

The Honourable Shri Gopinath Bardoloi : Mr. President, Sir, it is with considerable hesitation that I am proposing to make certain observations in regard to article 253, of the Draft. I must take this opportunity of conveying my thanks to the Chairman and the Members of the Drafting Committee for having given be Premiers an opportunity to discuss this and other questions, and also forgiving me an individual interview for the purpose of explaining0 the special difficulties of the Province of

Assam. I must say, however, that while I am not satisfied with what they have proposed, I am surely grateful for their courtesy, I also want to mention in this connection, Sir, the courtesy which I received from the honourable Member for

Finance of the Government of India in respect of reply to certain questions which I had raised in connection with these financial arrangements, deserves grateful acknowledgement.

Now, I think I will not be doing my duty to myself, I will not be doing my duty to my people, if I did not place before this House the real financial situation of the province. To put it, in a word it is facing a financial crisis and unless the Government of India by a short-term measure and the Constitution by a long-term measure did something for pulling this Province up, the situation as it appears to me is very dark in the future. I want to lay special stress on this on account of the special difficulties of the Province, on account of its being now a border Province of India, on account of it being a sort of a guardian of the eastern gates of India.

Sir, talking about the history of the financial arrangements from which this Province is suffering, I do not propose to take the time of the House; but I would like to observe that even from 1919 this Province has been suffering from grossly unfair treatment in the matter of financial arrangement. In 1919, although the Province had not even anything which would go by the name of social service-not even educational institutions enough for giving education to students, when even 10 per cent. of the school-going students had not the opportunity of going to primary schools-even then this Province was put under the obligation of contributing Rs. 15 lakhs to the Centre under the Meston Award. The result was. that the finances of the Province broke down and within seven or eight years the whole thing had to be revised. I think in 1927 or 1928 , Sir Alexander Muddiman revised this scheme and exonerated Assam from the payment of this contribution. Soon after that there was a proposal for the revision of the financial arrangements but things went on like that till the picture of the new Constitution under the Government of India Act of 1935 loomed large before the country. At that time, the Percy Committee thought that the arrangement under which Assam was suffering must be removed and a fair deal must be meted out to the Province. I do not propose to repeat the various stages through which the final award given by Sir, Otto Niemeyer had to be accepted, but all that the Otto Niemeyer award gave us was only Rs. 30 lakhs of subvention. The result was that the situation which existed in the Province in 1919 continued; no social service whatsoever could be possible with the finances available and no educational institution worth the name. I do not think the Government of the time was very anxious for that either. It was a planters' raj. It cannot be the object of an alien Government to educate the people; and when things could run so smoothly possibly without education and other social service to pay, they thought that things would go on like that.

This was the position of Assam before partition. The period of deficit continued in the budget of the Province excepting perhaps in those two years of war when some revenue was obtained on account of sales-tax on petrol etc., and which brought in an amount of about a crore or more each year. But all these years the provincial budget had to run at a deficit although as I said just now the social services were *nil*, and there were no educational institutions where you could educate your children, and although in every sphere of development we were held up. This was the pre-partition position. With partition, is thrown a responsibility which I hope we have all been able to realise. We are cut off from India, and though most of the linking work is being done under the provision of Central grants, a lot of provincial expenditure had also to be incurred in order that from the link up to the areas within the Province some kind of communication is possible. But the most important fact in regard to communications is this. All the four hundred miles of border area verges on Pakistan, China or Burma and the border with Pakistan runs through hills. The entire economy of this Hills area was disturbed and these poor people in the border areas, particularly the hill people, have to depend entirely upon supplies from the Province of Assam instead of Sylhet or Mymensingh as it formerly used to do. The necessity therefore of linking these areas with road communications has become very imperative and the Government had to undertake the work. Some money was provided in the post-war grant for that purpose; but I regret to say that on account of the curtailment of the post-war budget, these activities had, most unfortunately, to be curtailed.

Then, on account of the creation of the border, and I must add, the difficulties created by the communists, we had to increase the number of the provincial police force to an extent which bears no proportion whatsoever to the provincial revenue and expenditure. We had to increase our expenditure on police by more than 120 per cent. Those frontier areas which were formerly looked after by the Centre through the Assam Rifles which were entirely paid by the Government of India, had also to have provincial police force. The result was that about five districts had to be immediately posted with police forces, on account of which, formerly, the Province did not have to pay anything.

Sir, I want specially to stress the mischief from which the Province is suffering and is likely to suffer from the communist activities in that part of the country. You know that an attempt is being made by this party to connect themselves with people of the same profession in Burma and China. Already a recrudescence of violent actions has taken place;—and if you go through the newspapers you will see that the tactics they have adopted at Dibrugarh are the same as they adopted in Calcutta, namely trying to occupy places of Government by violent means like acid-throwing, bombing, hand-grenading, pistol-firing etc. Now, the police might show you one way of putting down some of these activities; but my point of view is—and I hope this view is shared by all of us—that if we want to root out the evils of communism it can ever be done with the police force alone. We have to take recourse to ameliorative measures to raise the standard of the people and give them training in a—sort of self-government which I suppose is being preached by these communists also. That can be done only by having a very much more per capita expenditure on the people than the Province is able to give today from its finances.

What I want to point out, Sir, is that these circumstances have made the financial position of the Province very difficult. Its original revenue was Rs. $3\frac{1}{2}$ crores just before partition. It is almost the same today. Today we have time over 5 crores with the Government of India grants. But we cannot definitely manage with that income of Rs. 5 crores and over. Already the budget is suffering a deficit of Rs. 70 lakhs; I understand Rs. 30 lakhs will come in as a supplementary demand in the coming session. So it is absolutely necessary that there should be an increase in the provincial revenues by Rs. $1\frac{1}{2}$ crores if the Province is to run in the most normal level, according to the prepartition standard. In the meanwhile, through the kindness of the Finance Ministry, we, as all other Provinces, have got some development grant. It has been calculated that that grant will throw a recurring expenditure of about Rs. $2\frac{1}{2}$ crores a year on the Provincial finance. In other words for the immediate requirements of the Province we shall require Rs. 4 crores $1\frac{1}{2}$ crores immediately and $2\frac{1}{2}$ crores in the course of the next four or five years.

The point therefore is, how to meet this demand. I have tried to examine the benevolent provisions that have been put in the Draft, one of which we accepted just now—article 251. According to the present distribution, on the basis of which money is given to Assam, we will get only 3 per cent. of that revenue and it does not come to more than $1\frac{1}{4}$ crores. There is of course, the subvention of Rs. 30 lakhs. I do not know what will be proposed in the future by the Financial Commission. We have also been given about Rs. 40 lakhs on jute duty. But when I am speaking about the deficit of the Province, I want to say that all this income has been taken into consideration and the deficit is there in spite of them. The fact, therefore, is how are you going to get the money? I am prepared to believe that the Financial Commission would be very charitable to the Province and will be able to find some more money, but will that be enough to meet the requirements of the Province even to the minimum? That is the reason why I think, Sir, that a share of the excise duties, particularly on products which are produced in the Province, might very well be allocated to us and that was the reason why I had proposed two amendments. The existing provision is to the effect that "if only Parliament passes the law, the duty will be distributable". I wanted that that clause should be substituted by a positive clause by which the duty would be distributable as a matter of fact without any reservation as to legislation by Parliament. In that connection I want to say that for the last twelve years the same provision has been there in the constitution, but no Province has got any benefit out of it because the Parliament in the meantime did not pass any law. What, therefore, I want in order that the Province might get a little benefit is that the excise duty on tea which is produced in Assam—and the total produce of Assam is two-thirds that of India,—petroleum which I suppose is produced only in Assam and kerosene, should be distributable immediately after the House passes this provision.

The second point was that I wanted that of this duty 50 per cent. should be allotted to the Province. I should like to point out in this connection that the Government of India gets on petroleum and kerosene about Rs. 2 crores of revenue from the produce of Assam. I want you also to consider that the mineral Wealth of this Province is being depleted every day by the extraction of petroleum and when it is exhausted the Province will have to suffer a big loss of revenue, even on crude petrol, and ground rent. If at least a fair portion of the duty is given to us it would not only be helpful but equitable. Then as regards tea, two thirds of tea that is produced in India comes from Assam. The Government of Assam gave a special concession to the tea planters in the matter of land revenue and many other things for bringing this industry into existence. Now that sphere has been taken by the Centre and the Province has suffered a lot and should be entitled to obtain compensation on account of that. I thought therefore that I was making only a fair proposition when I was putting these facts before the House. When the Centre was getting Rs. 8 crores I could see no reason why 50 per cent. of the duty could not be allotted to the Province so that it might be saved from the difficulties which it is facing today. Against that argument, it may possibly be advanced that the overriding needs of the Centre should outweigh the considerations of a particular Province. I am no less an appreciator of the overriding needs of the Centre; mine is a frontier Province and I should realise it more than any other man. But after all Assam is India also, it is a very important part of India today on account of the frontier; and therefore if you wanted that it should function as a province it should have a level of administration which should at least be able to stand in such a manner as you could keep the people contented, you could have a little development and be able to do away with those evil forces which are out to destroy society today. I was therefore not claiming anything extraordinary. I again plead that I am not asking for anything extraordinary, but only for a fair deal.

Then, Sir, I would like you to consider the expenditure which provincial revenues have been able to incur per head of the population. In that connection, if I want to compare with a province like Bombay, I should not be mistaken. I wish well to any other province, but it does us good to have that comparison. The poor province of Orissa has been able to spend only Rs. 3 per head of the population for their social service including Government expenditure also. Assam is able now to spend only Rs.

5. But Bombay spends, I think, Rs. 22 per head of the population and that does not include, I am sure,, the food grains concessions that the Government of India make to keep up supply to the deficit areas. If all that is taken into account, I am sure the expenditure per head will come to Rs. 30 in the case of Bombay. I do not want to cast any reflection on anybody. When passing the Objectives Resolution, we had high hopes of the future of India. When passing the clauses on Fundamental Rights, we thought that poverty, distress, disease and ignorance will be dispelled from the face of India. Now, I want to ask : How are you going to do it ? Well. I am personally not saying that my amendments are sacrosanct. All that I plead to you is that unless you look at the whole thing from that standpoint, India is not going to be the India of the Objectives Resolution or according to the Fundamental Rights that we have passed. I further want to point out to you that Bombay possibly imposes a sort of taxation for all exports of textiles that go out of Bombay. On the other hand, look at Assam with Rs. 5 per head. Its sources of revenues from petroleum and tea are depleted in every way and it is not able to give the necessary social services that the State ought to give to the people who are so backward and lowly; I want to put it to you whether this not a case of :

To him that hath, more shall be given, and

From him that hath not, even the little that he hath shall be taken away.

I believe that this state of things will not be allowed by this House to be continued and that if they are not able to accept my amendment, then at least they will look at the questions of provinces like Orissa and Assam with sympathy for adequate grants.