

***ON MINISTERS' SALARIES BILL**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Bombay City, Byculla and Parel): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a statement, and I use the word “statement” very advisedly. I am not moving an amendment to the Bill which has been proposed by my honourable friend the Prime Minister, nor do I propose to carry this matter to a division. The Ministers’ Salaries Bill, I think, ought to have been an agreed measure, and it need not have been carried through, as the Ministry proposes to do, by a purely party vote. That course the Ministry has not chosen to take, and I am therefore bound to make this statement with the simple object of lodging a protest against the principle of the Bill. Notwithstanding what the Prime Minister has said in moving this Bill—and no doubt every member of this House will feel a greater degree of respect for him for the sincerity with which he spoke and for the high principles he has enunciated regarding the conduct of Ministers—taking the view of the situation as a practical man, looking at things from a practical point of view, I do not think that I can accept the standard salary for Ministers which has been laid down in this Bill.

Sir, before I explain the reasons why I think that this should not be a standard salary for the Ministers, I would like to place before the House some figures relating to the salaries which are paid to Ministers outside India and also to Ministers in India, so that the House may at the outset be able to realize what a great departure we are making from the standard that exists today. I have here with me a few figures which I have collected. In the Irish Free State there are 11 Ministers; every one of them is paid a salary of £ 1,700 per annum, which according to my calculation comes approximately to Rs. 2,000 a month. In South Africa there are 13 Ministers, 2 without portfolio. The Prime Minister is paid £3,500 per annum; the other Ministers are paid £ 2,500 per annum, which according to my calculation comes to Rs. 2,900 per month. I have not been able to get the figures for Australia, but the figures for Canada are as follows: The Prime Minister gets \$ 19,000 per annum; there are 16 Ministers in Canada altogether, and the Ministers get \$ 14,000 per annum, which includes \$ 4,000 for sessional allowance. In New Zealand there are 12 Ministers. The Prime

*B.L.A. Debates, Vol. 1, pp. 247-54, dated 23rd August 1937.

Minister there gets £ 1,800 plus a residence, and a Minister gets £ 1,370 per annum which includes £ 200 for house allowance, so that the salary for the Minister comes to Rs. 1,500 per month.

Coming to India and leaving aside for a moment the salaries that were paid before the new Government of India Act came into operation, and taking the salaries that were fixed for the interim Ministers—and nobody could say that the interim Ministries were not Ministries which were, to some extent at any rate, responsible to public opinion—these are the figures which I find from a table submitted to Parliament. In Madras, the Prime Minister was paid a salary of Rs. 3,000, and each of the Ministers was paid Rs. 2,500 plus a house. In Bombay the salary was Rs. 4,000 for the Prime Minister, and for the Ministers Rs. 3,500 each. In the United Provinces each Minister including the Prime Minister was paid Rs. 2,500. In the Central Provinces the Prime Minister was paid Rs. 3,000, and each Minister was paid Rs. 2,250. In Bihar the Prime Minister was paid Rs. 2,500 and a Minister was paid Rs. 2,000. In Orissa the Ministers were paid Rs. 1,000 each.

Now, Sir, compare these figures with the figures proposed in the Ministers' Salaries Bill. There can be no doubt that there is a great departure from the prevailing standard. It seems to me that the difference is not merely a difference of degree but is a difference of kind, and I submit a difference of kind is a difference of principle. What are the considerations that ought to prevail in the fixing of the salary of a Minister? In my judgment, Sir, there are four considerations which ought to prevail. The first is the consideration of the social standard of the Ministers, who are undoubtedly the social leaders of the community; secondly, considerations of competency; thirdly considerations of democracy; and, fourthly, considerations of integrity and purity of administration. I am not prepared to push the first consideration to any unreasonable length. Personally, I should have thought myself that the Ministers of the country, who are the first citizens of the country, should lead a life which is cultured, which cares for art, which cares for learning, and which ought to be a model for the rest. But if our friends do not care to consider that aspect of the case, as I say, I am prepared to leave it out of consideration altogether. But surely the consideration of competency, the consideration of democracy and the consideration of integrity could never be overlooked in fixing the salaries of Ministers. I do not know what view the Honourable the Prime Minister takes of the duties and functions of the Ministers. If the view is that the Ministers are to do nothing more than go about and unfurl flags and receive salutes from crimson clad ladies forming guards of honour, then that is a different proposition. In my view, and I want to emphasise it with all the emphasis I am capable of, if there is anything we expect from the Ministry, it is competency. I have no doubt in my mind that of the three organs of the State, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, the executive is the

main spring of action. It is the executive which is to study the problems that are facing the country ; it is the executive which is to show what solutions can be proposed for solving those problems ; in short, Sir, it is the executive that must be the brain trust, if we are to solve the various problems with which we are faced and to get the best out of this constitution.

The question that arises in my mind is this, whether the salary that is proposed is a salary which is capable of inviting men who are capable and who have the necessary competence to face the problems and suggest remedies. Looking at the question dispassionately in the light of the circumstances which I see prevalent in this country, I cannot give, Sir, an affirmative answer. First of all, there is this fact to be considered, namely, that there are other walks of life in which the prizes are far greater than the prizes which have been provided for the Ministry. Many people who have competence, who have ambitions, will seek other walks of life rather than come to the Ministry and have the responsibility of the Ministry. I could have understood if the ministry was legislating that nobody should receive a salary of more than five hundred in any walk of life. If they had done so, things would have been otherwise. But they are not doing so. They are driving away competent men in other walks of life. This is one aspect of the matter. The second aspect to be considered is this. Looking at the situation in India, I cannot help saying that the intellectual class from which you can draw men who are competent enough to undertake the responsibility is very very small. Sir, in this country, on account of the social system which has been prevalent and which the British regime has not been able to damage very much, education was confined to a small class. Education has never been the privilege and the opportunity of many. In fact, under the Chatur Varna it is only one class who could take education and the rest were debarred. Consequently, a large mass of the people are absolutely so situated that they cannot throw forth leaders who can be taken in the Ministry to carry on the administration. Therefore, my submission is that the salary is not a salary which can invite competent people to carry on the administration.

Now, Sir, coming to the question of democracy, what will be the effect of the salary ? I would not mince matters. I would straightway say that the consequence of this salary will be this : Either there would be people who do not care for money, who have private means but who want to capture political power in order that they may use that political power for the advancement of their own class or their own community. That would be one consequence. The other consequence would be that men who cannot make any money in other walks of life will get into the Ministry. There can be no other consequence. (Laughter.) My friends may laugh, but I have no hesitation in saying that that will be the consequence of this Bill. There can be no greater disaster if what I apprehend comes true. We want that the

political power which is given under the Government of India Act should not be cornered or monopolised by a few who have money and who do not care for salary. Nor do we want in the interest of the masses that the power should go into the hands of incompetent people.

Coming to the other question, namely, the integrity and purity of administration, a friend of mine who is Congress-minded said one thing which I would like to repeat on the floor of this House. He said that if the Governor were to give him a contract for the supply of Ministers, he would very readily undertake the contract and also give something to the Presidency of Bombay for giving him that contract. I think, Sir, that remark is very pregnant. There are hotels in Europe who pay to the managers to allow them to wait. That shows what possibilities there are open to people who are not kept above temptation to pick something which they cannot get by way of pay. I am not saying anything in regard to the present Ministry, because we are discussing the principle of the Bill, not at all personalities involved. Even with higher salaries I admit, and readily admit, that you can never buy the dishonesty of a dishonest man. Pay him any salary you like, if he is dishonest, he will be dishonest. That is, however, not the consideration. The consideration is whether you cannot fix your salary in such a way that the Minister will be kept beyond temptation. Sir, we have had in this province a salary of Rs. 4,000 and a salary of Rs. 3,000, and yet there were scandals relating to the administration. If even with salaries of Rs. 3,000 and Rs. 4,000 it is not possible to avoid scandals. I fear very much a salary of Rs. 500 may produce far greater scandals than have been produced in the past. In this, the question that arises for consideration is not merely whether the salary is adequate. But my view is that it is not the close of the argument. The problem of salary has to be considered from two points of view. From the standpoint of the individual the consideration is one of adequacy. From the standpoint of the State the consideration is a consideration of safety and purity of administration. A man may say that a particular salary is an adequate salary for him. But it does not follow that you should not consider whether from the public point of view it is a safe salary. Lowest standard is not necessarily a safe standard. I believe my friends opposite will have, when they give contracts, to enter a clause that contracts shall not be given merely because the tenders are the lowest. Just as we do not give contracts to persons simply because their standards are the lowest, similarly we cannot allow persons to serve as ministers merely because they are prepared to accept the lowest salary. We have to consider the other side of the question whether the contractor who is offering the lowest tender is capable of discharging the obligations of his task. Therefore, I am suggesting that, though the Honourable Minister may say that Rs. 500 salary is good enough, it does not dispose of the argument. The House has to consider whether on this basis it can expect and hope to have an administration which is free from corruption may possibly arise.

Now, Sir, I should like to read to the House a small extract from the report that was made by the committee appointed by the House of Commons in the year 1920 in order to suggest the principles on which the salaries of the Ministers ought to be fixed. This is what the committee observe :

“There are probably few subjects open to more varieties of opinion than the precise amount of salary suited to any given office of Government ; and the Committee disclaiming all pretensions to any infallible rule on a question necessarily so vague, will nevertheless submit some preliminary observations upon the general principles by which they have been governed in the conscientious discharge of an ungracious duty.

“It is impossible not to recognise in its fullest extent the principle, that the people have a right to have their service done at the smallest possible, consistent with its efficient performance. Whether public servants sit in Parliament or not, the principle is the same. The only justification for taxes of any sort, is either necessity or evident public utility. If, notwithstanding the consecutive gleanings of different committees of the House, any sinecures are still existing no time should be lost in abolishing them ; and it will be seen in the course of this report, that the Committee have not failed to do their duty by more than one case of this description.

“If any offices are overpaid they should be reformed. If any can be united with others with benefit to the public this useful species of economy should not be neglected and several suggestions of this sort will be found in the evidence which it is not within the powers given to the Committee to follow up. In short, all departments of Government should be watched with the same view to economy in general which any individual would apply to the management of his own affairs.

“It is almost unnecessary to observe that these general principles do not lead to the absurd conclusion, sometimes imputed to them, that a willingness to accept low pay is any qualification for office. Economy, to deserve the name must be rational; and no consideration of more money can be set in competition with the paramount evident necessity of securing for offices of great trust and confidence the highest class of Intelligence and Integrity. It has been frequently observed, and the observation being founded on truth and reason should never be lost sight of that offices in a free country should not be put beyond the reach of men of moderate fortune. If salaries should be fixed too low a monopoly would be created in the hands of the wealthy, the power of selection by the Crown would be most injuriously restricted, and the public would be deprived of the services of men of limited means, educated with a view to the pursuit of liberal professions, a class furnishing more than any other the talents and industry suited to official life.

“It should be further considered, that the higher offices of Government require an entire devotion of the whole time and attention of those who fill them ; that their own private affairs must necessarily be neglected ; and that if care should be taken on the one hand to avoid the scandal of private fortunes amassed at the public expense, it is neither for the interest nor for

the honour of the country, on the other hand that they should be ruined in its service."

I submit, Sir, that these are principles which any ministry who cares for the service of the country and for the purity of the administration, ought to bear in mind. And I do not think that the present ministry in fixing the salary of Rs. 500 has shown any regard to the principles which I have read out

Now, Sir, what are the principles that have been suggested for the salary that has been fixed in the Bill? The one thing I have heard often said is that the salaries ought to be in accord with the income of the people. I ask the question, if that is so, can it be said that Rs. 500 salary is in accord with the income of the people? What is the income of the people? I have here figures given in the "Harijan"—I suppose a standard authority—from which I may quote.

The Honourable Mr. B. G. Kher: I am glad you read it.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: I do always read it. According to the figures given here, the income per head in the United Kingdom is £ 50 per annum; in the United States of America, £ 100; in France, £ 40; in Australia, £ 70; in Canada, £ 75; in India, £ 4. (*The Honourable Mr. B. G. Kher:* Hear, hear.) Now, Sir, if all this is done on the principle that the salaries ought to be in accord with the income of the people, then I do not understand how it can be suggested that the salary of Rs. 500 a month is in accord with the £4 income of the people of this country. Surely, if my honourable friend is basing the Bill which he has placed before us, on this principle, namely, that the salary should be in accord with the income of the people, then Rs. 500, I submit, is a most extravagant sum to take for the ministry; it ought to be less than Rs. 100; it ought to be Rs. 75, as was suggested. If they are honest, if they want to fix this sum as a matter of justice and not to placate the people, then why not be logical in your honesty? Why fix a sum which is out of all proportion to the income of the people?

The second thing that has been suggested in justification of the low salary is that the ministers ought to live in such a manner that they should look as though they were of the people, that there should be no distinction between ministers on the one hand and the private citizens on the other. Sir, if this is the object of the ministry, that all distinctions should be abolished, that they should look as though they were of the people, that the people should have full confidence in them as though they belong to the people, then, my submission is that this is not the method of winning the confidence of the people. Sir, in this country, the cleavages, social and religious, are far greater than they exist anywhere else in the world. We have here—I am speaking of this presidency for the moment—we have the division of Brahmins and non-Brahmins; the division of the touchables and the untouchables—I am confining myself again to the Hindus—we have the division of Maharashtrians *versus* Gujaratis; we have the division of Gujaratis *versus* Kanarese. And add to all that the difference between the Hindus and the Mahomedans. If you want to create confidence

in the administration, then, I submit that the proper way of doing it is not for the ministers to go about in the streets half clad, showing their anatomy ; or smoking bidis in place of cigarettes ; or going in third class or in bullock carts. Nobody is going to be deceived by these things. If you want to gain the confidence of the people, then, I submit that the only way of doing it is to constitute your Government, your ministry, your civil services, in such a way that it does not become the monopoly of any particular class or any particular community. (Cheers.) We shall watch what the ministry is going to do about it. But if they want to pretend that they are going to create confidence by doing these, what I might call, puerile things, then, I submit it is an attempt that is doomed to failure.

Then, Sir, the ministry has come forward with what might be called an act of renunciation on their part. It reminds me of the conduct and the way of life of medieval monks. The medieval monks when they started their careers as monks were required to take the three vows—the vow of celibacy, the vow of chastity, and the vow of poverty.

I do not know whether my honourable friends have taken the vow of celibacy. (Laughter) I suppose it is too late for them now to do it. I do not know whether they have taken the vow of chastity. But if they have and if they break it, it is certainly not a matter of grievance for this House. But they certainly have taken the vow of poverty, as I see from this Bill. Can they keep this vow ? The medieval monks very seldom succeeded in maintaining their vow of chastity, but they always succeeded in maintaining their vow of poverty. Why was it so ? That was because the monks had no families ; they were single, solitary individuals, with no obligations to any one. The ministers in this respect stand in a different situation altogether. They have certainly large responsibilities arising out of their families and their children. I cannot see how they can succeed in keeping up to their vow of poverty. I wish them success, but I doubt very much whether they will be able to do it.

Mr. A. V. Chitre: They will be drawing their dividends ?

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Now, Sir, there is one other matter which I would like to speak about. Is there any necessity for this Bill ? Personally myself, I do not think that the Bill is a necessary Bill. Nobody can compel the Honourable Ministers to take more than what they desire. And surely, without bringing in the Bill, and allowing the salaries fixed by the Governor to remain at the figure at which they are fixed, they could take Rs. 500 and return the rest either to the State or to the Party chest, whichever they liked ? Why is it they do not do that ? Why is it that they are bringing in this Bill ? And that is where the catch comes in. I venture to say that this Bill is not put forth out of any pious motive : there is a strategy behind it. That strategy is this, that they should always remain in the saddle and nobody else should take their places.

The Honourable Mr. K. M. Munshi: You are welcome !

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: This reminds me of how at the Round Table Conference the Conservative Party was trying to strengthen its provision by introducing certain clauses in the Government of India Bill which could have no other purpose except to restrict the freedom of action of the Labour Party. Many of us used to question them as to why they wanted certain clauses to be introduced into the Government of India Act which apparently had no justification. They could give no reply, but everybody knew that what they were doing was really to forestall the Labour Government should it ever come into power, and prevent it from undoing what the Conservative Party wanted to do. If my learned friends want to adopt that policy, they are welcome to do so. We cannot prevent them. All I want to say is that this is a misuse of their power.

Let me at this stage make it clear, because I am likely to be misunderstood, that when I am protesting at the salary of Rs. 500 as being too low. I am not at all suggesting that the salary of Rs. 4,000 or Rs. 3,000 which was suggested by the Interim Ministry was a standard salary. Nobody need draw that conclusion, because I am not going to say that Rs. 4,000 or Rs. 3,000 is a proper salary. I bind myself to no figure. All I say is that Rs. 500 is not a proper salary for a Minister. The statement I have made will no doubt leave me open to the criticism that I am suggesting an extravagance. But I do not feel any embarrassment in making the suggestion that the salary ought to be more than that fixed in the Bill. I am certainly not a recipient of the salary, if it was increased; and, so far as I can see the future, I do not think that I shall ever be a recipient of it.

The Honourable Mr. B. G. Kher: Do not despair.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Well, I need not answer my learned friend. But his policy is what it is; he certainly has deliberately excluded members of the Scheduled Classes from his Cabinet.

The Honourable Mr. K. M. Munshi: They may not like Rs. 500 !

The Honourable the Speaker: Order, order.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: I do not feel any embarrassment in making this proposal, because I am not going to be a recipient of this salary. My motives are motives purely of public policy. Dr. Johnson said that patriotism was the last refuge of scoundrels. He could very well have said that politics also was the last refuge of scoundrels. And it is because I do not want that politics in India should become the last refuge of the scoundrel that I have risen to speak.

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†*Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Bombay City):* Sir, I would just like to say a word to my honourable friend the Prime Minister, whether the whole of the difficulty could not be solved by putting in a lump sum rather than putting in all these different items. I am only suggesting it to him whether we could not then say that a consolidated salary of so much—Rs 750 per

†B.L.A. Debates, Vol. I, p. 279-80, dated 23rd August 1937.

month should be paid to a Minister. I am only suggesting for his consideration whether that would not solve the difficulty.

The Honourable Mr. B. G. Kher: Sir, I thought I had made clear what we had done in Poona, where there were four Government residences available. In Bombay also there will be Government residences available. Those Ministers as also the Speaker and the President who will get accommodation in Government bungalows will not need and will not be paid any allowances. There is no question of consolidating the allowances with salary. For residences which are available from the Government and which they occupy they do not get an allowance. If they have their own houses, whether they choose to occupy them or not is entirely left to them. But for the purposes of a house allowance, we consider that Rs. 100 per month is a reasonable provision. That being the position, I do not think it will be possible to consolidate the salary with the allowance. The arrangement that we have followed in Poona seems to have worked well; the arrangement in Poona was to divide the Government residences available, and I can assure the honourable member Dr. Ambedkar that we are now accommodating in one Government bungalow two or three Ministers where including the out-houses formerly only one Minister used to occupy it in solitary dignity. If we do the same thing in Bombay, after providing residences for the Ministers as also for the Honourable the Speaker and President, there will be some Government residences perhaps available for letting. Therefore, more retrenchment will follow as a result of the arrangement that we have in view.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: I am only trying to point out a way out of the difficulty which has been raised, namely, that the word "allowance" does not occur in the section of the Government of India Act which refers to the salaries of the Ministers. In order, therefore, not to give rise to any contention that an allowance has been fixed in addition to salary which may not be permissible under the Act, what I am suggesting to my honourable friend is that he might consolidate the whole thing and call it salary and drop the word "allowance" and thereby get out of the difficulty. Of course, we have yet to know from the Advocate-General whether the point raised has any substance in it.