

* Multi-purpose Development of Damodar Valley

Labour Member's Speech at Calcutta Conference

“The project (harnessing the waters of the Damodar River) is a welcome one to the Government of India. It very clearly shows a fine prospect of the control of the River, a prospect of controlling floods, of securing a fine area for perennial irrigation with resultant insurance against famine and a much needed supply of power. I am sure it will be more than welcome to the Governments of Bengal and Bihar if they realise what the project will mean to them and their people.”

Thus observed the Hon'ble Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Labour Member, Government of India, in his address to representatives of Bengal and Bihar Governments at a Conference held in Calcutta on August 23 to discuss the Preliminary Memorandum on the Damodar Valley Multipurpose Project. The session lasted two days, and the Labour Member presided.

Here is the full text of Dr. Ambedkar's speech :

“We are now meeting for the second time to discuss the project for harnessing the waters of the Damodar River. As you will recall, our first meeting in this connection took place on January 3, 1945. We then considered the Report of the Damodar River Flood Enquiry Committee-appointed by the Government of Bengal in 1944.

“The issue before us was whether we should be content with damming the river for the purpose of stopping the flood only or whether we should make it a multi-purpose project so as to cover generation of electricity and the supply of water for irrigation and navigation also. The consensus of opinion at that Conference was that we should go in for the latter. Accordingly, the Conference decided to take the next step, namely to create machinery for collecting the necessary data to

* Indian Information, October 1, 1945, pp. 345-49.

draw up a multi-purpose scheme. On the part of the Government of India, I offered the fullest assistance of technical experts in carrying out this preliminary work.

“The experts have now drawn up, with the co-operation of the engineers from Bengal, a Preliminary Memorandum on the Unified Development of the Damodar River Valley. Copies of this Memorandum have already been in the hands of the Government of Bengal and Bihar.

“With regard to this Memorandum, I feel it my duty to say, and I am sure in this I am voicing your sentiments, that we are grateful to Mr. Voorduin for the preparation of this draft Memorandum and also to the ready co-operation which was offered to him by the engineering staff of the Bengal Government. Mr. Matthews, the Chairman of the Central Power Technical Board, has also given us the benefit of his advice, and at a later stage, I have no doubt, that we shall receive all the assistance from Mr. Khosla, the Chairman of the Waterways and Navigation Board.

“For the present we have before us now a very clear, a very comprehensive and a very essential survey of the full possibilities of the Damodar River Valley, accompanied by adequate data to enable us to take the next step with confidence.

“The reason why we have met today is to consider this Preliminary Memorandum and the points that arise out of it. These points are set in the agenda which is prepared for this meeting. The agenda contains a full list of matters arising out of the Preliminary Memorandum and which require immediate attention. As it has already been circulated to the Governments of Bengal and Bihar, it is unnecessary for me to go over it again. I shall, therefore, content myself with making two general observations (1) with regard to matters of policy, and (2) with regard to questions of method and procedure.

“Flood control is a matter of policy. I hope that there will be general agreement as to the desirability of providing that measure of flood protection as will ensure full safety to the vulnerable area of the Damodar Basin against even the most adverse combination of foreseeable natural circumstances. I am glad to say that the scheme drawn up in the Preliminary Memorandum does provide for that full measure of safety.

“The second matter of policy is the collective responsibility of the three Governments assembled here to put their shoulders to the task. I believe that there will be general agreement that the findings in the Preliminary Memorandum justify the three Governments in proceeding energetically with the development of the Damodar River Valley on the general lines indicated in the Memorandum.

“The project is a welcome one to the Government of India. It very clearly shows a fine prospect of the control of the river, a prospect of controlling floods, of securing a fine area for perennial irrigation with resultant insurance against famine and a much needed supply of power. I am sure it will be more than welcome to the Governments of Bengal and Bihar, if they realise what the project will mean to them and their people.

“In concrete terms, the project will give them (1) an aggregate controlled reservoir capacity of about 4,700,000 acre-feet, (2) sufficient water for perennial irrigation of about 760,000 acres besides water for navigation purposes, (3) electrical energy amounting to 300,000 kilowatts, and (4) it would serve to promote directly the welfare of 5 million people and indirectly of many more millions.

“Coming now to the question of methods and procedure, we have to decide upon the following points which I am placing before you in order of priority :—

- (1) Selections of dam sites to be taken up first;
- (2) Further detailed investigations as to the selected dam sites before construction can begin ;
- (3) The agency for such further preliminary investigations ;
- (4) The agency for designing and construction of dams ;
- (5) The creation of high grade administrative machinery to co-ordinate and push forward the vast amount of work, both technical and administrative, that will have to be done during the stages of investigations and construction that are to follow ; and
- (6) A series of surveys relating to the best utilisation of water and power that will be eventually available in the developed areas.

“I would like to emphasize the need for a quick decision on the points relating to method and procedure. The project is no doubt primarily for the establishment of safety and the development of a

multi-purpose river basin project. But it cannot be forgotten that the project is a post-war employment project. As the war is now over on all fronts, we are faced with the problems of peace one of which is to prevent unemployment which, with the sudden cancellation and the reduction of war employment and expenditure, is going to be one of the gravest problems in our domestic economy.

Central Government's Part

“From this point of view, the Damodar Valley Project is a matter of grave urgency, and it would be a criminal folly not to come to an early decision, without which it is not possible for us to proceed further in the matter. I, therefore, hope and trust that, with your cooperation, we should be able today to return with our decisions fully and firmly made.

“ Before closing, let me tell you that the Government of India is very keen, very earnest and is prepared to play its full part in carrying through its project.

(1) The Government of India in conformity with their earlier declarations recognise their responsibility for doing all that they can to speed up the project on approved lines, and to this end will endeavour to the best of their ability. Though the form of the authority to carry out the project and the manner of setting it up is yet to be defined, the original view of the Government that such an authority should be set up remains unaltered.

(2) The Government of India is prepared to assume direct responsibility for securing the staff and organisation necessary to carry out all further preliminary investigation in such manner as will facilitate and expedite construction with such assistance as the two Provinces can render without any serious detriment to their post-war development works. The Government of India, however, realise the shortage of engineering manpower in Bengal and will endeavour to find the necessary staff by drawing upon the services, if found available, of a military unit and its equipment to assist in preliminary investigation. This will avoid drawing on the strained engineering resources of the Province at a larger extent than is necessary and will secure a most rapid supply of equipment.

(3) The Centre is prepared to advance, initially, the funds necessary for the further preliminary investigations undertaken by them which

are necessary for the main project of the understanding that such preliminary expenses will be charged to the project if it materialises and divided half and half between the Centre and the Province if it does not materialise.

“There is only one thing which the Government of India expects the Provinces to do. It expects the Provinces to bear in mind the absolute necessity of ensuring that the benefits of the project get ultimately right down to the grass roots, i.e. everyone living in the Valley and some of those in the vicinity, all have their share in the prosperity which the project should bring. This, in my view, is essential, and it is for this reason that we want the establishment of some agency early enough so that that agency can set about planning at once in the manner in which its essential and ultimate object can be secured.”

CONFERENCE DISCUSSIONS

The Conference decided to proceed rapidly with further investigation and progress in regard to the Unified and Multipurpose Damodar Valley Development Project.

It was agreed that the scheme should provide the maximum measure of flood protection that might be necessary against the most favourable combination of natural circumstances.

Further investigation of possible dam sites on the Damodar River would be necessary before starting actual construction, and among the sites which required such investigation were Maithon, Aiyar and Sonalapur. The Conference discussed the technical aspects of the question and decided that the order of priority of investigation should be, Maithon first, Aiyar second and Sonalapur third ; and that the Central Technical Power Board should prepare project reports for each of those dam sites—in the case of Sonalapur dealing in particular with possible effects on coal production.

Necessary Staff

The Central Government would try to secure staff, at the earliest possible opportunity, for the further detailed investigations required for such project reports. Meanwhile, however, investigations should be carried on by such staff as was immediately available.

The Conference agreed that the entire staff engaged on further investigation of dam sites should work under the technical direction of the Central Technical Power Board so that unified control of the preliminary operations could be ensured.

It was further decided to invite four engineers from the U.S.A. to advise on the design and construction of the first two dams to be built under the proposed unified scheme. The engineers would constitute a Technical Mission and should arrive, if possible, in India early next year. It was hoped that by that time the required data would be collected and available.

While the ultimate intention is to constitute a Damodar Valley Authority for the administration and carrying out of the Scheme, the Conference decided that, as an interim measure, the Central Government should appoint a high-ranking Administrative Officer to co-ordinate all preliminary action and rapidly to push through investigations connected with the proposed Project.

It was agreed that investigation should be undertaken simultaneously for the various other problems connected with the scheme. The Irrigation Departments of the Bengal and Bihar Governments, in consultation with the Central Irrigation, Waterways and Navigation Commission, should investigate the best methods of utilising the water made available for irrigation.

Other subjects to be investigated include the development of power demand, including the setting up of nursery stations, anti-erosion works, navigational, geological and the water supply aspects of the scheme and the lay-out of transmission lines.

The following representatives of the Central Government and the Government of Bengal and Bihar attended the Conference :—

Government of India.—Mr. H. C. Prior, Secretary, Labour Department ; Mr. D. L. Mazumdar, Deputy Secretary, Labour Department; Mr. M. Ikramullah, Joint Secretary, Supply Department; Mr. H. M. Mathews, Chairman, Central Technical Power Board ; Mr. W. L. Voordin, Hydro-Electric Member, Central Technical Power Board ; Mr. C. Coates, Deputy Secretary, Supply Department; Mr. J. R. Harrison, Deputy Coal Commissioner.

Government of Bengal.—Mr. O. M. Martin, Adviser to H. E. the Governor, Communication and Works Department; Mr. R. L. Walker,

Adviser to H. E. the Governor, Finance, Commerce, Labour and Industries Department; Mr. B. B. Sarkar, Secretary, Communication and Works Department; Rai Bahadur S. K. Gupta, Chief Engineer, Irrigation Department, West Bengal; Mr. Man Singh, Superintending Engineer on Special Duty, Damodar Scheme ; Major M. Jafar, Director of Public Health and Mr. Aziz Ahmed, Joint Secretary, Post-War Reconstruction Department.

Government of Bihar.—Mr. S. M. Dhar, Development Commissioner and Mr. W. G. Caine, Chief Engineer, Irrigation and Power.

■ ■