

* Strike by the Workers of the Government of India Press, Calcutta

Mr. President: I have received a notice from Sree Satyapriya banerjee of his intention to move for the adjournment of the business of the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely:

“Strike by the workers of the Government of India Press, Calcutta, on account of the failure of the Government to redress their grievances.”

I find that the Honourable Member had put in a question on the subject some two or three days back and wanted to have it answered as a short notice question, but the honourable Member for Labour did not accept the short notice question. At that time there was no strike actually going on. The present notice alleges a strike. There, it was a question of impending strike. Is there any strike at all ?

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Labour Member): I have no information with regard to this matter.

Sree Satyapriya Banerjee (Chittagoing and Rajshahi Divisions : Non-Muhammadan Rural) : I have definite information that there is a strike going on and yesterday's Free Press Journal also contained that news.

Mr. President : The source of the information is the Free Press Journal ?

Sree Satyapriya Banerjee : The Leader of the Opposition has also got a telegram.

Mr. President: Is the Honourable Member in a position to state the nature of the strike ? Is the whole Press on strike ?

*Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. V-No. 4, 4th April 1946, pp. 3522-24.

Sree Satyapriya Banerjee : Yes, Sir, about 1200 workers are involved.

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : The position is this. A notice of strike was given on the 13th of March by the press workers of the Calcutta Press. Similar notices of strike were given by presses belonging to the Government of India located at various other places. The Calcutta Press workers gave a list of 13 demands and the Government has taken into consideration all of them and has made the following concessions to the press workers—compensation leave granted for attendance on gazetted holidays on which the press is closed, promotion of piece workers to classes above efficiency bar accelerated, increased rates of dearness allowance to have retrospective effect from 1st July 1944 instead of from 1st January 1945 ; half the dearness allowance to count as pay for calculation of pension; inferior servants to draw pension up to a limit of half average pay ; the full period of strike will be treated as leave on average pay and debited against leave account due to uncertain conditions ; an officer on special duty appointed to report on anomalies existing in the pay and conditions of service of the Press workers ; hours of work have been reduced from 48 to 44 for day shifts and from 44 to 38 for night shifts ; piece-workers have been granted 23 days holiday with pay, same as salaried workers.

With regard to other demands which relate, for instance, to revision of scales of pay and increase in subsidy rates, Government has informed all workers in all the presses belonging to Government that this matter must remain pending until the report made by the Salaries Commission, and Government therefore is not in a position at present to make any announcement with regard to these demands.

I may tell the House that so far as the strike in the Delhi Press is concerned, these concessions have been accepted by the workers and they have gone back to work. I do not see any reason why the same attitude should not be taken by the press workers in the Calcutta Press. I understood just now from office that one of the demands which they are pressing immediately is that further reduction should be made from 44 hours to 40 hours. I am unable to say anything definitely immediately, but that is a matter which I am prepared to consider. I do not think that any useful purpose will be served by discussing this matter on an adjournment motion.

Sree Satyapriya Banerjee : Sir, it may be within the knowledge of the Honourable Member that the Regional Commissioner of his Department recommended 42 hours and he turned down that proposal and insisted on 44 hours. Moreover, Sir, the workers of the Bengal Government Press work only 40 hours a week.

Mr. President : That is cross-examination on the merits. I am at present wanting to know how, in view of what has fallen from the Honourable Labour Member, the matter is of sufficient urgent and public importance.

Sree Satyapriya Banerjee : Sir, so many workers are involved and the lives of such a large number of workers and their dependents are at stake, being faced with starvation; Sir and if that is not a matter of sufficient urgent and public importance, I do not know what else can be.

Prof. N.G. Ranga (Guntur cum Nellore : Non-Muhammadan Rural): Sir, may I also make one submission. If it is possible for the Department to send any special officer to go and explain their own concessions to these workers and reason with them, it may be possible for them to prevent the continuance of this strike. After all, 1300 workers going on strike is a very serious matter even from the point of view of Government getting all their work stopped there.

The Honourable Dr. B.R. Ambedkar : I understand there is a Regional Labour Commissioner stationed in Calcutta who has been instructed by the Labour Department to get into touch with the workers and see what can be done.

Seth Govind Das (Central Provinces Hindi Divisions : Non-Muhammadan) : The Honourable Member said that notices have been received about strikes in various presses. Is there any strike or danger of a strike anywhere else besides Calcutta ?

Mr. President : I do not think that is relevant to the present issue. In view of what the Labour Member said, I do not think the matter is of such a type that I should give my consent to the adjournment motion being moved.