

Lok Sabha Adopts Bill To Curb Secessionism

VOTE IS UNANIMOUS AS DMK MEMBERS STAY AWAY

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NEW DELHI, May 2.

A BILL to amend the Constitution so that secessionist moves can be countered effectively was passed unanimously by the Lok Sabha today.

However, the absence of the DMK members at the time of voting somewhat detracted from the impressive unanimity with which the House passed the Constitution (Sixteenth Amendment) Bill.

Mr. E. Sezhiyan, who said that the Bill was popularly known in Madras as the "Anti-DMK Bill," moved an amendment, proposing the indefinite postponement of further consideration of the Bill. It was rejected by a large majority.

The Bill seeks to give effect to the recommendations of the Committee on National Integration and Regionalism appointed by the National Integration Council.

In the amended form Article 19 of the Constitution will permit the State to impose reasonable restrictions on fundamental rights in the interests of "the sovereignty and integrity of India."

CANDIDATES' OATH

Mr. A. K. Sen, Law Minister, said Article 19 in its present form did not empower the Government to impose restrictions on any group or individual even in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of the country. "We seek to do this through the amending Bill. This is absolutely necessary."

The Minister explained that, under the Bill, candidates for both Parliament and the State legislatures in future elections would have to take an oath or make an affirmation, pledging loyalty to the Constitution. No party could in future advocate secession as part of its electoral plank.

He said that through this measure it was proposed to bring into operation strict laws "which will penalise all action aimed at secession or disintegration."

The Minister regretted the necessity for introducing a measure like this at a time when the country was faced with a grave threat from China.

Mr. Sezhiyan maintained that there was no urgent need for debating the Bill at this juncture. The DMK had

pledged its co-operation in the task of defeating the Chinese aggressor. The only threat to the country's integrity was "external and not internal."

In his opinion, the Bill facilitated "legal repression" of Opposition parties like the DMK. A political problem should be solved through normal accepted democratic methods and not through Bills like this, he added.

Mr. Hiren Mukerjee (Com.), who supported the Bill in principle, questioned the wisdom of reliance on legal devices to combat secessionist moves.

In his opinion, the Government should approach the problem with sympathy and understanding. It should try to find out why certain sections in the South talked in terms of secession. From time to time in the long history of India there had occurred an imbalance—cultural, economic and political—between the North and the South.

"The South today feels neglected economically. Regional disparities in economic development have to be removed. The Government cannot hope to solve such basic problems by merely flourishing the baton of law," he added.

INOPTORTUNE TIME

Mr. R. K. Khadilkar (C) took a stand broadly similar to that of Mr. Mukerjee. He emphasised that the advocacy of legitimate regional causes should not be interpreted as something tending to promote disintegration of the country.

Mr. Khadilkar said he supported the Bill in principle, but would advise against any hasty action born out of an alarmist view.

Mr. H. V. Kamath (PSP) supported the Bill in principle, but felt this was an inopportune time for passing the Bill.

He wanted an assurance that the Bill would cover even the Chinese-occupied areas in Ladakh and other disputed areas on the Himalayan border because occasionally there were suggestions for a settlement on the basis of surrendering some of these areas to China.

P.T.I. adds: The final voting on the Bill was 300 to nil and the Speaker amidst prolonged cheers, declared it unanimously carried.