

TAXES ON PRESS CRITICISED

Heated Debate In Assembly

From Our Special Representative
NEW DELHI, September 1.

The issue whether taxes on newspapers and advertisements were an infringement of the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under the new Constitution provoked an excited debate in the Constituent Assembly today.

Mr. Deshbandhu Gupta, a journalist member of the House who raised this question over a point of order, quoted in support of his proposition the judgment of the U. S. Supreme Court in the Louisiana Case and suggested that any tax levied on the press was "ultra vires" as it sought to curtail the freedom of the press.

The Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, drew the attention of the House to an amendment standing in the names of 104 members of the Assembly including Mr. Gupta, suggesting transfer of this item from the State to the Union list, and asked whether a member, after having signed his acceptance of an amendment, could raise a point of order.

GOVERNMENT'S VIEW

Dr. Ambedkar agreed that if a tax levied upon a newspaper was unduly severe, then it might be "ultra vires" but to lay down that anything which affected newspapers or freedom of speech would be "ultra vires" was a thing that the House would not accept. He proceeded to point out that if the object of the amendment of 104 members was to enable newspapers to escape taxation, it would be defeated, as by its inclusion in the desired part of the Union list, it left it open to levy taxes or excise duties on newspapers.

Mr. Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar reinforced Dr. Ambedkar's arguments and said that taxation provisions should not be mixed up with fundamental rights. "The House would be taking a dangerous step if it decided that particular people are exempt from taxes," he warned.

The President said that he would give his ruling on the point later as he wanted to have time to consider all aspects of the point in question.

The House completed consideration of the Union list and disposed of over a dozen items in the provincial list before it adjourned for tomorrow.