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*The Indian Finance Bill

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Labour Member) : Sir, I rise to reply to the criticism made by Honourable Members during the course of this debate on certain points or acts of commission and omission with which the Labour Department is concerned. Sir, I will begin with the points raised by Sir Frederick James. As the House is aware so far as the Labour Department is concrened these were two points to which he devoted special attention. The first one is the point which relates to paper. Sir Frederick James paid great attention to the point how Government of India was extravagant in the use of paper and how in every direction Government was responsible for what he called waste. Sir, this question of paper, as the House will recall, was once debated in the course of this Session on an adjournment motion when I gave a reply on behalf of Government. It is quite clear that my Honourable friend Sir Frederick James was not satisfied with the reply that Government then gave and has returned to the subject again. I make no complaint of his returning to the subject again for I am glad that it does give me another opportunity to explain what Government is doing in the matter of conservation of paper. Sir, before I enter into the subject matter it might be desirable to tell the House that as far as I have any information it seems to me that the House is exhibiting, if I may say so, a certain degree of over-anxiety that there is a shortage of paper, but I am not quite convinced that there is what we might call acute suffering in the matter. It might be interesting to the House, if I present to Honourable Members a few figures with regard to the publications that have been issued in Great Britain and in India. Sir, in 1939 in Great Britain, fifteen thousand books were issued and in 1940 eleven thousand were issued, in 1941 the figure was fourteen

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thousand. I am not saying that shortage of paper is not a question with which we are not concerned. As I said, there is shortage, but what I want to emphasise is that there is not a case of what we might call acute suffering.

Sir, proceeding further, as the House will remember, Sir Frederick James depended upon two illustrations in order to substantiate his charge of extravagance against the Government of India. Last time when the subject was debated, Sir Frederick James brought out a rent bill which is issued from the Western Court to the tenants who occupy that building. His case was that the rent bill which was presented to the tenants was a document of great enormity which contained details which were probably unnecessary and at any rate which could have been cut down in the period of the war. This time he brought out an old dilapidated copy of the Calcutta Gazette and pointed out that there were published in the Gazette certain information which could have been avoided in the course of the war.

Sir F.E. James (Madras : European): May I just interrupt my Honourable friend for one moment ? The issue I demonstrated of the Calcutta Gazette was the one which was just received from Calcutta and I think it was dated February of this year.

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : I am obliged to my Honourable friend. Now, Sir, the point I would like to make is this. If Sir, Frederick James was a lawyer, I am sure he would not have brought forth these two cases as illustrations of the points he was making. With regard to the rent bill, Sir Frederick James evidently forgot to look up the date on which it was printed. This bill was printed in 1938 and far from condemning the Government of India for using the bill, I think the Government of India ought to be congratulated that rather than destroying the old bills, the stock of which exists in the Government of India, the Government of India had laid aside all requirements of reforming the bill and were bent upon using the old stock which it possessed in order to conserve paper.

Sir F.E. James: Make them into scrap.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Sir, with regard to the question of the Gazette, I think a slip was committed by Sir Frederick James by reason of the fact that he was not able to appreciate the importance of the Gazette. The Gazette is not merely a matter which

contains useful information, information useful to Government, but as every lawyer knows, the Gazette is the only document where in some cases proof can be given by nothing else in a court of law except by the production of the Gazette. Even the list of enemy firms, patents etc. Government Gazette according to the Evidence Act, is the only primary evidence by which certain things can be proved. I would therefore ask Sir Frederick James whether he would not agree with me that whatever else we may do with regard to economics in Government paper, the Gazette is the last thing which we ought to touch.

Sir F.E. James : I would point out that my case was that an enquiry should be made whether it was necessary to publish in all the Provincial Gazettes, undoubtedly unimportant items which are published in the Central Government Gazette.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : The reason obviously is that every Provincial Government must publish its own Provincial Gazette as prescribed by the Government of India Act. But, Sir, I do not wish to rely upon what might be called a rhetorical reply to meet the argument of my Honourable Friend. I propose to refer to the practical steps which the Government of India have taken in order to economise paper. I would first of all take up the question of the Gazette. Now, I would request my Honourable friend Sir Frederick James and also other Honourable Members of this House who are interested in this question to compare Part-II, Section I, of the Gazette of India of 29th August with that of Part-II, Section I, of 6th March, 1943. If the House and the Honourable Members would take the trouble of comparing these two issues of the Gazette, they will find that practically the matter which used to occupy 1½ pages of the Gazette is now compressed in half a column, so much space has been economised. All margins have been cut out.

Dr. P. N. Banerjea (Calcutta Suburbs : Non-Muhammadan Urban): What about people with defective eye sight ?

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : I cannot please all. Then, Sir, with regard to the point which Sir Frederick James just now raised, I might also inform him that the Government of India has circularised all Provincial Governments whether it would not be desirable and possible for them to use notifications issued in the Gazette of India by the Government of India and not to reproduce or repeat them for their

own use in their own Gazette. Of course, all that we can do is to advise and to recommend.

Then, Sir, with regard to Indian Information, the House will be interested to know that we have already issued orders that its size should be reduced to half.

Coming to the question of forms, the House will be interested to know that as a matter of fact 149 forms have been suspended during the war and 190 have been altogether abolished. Secondly the size of the form has also been reduced from 1941. In the forms printed after July 1942, no superfluous space is allowed. I would say that if Honourable Members have any suggestions to make to the Government of India, I should certainly feel extremely obliged and give my best attention to them.

Then, Sir, with regard to publications, I might assure the house that nothing is published, unless it is found to be absolutely essential. In order to determine the essentiality of any publication, the Government of India have introduced three different checks on publications. There is first of all the check applied by the Controller of Printing and Stationery. He is no longer the mechanical man who used to execute orders placed before him for printing. We have now invested him with authority to scrutinise and to examine the essentiality of any publication put before him. If he disagrees and objects, the matter is then referred to the Secretary of the Labour Department who considers the question and if the Labour Department and the Controller of Printing agree that the publication is not an essential publication, then the matter is referred to a Committee whose decision is regarded as final. Then, Sir, we have also issued instructions to printers whereby they are directed that they must make the most economical use of paper both in the matter of spacing, margin and other things. I am sure that although this may not be a very impressive list of steps taken by the Government of India, it is undoubtedly a serious attempt to produce economy. Sir, as the saying goes, no one expects Hannibal's elephant to learn the goose steps. The Government of India, and any Government for the matter of that, is a huge beast, slow in moving, slow in gaits and yet it cannot be expected to learn goose steps and yet, I think the House will agree, the Government of India has learned the goose steps, if it has not learnt, it is ready to learn.

Sir F.E. James : It is still quite young.

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : Now, Sir, I come to the definite suggestion made by my Honourable friend Sir Frederick James in the matter of bringing about economy of paper in the Government of India. His specific suggestion, if I understood him correctly, was that a body was appointed in England, a committee consisting of a Chartered Accountant, a representative of the Publishing House and a representative of the Printing establishment. Sir, he has given us no details as to the mode and the manner by which this Committee works in England, nor has he referred to any principles adopted by this Committee in order to bring about economy. It is therefore at this stage quite impossible for me to say that I am ready to accept the suggestion that he has made. But I would like to point out to him the steps that we had taken which I am sure he will agree is more or less along the lines that he suggests. The step that we have taken is to appoint an officer called Commercial Master Printer to advise the Controller of Printing. We have very recently secured the sanction of the Finance Department and the Officer will be appointed before long. I am sure this Officer will be able to do what the Committee in England is said to have done.

Dr. P.N. Banerjea : Is he an Indian or a European ?

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : We have only got the financial sanction just now.

Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta (Bombay Central Division: Non-Muhammadan Rural) : Will he save more than he will cost ?

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Let us hope so. There is no harm in guessing and hoping. That is all that I have to say with regard to this question of paper.

The next point dealt with by Sir Frederick James was with regard to the housing of families of officers in Simla. He will appreciate that so far as housing is concerned, this is probably the tightest corner in which the Government of India finds itself. The accommodation which it had and the accommodation which it has been able to control as a result of the requisition order is nothing as compared to the officers which the Government of India has had to employ as a result of war efforts. He will also agree that if we are to prosecute the war effort fully, we have to have priority fixed for accommodation, and he will

agree that so far as the priority is concerned families must take a second place as compared to the officers themselves. At the same time, the Government of India is aware how separation of husband and wife, father and children is likely to affect the mentality, the ease of mind of an officer who is required to do war effort. In order to relieve whatever distress such an arrangement might be causing, the Government of India has undertaken to open three boarding houses in Simla in order to accommodate the wives of officers who cannot leave their stations and I hope that Sir Frederick James will accept this as a token of goodwill of the Government of India towards this very acute problem.

Then, Sir, I come to the third point which was raised by my Honourable friend, Sir Jamnadas Mehta.

Mr. Jamnadas M. Mehta : I beg your pardon.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I hope you will be on the way to Knighthood. I won't withdraw, nor apologize; I only say that it is in anticipation.

Maulana Zafar Ali Khan (East Central Pubjab : Muhammadan) : Coming events cast their shadows before.

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : Mr. Jamnadas Mehta in the course of the debate referred to the Session of the Dominion Labour Trade Union Congress which is being held in England or which is about to be held, and he complained that Indian Labour was not represented at that Dominion Conference. Sir, I share the regret and the sorrow which Mr. Jamnadas Mehta feels at the omission of representation of Indian labour at this important labour conference, but I would like to tell Mr. Jamnadas Mehta that the Labour Department is in no sense responsible for this unfortunate result. I would also like to tell him that the Labour Department was not consulted by the conveners of this Conference and I am sure that Mr. Jamnadas Mehta will admit that we really could not do anything in this matter since we were not consulted. Why they omitted to consult us and why they did not directly consult the heads of the labour movement in this country, who are quite well known to the gentlemen who are working for this Conference, I can more than understand. But, I think, Mr. Mehta will agree that the Labour Department is as watchful as any department can be in the matter of safeguarding the interest and the position of the Labour Department. Sir, I have done.

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