be taken up within ten years. That Committee had said that during that period of ten years their recommendation about the question of rationalisation of coal industry should be implemented. Ten years from 1947 have passed, and many things like the question of amalgamation, the question of safety, the question of conservation etc., which are of utmost importance for the coal industry of our country, have not yielded satisfactory results. We have passed one or two laws also like the Conservation Law and the Acquisition Law with regard to coalfields or coal-bearing areas. But, as the Minister himself has admitted the pace has not been fast enough and the ends that we had hoped for have not been achieved. Therefore, it is necessary that we should take it up again, now that we are on the eve of the Third Five Year Plan.

[Shrimati Renu Chakravartty]

Secondly, another argument that is always placed before us is the question of production. It is said that we need coal production and we must have it immediately, and if we now try to put the onus of running so many coalfields—many of them small coalfields—on the shoulders of the Government we will not be able to do this with the result that there will be a fall in our production. Now that the NCDC has achieved the targeted rate of production and it has now even been admitted for the first time, I think, by the I.M.A. that the NCDC is a factor which they have to take into consideration, that argument cannot be put in. Some of the foreign experts have also said that some facets of the production machinery and technique of the NCDC are working fully satisfactorily. There may be many criticisms also. We know that there are very serious criticisms about the way it is functioning. But the fact remains that the NCDC has started functioning in the public sector. In such a situation, the practicability of considering the question of nationalisation of coal fields again assumes importance.

16 hrs.

As we have always held, coal is a strategic industry. It is not like any other industry. It is a strategic industry and upon it depends all other industries. Not only do the other industries depend upon it, but the entire question of prices also depends largely upon coal. Just as the prices of food are important, on the basis of which all other prices depend, so too, the price of coal is a very important aspect of the entire planned industrial production and industrial development of the country. Therefore, we have to see that in respect of this strategic industry, Government have a firm hold on it, so that neither in the way of prices nor in the way of development and production, including the point of view of conservation, is anything done by which any of these three factors jeopardises the planned development of our country.

85 per cent of our energy is from coal, and therefore the nationalisation of coal mines is very, very important. As a matter of fact, almost one-third of the production of coal is already used by the nationalised sector, namely, the railways. Therefore, I feel that there can be no proper planning of industrial development nor a planned price control without the nationalisation of coal mines.

Another aspect of the whole question is that in the planned production of coal it is not only that increased production is very important, but we have to see to it that the other industries are kept going. I shall illustrate this by saying it how sometimes many coal fields are closed down by the private sector because they feel it is not profitable enough. And a little while ago, in the case of metallurgical coal, we found that there was a great shortage of it. Fortunately, new seams were found and our steel plants which were starved for coal at one stage are now getting a little more coal. In the case of the public sector colliery, namely, Giridih, in spite of the fact that it was for over a year having a loss of Rs. 50 lakhs—it came in for a great deal of criticism in this House—we felt and it was correctly felt that because these were the national resources which were needed for other essential industries, we should keep them going even at a loss. Therefore, the question of production in such a strategic industry cannot always be viewed from the standpoint of profits.

Then again, there is the question of the conservation of coal resources. Already this House knows that our reserves are not unlimited. As far as high-grade coal is concerned, the estimated reserve is about 1,300 million tons. Three-fourth of it is worked in the collieries of the private sector. Three-fourth of our high-grade coal is in the hands of the private sector in these collieries. The estimated reserve of high-grade non-coking coal is 3,150 million tons. Following the rule that

only 60 per cent extraction is permitted, it will come roughly to 2,000 million tons. This shows that the reserve of high-grade non-coking coal is also very limited. The position of metallurgical coal is well known to this House. Therefore, it is not only a question of production but a question of conservation which is of the utmost importance. If we are only going in just for higher production without taking into consideration the question of conservation, then, I am afraid there can be no planning and the future of our country will be jeopardised if we do not go into this matter.

Then of course there is also the question of the conditions of life and the service conditions of labour. In the coal fields the conditions of labour continue to remain shocking; they are in an appalling condition. Therefore, from all these aspects I want to deal with this question of the nationalisation of coal mines. In the Industrial Policy Resolution of the second Five Year Plan, it was laid down that the virgin coal fields should be worked in the public sector. From the first Plan, we have been asking for nationalisation of coal mines. It was under the consideration of the Government for two full years, but due to the pressure brought on the Government by the big mine-owners and they are fairly powerful people, the Government announced that they are not going to nationalise coal mines.

Of course, they brought forward many arguments, viz., why we should take over old mines, it is much better that we open our own mines, etc. We know that big monopolists like Tatas, Birlas and Thapars have got their own mines and foreign companies like Bird and Company, Andrew Yules and Equitable Coal are agents under the managing agency system. They not only control several coal mines, but I think a very great percentage of high-grade coal is controlled by these foreign companies.

Government countered our arguments by saying that the profits in

these mines were not very high. But I think the hon. Minister himself in the other House stated actually the big profits earned by Andrew Yules and other foreign companies, where there has been a very big return of profits. They have quoted that the Bengal Coal Company have a capital of Rs. 1.2 crores and a capital reserves of Rs. 1.07 crores. The dividend paid between 1953 and 1957 was Rs. 1.03 crores. Then again, in regard to the Bawrah Coal Company, it was stated that there was a capital of Rs. 11 lakhs, a reserve of Rs. 6.33 lakhs and out of this they have paid back dividends totalling Rs. 7.75 lakhs. In answer to this, the Minister had stated that there was actually not such a big return. He quoted that as far as the coal price revision committee was concerned, they had said that a return of 10 or 11 percent is something that we have to give to the industry and the Ministry felt that this was not much.

I do not want to go into the question whether the return is high or not. My point is, this is a strategic industry and there will be a time when we will not allow any profits in that industry, because it is a strategic industry, on which depend the price, the production etc. of everything else. It is not like any other industry. It is from that point of view that we have to see this. In answer to a debate in this very House, when he was talking about the Giridih collieries, the Minister said, even if there is a loss we feel national good demands that we should continue with it.

Actually this is a very important point, because we are finding that prices are being increased every time. If a labour award is given, immediately the coal mine-owners say, "We are not going to accept the award unless you give us higher rates in coal prices". For example, on the question of bonus, one-third of the basic wages drawn in the quarter was to be given as bonus. But during 1957-58, in Bengal and Bihar where 80 per cent of the labour is concentrated they did not get the bonus accord

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to the statistics compiled by your own Commissioner of Coal Mines Provident Fund. Also, when it was stated that in the provident fund scheme recoveries have to be given at 6½ per cent of basic wages, they said, "We will not give this until you give us a rise." Therefore, at every stage, unless there is a rise, the coal-mine-owners are not prepared to give even a small increase in the low wages which the workers get. Therefore, we have found that at every step these coal-mine owners have been holding up, whether it is the question of wages, whether it is the question of actual safety measures or the question of stowing. We have been told by various committees that have been set up by Government that by proper methods of stowing the production can be increased and a greater fillip can be given to it. Still, very few coal mines do it. Therefore, from the point of view of production, from the point of view of prices, from the point of view of labour conditions, from all these points of view it is very very important that there should be nationalisation.

As a matter of fact, it is only when we have planned exploration and exploitation of coal on an all India scale that we can really have a real plan for coal, and this cannot be done until we have nationalisation of coal mines. The history of private sector coal fields shows that everything is determined by the slumps, by the demands and by the lure of immediate profits. I can quote page after page of your own report, Government, report to substantiate my statement. From 1907 onwards, whenever there has been a slump, there has been a closure of these coal mines and whenever there has been a sudden demand immediately everybody rushed to open coal mines like the gold rush. In this way, we have found the growth of a large number of small collieries, very many of them unproductive, which do not introduce good techniques and which, in many cases, are unable to put the large amount of

capital which is necessary to introduce reforms. So, the amalgamation of these collieries is very necessary if we are really to have a coal plan and the production is to go up.

From the statistics it is seen that though the number of small units is so big, yet the production is so small. For example, in 1941 there were 502 collieries; in 1945 there were 810 collieries. The period from 1941 to 1945 was the period of the war. But what was the increase in production? The production was 23.74 tons in 1941 and 23.88 tons in 1945. In spite of the fact that there was an increase of 300 collieries in 1945, the increase in production was only from 23.75 tons to 23.88 tons. So, the question of amalgamation of small collieries has become a very important point and it is absolutely necessary for the economic development of the industry.

Then I come to greater production and better conservation. Small coal bearing works cannot be worked economically and systematically and from the point of view of sound mining practices. This report itself says on page 32, for example, that "unsound mining was not restricted to small mines alone". It also says "that large well-equipped mines have also resorted to it, which is detrimental to the country's interests". We have seen on many an occasion how the safety regulations have not been abided by the coal mine owners. We have seen on many occasions how great fires have broken out. As a matter of fact, there have been such big fires in some of the best metallurgical coal mines. For example we had fire at the Probellia coalmines, owned by Bengal Coal, which is one of the biggest companies. We have been told that Bengal Coal is one of the best companies, and so why should we take over the best and efficiently-managed collieries. In the Probellia coal mines, due to the reckless utilisation of the mine, though it had 40 million tons of high grade coal, it has to be sealed off for three to four years, which resulted in such a huge waste.

Similarly, in the Bowra collieries, which have open cast mining, in 1959 there was a huge fire. This is one of the collieries owned by Shri Dharamchand Thapar, a very big unit. Then, speaking about the smaller units, almost every day we have been hearing of various accidents and various fires and caving in of collieries. We hear about them almost every day. So, this question of conservation and safety in mines is also very important.

We are always told that according to our statistics our rate of accident is low and that after all there are mining fatalities and accidents in all countries of the world. In absolute figures we may say that ours is a lower rate of accidents, but if we take it per ton produced, I think, our rate of accidents is fairly high.

There is also the question of a uniform price. As stated earlier, it is not only a question of high prices, but it is also a question of a uniform price as we have for cement and steel which are the other two very strategic industries, the regional development of the country will also be hampered. If the Central Government really gets this uniform price, it can then be divided and the excess which one gets can be given back to the various States. If we have this uniform price at the rail head, it will be a very great improvement on the position of today. But this cannot be done in the present situation. The hon. Minister will say in reply that there are many aspects of the industry which are already controlled, that there is the Coal Commissioner and that there are other points of governmental control.

The Minister of Steel, Mines and Fuel (Sardar Swaran Singh): I did not follow it when the hon. Member said that it might be given back to the States. I did not follow the essence of the scheme.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty: The excess which may come as a result of it may be given back. For example, if there is uniform price, naturally there will be a rise in the price in the State of West Bengal or Bihar where we have got actually a lower price today. So, in that way a certain amount may be returned back to the States also. But this question of a uniform price at railheads is very necessary.

Sardar Swaran Singh: Returning back means lower price for these areas.

An Hon. Member: Uniform price everywhere, at all railheads.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty: Thus the prices at places that are nearby and far-off will be equalised and will be on the same level.

Sardar Swaran Singh: There is no question of giving back to the States. You appear to be arguing both sides.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty: Whatever it be, the question has to be dealt with. A uniform price is absolutely necessary if we want regional development. From that point of view we would say that this can only be done if the whole industry is controlled. Without that it is not possible. Therefore the question of nationalisation has got to be underlined because we find that if anything is left to be done voluntarily it is never brought about. For example, the recalcitrancy of the mine-owners can be seen not only on the question of wages but on the question of, say, housing itself. There are Rs. 5 crores with the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund and this sum cannot be used because the mine-owners are not prepared to give the land and are not prepared to come forward. Everybody knows that the conditions of housing in the coal-fields are an absolute disgrace to the name of free India. There is no water. There are hardly any roads. The houses are like hovels. In spite of the fact that

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he Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund had the money, there is no possibility of using it for such a long time.

With regard to the question of labour machinery, again and again in this House we have ventilated how these mine-owners with their wealth and money actually subvert and sabotage many of these safety rules and that many people in the Mines Department who should be looking after these things are really under the influence of these mine-owners. There were many cases which were brought forward here. If we could have a nationalised sector in regard to coal, I think, this could be checked to a very great extent. It is not that I say that the public sector labour practices are very good, as we ourselves know and as the hon. Minister himself knows. But this is a question of comparativeness. It is a question on which we sharply criticise the public sector because we expect that the public sector will be above all these things. But when we find in many of the States that the conditions are even worse, then we come forward with sharp criticisms against them.

Sardar Swaran Singh: I have every sympathy for the position in which the hon. Member finds herself.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: What is the exact sympathy for?

Sardar Swaran Singh: The position being that the hon. Member is asking for nationalisation, but she does not want to concede that labour is well looked after even in the nationalised industry. That is her difficulty.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Is the hon. Minister going to do something to pull her out of that difficulty?

Sardar Swaran Singh: I think the clock will decide it.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: I would not like to be in this predicament of having to find the public sector projects continuing to contra-

vene the labour laws in Rourkela and other places, but I would like to point out in contrast that some of the private sector steel factories, mine-owners, steel-plant-owners, steel factory owners like IISCO etc. have better housing facilities in Rourkela and in Bhilai. At least that much should be done. It is not necessary always to say that the public sector is worse, but at the same time . . .

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao (Khammam): Even the NCDC is better.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: I have not seen the NCDC; therefore, I do not know, but I presume that it should be a little better. I think these facilities are very necessary.

There is one new point which I want to add here for this debate, that is, that this nationalisation is being opposed by another very important body, namely the World Bank Commission that came here recently. Recently, the World Bank Mission came here and went round, and they have given a report, and as we know, the American World Bank is a source of boosting up the private sector.

Sardar Swaran Singh: I do not want to enter into an argument but I would only like to correct the hon. Member. It will not be correct to describe the World Bank as American. It is an organ of the United Nations; it is not an American organisation.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: I knew that it is the World Bank. But I think, today, it is very well known in the world that the U.N. is controlled by the United States of America. So, I do not want to quarrel on that point here.

Sardar Swaran Singh: I think that that is not the position even of the U.S.S.R.

Shrimati Renu Chakravartty: I think that is the idea of almost all

the African countries and Asian countries today, though I do not know whether the U.S.S.R. could convince my hon friend very much; at least certain African nations feel like that, and we also feel like that. However, we need not go into that argument for the purposes of this debate. They say in their report that:

"The Mission was of the view that the expansion of the private sector had been restricted as an act of Government policy which had reserved opening of new areas to the public sector."

They oppose even that. They have also said that price control has also discouraged the private companies from investing more in the industry. Therefore, their specific recommendations were that the private collieries should be encouraged to raise all the coal they can, secondly that the restriction on the issue of new mining leases should be lifted, and thirdly that the prices should be adjusted to provide the industry with large resources for investment. These are some of the recommendations that they have made. I am sure that this will have a very great effect on the working of the mind of the Ministry, because, after all, the big amount of money is coming; and we want foreign loans. Here again when the U.S. experts on the coal industry came here, they made some sort of recommendations about the private sector mines. Of course, they have not been able to say that the NCDC is worthless; in fact, they have made some complimentary references to the NCDC, but they say that:

"A reappraisal should be made of the coal reserves to allow private sector mines a greater share of undeveloped coal reserves."

So, the attack is on them. Even the small-scale units which have been reserved for the rights of the Government are being attacked by them. Therefore, I feel that this is a danger which we see. It is not an

ideological question at all, that is, this question of nationalisation of coal. It has taken place in the United Kingdom. I have got the whole history regarding that matter. They have shown that right through-out they tried persuasion and they did not want nationalisation, and they tried persuasion, and they tried rationalisation, and they tried many other methods, but finally, it was in 1947 that under the Labour Government, nationalisation of coal had to be resorted to. The same is the case in Italy, in France etc. It has been said by our own experts, whose opinion also I can quote to you, that the working of the coal mines in the European countries where nationalisation has taken place much earlier has been much more successful, and Great Britain also had finally to follow this.

Therefore, I think that we should not look upon this as an ideological question. It is not an ideological question. It is a question of practicability. Not only that. It is no use saying that we cannot think about these things because we have already decided on this point. We have got to think again and again in new situations when we are again thinking of a Third Plan, in a situation where the public sector is going ahead. In view of the need for conservation, in view of the need for controlling prices and the need for real planned development of the coal industry, nationalisation of coal mines is very necessary.

Therefore, I move my Resolution.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Resolution moved:

"This House is of opinion that all the coal mines in private sector be nationalised".

There are some amendments as well. But I find that both Shri Shree Narayan Das and Shri Braj Raj Singh are absent.

Shri S. L. Saksena (Maharajganj): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, this Resolution

[Shri S. L. Saksena]

is of the utmost importance for our country. Coal is a key industry. Even in the first Industrial Policy Resolution, it was said that the key industries shall all be nationalised. It is unfortunate that even after 13 years of freedom, these coal mines have not been nationalised.

Our coal production today does not exceed 50 million tons annually. The progress of production that is envisaged for this industry in the Third Plan is to double that quantity at the end of the Plan. But if we compare the rate of progress in the neighbouring countries, we shall be surprised that we cannot keep pace with them. We cannot build our country into a powerful country if our production is so low. Today the greatness of a country is judged by its capacity to produce steel, coal and a number of other things. We are at present in a very difficult situation with China. The production of coal in China, according to their figures, has reached 300 million tons. Even if we discount that big figure, it is at least several times our coal production. Even at the end of the Third Plan, we shall be producing only about 100 million tons.

Therefore, I think the most important consideration before the Ministry should be how we can keep pace with other countries. We have to compete with them. We have at least to see that our industry is maintained at a level not lower than that of those countries. If this has to be done, we must do all we can to develop coal production in our country.

Let me say this, that the coal mine-owners will not work except for a profit. In an industry like the coal industry, it is very important that national interests must come first and all other interests must be subordinated to them. Recently, I

went round the whole country visiting coal mines to see the conditions of Gorakhpur labour. I was surprised to see the conditions of work in the coal mines. Their practices are old and antiquated. I have seen the working of coal mines in foreign countries, and I am surprised how, in spite of the fact that this is a key industry and in spite of the progress we have made in industrialisation, we have not modernised our coal industry. Our coal miners have to go into the pits, into small seams of 4 ft. height and come back with a load of coal on their backs. I think it is time that we had a comprehensive plan to make coal extraction larger in quantity as well as modernised in operation, by using all the modern methods that are available. Now the extraction is less and the working conditions are antiquated. I therefore think that this is only possible if the coal industry are nationalised. The mine owners always work for profit; they will not do anything which will not give them more profits. They do not look at it from the point of view of national welfare; they only want their own profits. Therefore, in the interests of the nation, in the interests of the Plan, it is of the utmost importance that this key industry should be nationalised.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: I think the hon. Member would like to continue for some more time.

Shri S. L. Saksena: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Then he might continue his speech the next time. The House now stands adjourned till 11 A.M. on Monday.

18:31 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Monday, April 3, 1961/Chaitra 13, 1883 (Saka).