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* Announcement *re* Grant of Inadequate Dearness Allowance to Workers

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Labour Member): Sir, the motion made by Mr. Mehta raises two points, if I understand it correctly. One point is that the Government failed to consult the representatives of Trade Unions when they last raised the dearness allowance. The second point which is raised in the motion is that the dearness allowances which were announced on the 21st of January last were meagre and inadequate. Sir, I am sorry to say that although I have every sympathy with Mr. Mehta for bringing forward this motion, I am bound to say that the motion has been based upon misunderstanding.

Sir, I will take the first question, namely, that the dearness allowances announced by the Government of India are meagre and inadequate. Sir, with regard to the meagreness of the allowances the point that I would like the House to bear in mind is this, that there is no final decision at which Government have arrived, it cannot be said that the figures that they have announced by the notification of the 23rd February are not to be altered or are not to be increased.

Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra (Presidency Division: Non-Muhammadan Rural): Is it tentative ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : It may be. There is the case that those figures do not grant adequate dearness allowance. But as I said there is no finality about it. The situation is still fluid and it is a matter for consideration now for the Government as to the form which the dearness allowance should take, whether the dearness allowance should take the form of cash allowance or whether the dearness allowance should take the form of food provision, that is a matter which the Government has to decide before the Government can fix upon any particular pitch at which dearness allowance should be fixed. Therefore my submission on that point is that it cannot be said that Government

* Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. I, 12th February 1943, pp. 197-99.

has taken any decision which can be said to be irretrievable, irrevocable, unamendable.

Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra: Is there a good conduct allowance ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I think it is in the Postal Department that the concession has been given. With regard to meagreness and the inadequacy, the matter as I say, is still open and it may be considered at the proper time.

Coming to the second accusation, namely, that the Government did not consult the representatives of trade unions, I think it is necessary to bear in mind that in the first place there are some difficulties in the matter of establishing contract with labour. The difficulty is this. As my Honourable friend, Mr. Jamnadas Mehta, knows, so far as the railways are concerned, there are Unions, which Unions have been federated into a single organisation and it makes matters quite easy for the Government to establish contact with workers on the Railways to obtain their opinion and to consult them whenever occasion for consultation arises. That, I think, Mr. Jamnadas Mehta will admit that the Government have been doing. In fact the convention has already been established and has been practised without any departure that the Railway Board and the Railwaymen's Federation meet twice a year to discuss matters of common concern.

Then, Sir, under the Central Government there are employees of the Posts and Telegraph Department. As I understand, there are twelve Unions which represent the posts and telegraph workers of the Central Government. Out of them four are Unions representing the higher officers and eight represent the union of workers. Unfortunately there is no single body, no Federation of the different workers of the Posts and Telegraph Department and consequently it has not been possible to establish the same sort of contact which it is possible for the Railway Board to establish with the Railwaymen's Federation. But I do like to point out the fact that notwithstanding this difficulty the Government had as a matter of fact contact with the posts and telegraph workers before taking action. I should like to read to the House a short paragraph from a magazine called the Telegraph Review for January, 1943, which records the attempts made by the Posts and Telegraph Department to establish contact with the workers in the Posts and Telegraph. This is what the Review says :

> "During his recent visit to Calcutta, the Director General invited the representatives of the different recognised service Unions and

held a joint conference with them on the question of dearness allowance on 10th December, 1942. The representatives could not present a united front on this question at this conference. Subsequently they met together in Tarapad Hall of the Postal Club building, Calcutta on the evening of 12th December 1942, and drew up on mutual agreement a new scheme of dearness allowance which is published elsewhere in this issue."

Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta : What did they ask in that scheme ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : They saw the Director General again. The representatives met the Director General again in conference on 18th December, 1942 and submitted their scheme to him.

Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta : What did they demand ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : It is a very long thing. I am sorry I have not got the time to read the whole of it. If my Honourable friend wants, I can pass it on to him for his perusal. The point that I am making is this, that so far as the Posts and Telegraph Department workers are concerned, it cannot be said that there was no consultation between the Government and the workers concerned before the announcement was made.

Then, Sir, there remain what are called the clerical employees of the Central Government. So far as this body of workers is concerned, there is no Union and as there is no Union, there is also no Federation of the employees. What exists is a certain Association. First of all we have the Imperial Secretariat Association, secondly, we have the Daftary and Record Sorters Association and thirdly, there is the General Headquarters Association and the House will be glad to see that far from omitting to consult them, they sent their representatives to the Central Government and they were granted interview by the Honourable the Home Member and the Finance Member before this announcement was made. I think I am justified in saying what I said at the beginning that the allegations made by Mr. Jamnadas Mehta on which his motion was founded were really not correct. The Government have all along maintained the position they have always taken, namely, they consult the workers as far as possible.

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