

RAJYA SABHA

Tuesday, the 9th May 1978/the 10th
Vaisakha, 1900 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the
Clock, Mr. Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Bhoothalingam Committee

*301. SHRI JAGJIT SINGH

ANAND:

SHRI BHOLA PRASAD:†

SHRI INDRADEEP SINHA:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to refer to the answer to Starred Question 47 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 25th April, 1978 and state by when the Study Group on wages, incomes and prices headed by Shri Bhoothalingam is likely to submit its report to Government?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI H. M. PATEL): The Study Group on Wages, Incomes and Prices is expected to submit its report by about the middle of May, 1978.

श्री भोला प्रसाद : सभापति महोदय, भूतलिंगम कमेटी की रिपोर्ट आने तक मजदूरों को बोनस का जो रकम बकाया है उसको रोक रखने का क्या औचित्य है और वह भी तब, जब कि सरकार इस बात को मानती है तथा जनता पार्टी ने अपने घोषणा पत्र में भी इस बात को कहा है कि मजदूरों का जो बोनस का अधिकार है वह उचित है इसलिए इस चीज के आधार पर 76-77 का बोनस दिया भी गया लेकिन फिर भूतलिंगम कमेटी की रिपोर्ट आने की इंतजार में 77-78 के बोनस का बकाया

चुकता न किया जाये तो आखिर इसका क्या औचित्य है? क्या सरकार उस रिपोर्ट के आने के पहले बोनस की बकाया रकम देने के लिए कदम उठायेगी ?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: After receipt, the report of this Study Group will be considered, and then the Government will take a decision in regard to all these matters.

श्री भोला प्रसाद : सभापति महोदय, मैंने उनका जवाब मुना नहीं है जरा साफ साफ कहें ।

SHRI H. M. PATEL: I will repeat it. What I said was that the Government will take a decision on these matters, including bonus, after they have studied the report of the Study Group. We have said also that before taking any decision on the report of the Study Group, Government will have a dialogue with the trade unions' representatives and thereafter decisions will be taken. Not until then will we say anything about the bonus.

श्री भोला प्रसाद : सभापति महोदय, भूतलिंगम कमेटी की रिपोर्ट की स्टडी करने के बाद वह बोनस का बकाया देगे इसके पीछे कोई उचित तर्क सरकार के सामने नहीं है । क्या इससे यह जाहिर नहीं होता है कि सरकार का जो अभी इंडस्ट्रियल रिलेशन बिल आने वाला है जिसमें कि मजदूरों के खिलाफ, मजदूर विरोधी कदम और उसके अधिकार छीनने की तरफ उसका आशय है, उसके आने तक भूतलिंगम कमेटी की रिपोर्ट को रखे रहते हैं फिर जब वह नया रिलेशन बिल पास करेगे जो मजदूरों के खिलाफ होगा जिसके आधार पर कि भूतलिंगम कमेटी की

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Bhola Prasad.

रिपोर्ट आयेगी इससे उसका इस्तेमाल मजदूरों के खिलाफ होगा। इसी तरह से जिस तरह से आज मजदूरों के अधिकारों पर हमले हो रहे हैं इससे क्या यह प्रतीत नहीं होता है कि सरकार की पालिसी मजदूर विरोधी पालिसी के आधार पर निश्चित है?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: I do not understand on what basis he reaches this conclusion; he himself proceeds to say that the Industrial Relations Bill is designed to be anti-labour and that therefore when this Bill is passed, the result will be anti-labour and he asks: therefore, is not the Government anti-labour? The Government is not anti-labour.

SHRI INDRADEEP SINHA: Sir, it is heartening to hear the hon. Finance Minister telling the House that his Government is not anti-labour. Very good. If the Government is not anti-labour, will the Finance Minister assure this House that whatever be the report of that wretched Bhoothalingam Committee, the Government will not resort to any policy of wage freeze or denial of bonus? I want this assurance from the Government.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: The hon. Member wants me to anticipate the decision of the Bhoothalingam Committee. Time and again, it has been said that there is no question of a wage freeze. The fact is that this Committee was not asked to suggest any wage freeze. The whole idea is to evolve a national policy on this subject. It is necessary because in the absence of such a policy, all manner of distortions have taken place in the economy.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, the hon. Minister thinks that we are asking to anticipate. We do not ask you to anticipate. We expect you to tell us the truth. That is all.

Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that many of the trade unions in the country have demanded the scrapping

of the so-called Bhoothalingam Committee because, in their view, it is a mode to curtail the rights of the working people, to affect their rights and interests and to serve the exploiting classes?

Is he also aware that this Committee is working against the background that the so-called Industrial Relations Bill is being prepared with a view to affecting the trade union rights of the workers? Is he also aware that while the Bhoothalingam Committee is considering this, a circular has been issued by the Union Public Service Commission dated May 5, 1978—only the other day—over the signature of Shri P. N. Mukherji, Under Secretary, to the Central Government Clerks' Union on the question of going on a hunger strike, in which it is stated: "I am, therefore, to clarify that the launching of hunger strikes, as contemplated in your letter under reference, will be a clear and deliberate infringement of the provisions of the CCS (Conduct) Rules, 1964"? Now, Sir, this is the first time that this Government is officially declaring hunger strike by the Government employees as illegal, obviously with a view to prosecuting and victimising the Government employees, whose demand is against workload and all that. A legitimate and peaceful hunger strike by the Government employees is sought to be treated like this, and yet the Government says we should not expect them to anticipate. I do maintain—let him deny that—that the whole exercise of the nefarious Bhoothalingam Committee is meant to affect the vital interests of the working people and is the most sinister and deepening conspiracy by this Government to affect the living standards of the working people, take away their trade union rights and make it impossible for them to function as a labour movement in the country.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Sir, if he wants to deny, I deny that that is so.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: What is that, Sir?

MR. CHAIRMAN: He denies. You can repeat it.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: I can repeat it if he has not heard it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He has not heard it.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: You asked me, "Will he deny that this Government is against labour, that the Bhoothalingam Committee's Report is designed to crush the labour interests etc." I deny it.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: This is not fair. I did not ask that only.

Anyway, perjury may be your right...

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Sir, the hon. Member wanted to know whether the Government...

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: No, I began with, "Are you aware that most of the trade unions in the country have demanded the scrapping of the so-called Bhoothalingam Committee?" Are you aware of that? Either you are, or you are not.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: If all he wants to know is if I am aware that the trade unions have represented in such matters, my answer is 'yes'.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He says he is aware of it. Now you cannot go on.

श्री शिव चन्द्र झा : सभापति जी, मैं मंत्री महोदय से जानना चाहता हूँ कि क्या कोई पेनअल्टीमेट या टेंटेटिव्ह रपट आई है ? अगर आल रेडी है तो वेजेज, प्राइसेज और इनकम के बारे में क्या गाइडलाइंस हैं और उनके बारे में सरकार का क्या रिएक्शन है ?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: The report is due this month. Here it is said that

it is expected about the middle of May. That is to say, in a few days' time.

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: May I know from the hon'ble Minister whether, when this Bhoothalingam Committee was appointed, the Government took into consideration the report of an important committee appointed precisely to look into this matter, namely, the Chakravarty Committee, headed by Prof. Sukhomoy Chakravarty, a former Member of the Planning Commission? They went into this matter in detail. May I know whether they looked into this report and whether the advisability of its implementation or otherwise was also considered before another Committee was suggested because we are used to unnecessary and indefinite numbers of Committees and sub-committees being appointed and then their findings being put into the shelf and then appointing another Committee. So no professional importance or economic importance is attached to these committees by the people.

Secondly, is it not a fact that these questions of incomes, prices and wages are being looked into so that the committee's findings become more relevant to the economy? May I know whether the question of profit is also taken into account because there are some organisations quite in the knowledge of the hon'ble Minister making fantastic profits. May I know whether that also would be brought into picture together with it?

Lastly, may I know whether it is in the knowledge of the hon'ble Minister that some public sector corporations have frozen the wages of their workers and employees for quite some time? In view of the decanalisation of many import items and because of the reduced importance of some public sector companies may I know whether the question of their wage stagnation over the years will also be taken into consideration?

SHRI H. M. PATEL Sir, the hon'ble Member has not put one question but a number of questions. The first question he put was...

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: Otherwise you will get away with the stock reply of "Yes" or "No".

SHRI H. M. PATEL: What did the hon'ble Member say?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You reply.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: The first question he put was whether I am aware of the Chakravarty Committee report. Certainly, I am aware that the Chakravarty Committee had submitted a report even while the hon'ble Member was a Minister in that Government. That Government chose to take no notice of that report. We have considered that report and we felt that it did not cover all the ground and in any case it had to be brought up to date. Therefore, the Bhoothalingam Committee was appointed.

I think the second question that the hon'ble Member wanted to know was whether the Government is aware of companies making lots of profits etc. and whether that factor will be taken into consideration. That factor will undoubtedly be taken into consideration. But profits by themselves do not mean anything. It is not the final consideration in the determination of wages: it is one of the consideration...

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: But a very important one.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: One of the very important. But certainly if you mean only profits it would mean a minor distortion. This is one of the important reasons why it was felt that there should be a national policy.

I think the last of his questions was...

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: Frozen wages of the public sector employees over the years.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: ...about wages in the public sector enterprises. The employees there are very well paid as far as I know. There too distortions have come in. Because some public sector enterprises make more profits than others, there is no reason why employees of those making less profits should not be as well off as the other or *vice-versa*.

SHRI SADASIV BAGAITKAR: May I know from the hon'ble Minister whether the so-called Bhoothalingam Committee is a committee or a study group. This is a very vital thing. I believe, some days back, the impression that was given to us trade unionists was that the Bhoothalingam Committee is a sort of study group which was appointed to sort out the different options that are before the Government and come to some decision. If it is a study group its jurisdiction would be different. But if it is a committee its jurisdiction would be different. I would very much like him to clarify the position. Is it a study group or a committee?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Sir, I stand corrected. In fact, my written reply clearly says that it is a Study Group. Only because some of the hon. Members used the term "Bhoothalingam Committee", I also went on using the same thing.

SHRI S. W. DHABE: Sir, in this connection of the Bhoothalingam Study Group, all trade unions, the INTUC, the AITUC and others have demanded the scrapping of this and had boycotted the proceedings of this Study Group. An Anti-Wage Freeze Day was observed in the month of January all over India by the working class. The apprehension is that this Study Group on wages, incomes and prices was meant only to curb the bonus which will have to be paid to them in future and to merge it in wages and that it will not be able to frame any policy on wages, incomes

and prices. Even in the Draft Five-Year Plan which we are going to discuss, there is no mention of a policy on wages, incomes and prices. May I know from the hon. Minister whether, before formulating the final policy on wages, incomes and prices—which is very vital for the economy—the Report of the Committee and everything will be placed before Parliament and Parliament taken into confidence?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Sir, the trade unions were asked to assist this Study Group, but the trade unions said, "No." They did not wish to do so. The answer then was, "That is all right." The Study Group has proceeded. This Report will be submitted. As Government spokesmen have already said on various occasions, before taking a final decision, the Government will have a dialogue with the trade union leaders. Now it seems to me that the trade union leaders and the trade union movement should welcome any decision which is based on a study of facts, analyses and so on and not imagine that merely because it is a study, everything is going against them. In fact, if that is their apprehension, then, quite obviously, they have something to worry about.

SHRI S. W. DHABE: My question was: Before you decide the policy, will Parliament be taken into confidence?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: When a decision is taken it will be placed before Parliament.

SHRI G. LAKSHMANAN: Will the hon. Minister of Finance agree that many agitations by the trade unions are because of his Ministry following a red-tape method? Take, for instance, the CDS. That was annulled by the present Government. Why cannot they return the entire amount? When some workers went on a strike for 24 days, finally the Government conceded. Therefore, I would like to

ask whether the Finance Minister will consider returning the entire amount of CDS. Fifty per cent of the agitations in India today—I can give the figures—are because they are refusing to return the CDS. It is their own money. It was done by the previous Government quite against their will and it has been accepted by the present Government that it should not have been done. They why not return this amount and stop these agitations? Will the hon. Minister consider returning the amount by bringing an Act here?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Sir, I will not do so—this is quite clear. I will not consider returning the CDS save according to the Act.

SHRI G. LAKSHMANAN: You have said that the money has been misused by the previous Government. You are also misusing the money and that is why you are not able to return it.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: I do not know whether he is putting a question. Whatever the question was, to that extent I have given a reply, that it is not my intention to go outside the scope of the Act according to which the CDS will be paid. The question with reference to 24 days also is put somewhat incorrectly. That means that the Finance Ministry had said "No." The question is, if any problem comes up before the Finance Ministry, it will consider it and as soon as it comes, it takes a decision. It did take a decision and it took a very quick decision and I think you have to be very happy about it.

SHRI G. LAKSHMANAN: Twenty-four days' strike...

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Not at all. Anyhow, I do not want to enter into any argument.

SHRI G. LAKSHMANAN: You will not return that amount—that you have made clear. Of course, they will get their amount.

SHRI ANANT PRASAD SHARMA:

Sir, the Bhoothalingam Study Group was set up to study the questions of income, prices and wages and advise the Government as to what should be their future policy. In between, the Government has made a statement, both outside the Parliament and on the floor of the House, that the question of bonus, which has already been hanging fire throughout the country, is really a question of deferred wages. This is the announcement of the Government. And they have also said that they will consider the question of bonus also after the report of this Study Group is available. Sir, I would like to remind the Government that in the terms of reference of this Study Group the question of bonus is not there, though they have made an announcement like that. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether, after the report of the Study Group is submitted to the Government, the question of bonus, particularly to the railwaymen and other Government employees like the Defence employees and the P&T employees will also be considered by the Government.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Sir, the Government will consider the question after the report of the Boothalingam Study Group is received and studied by the Government. When they take a view on the Study Group's recommendations, after also having a dialogue with the trade union leaders, all these matters will be considered. Now the hon. Member should know that the report will be in our hands within a matter of a few days and thereafter we will take a decision fairly speedily. This is all that I can assure him.

SHRI ANANT PRASAD SHARMA:
Sir, my question was about bonus.

SHRI H. M. PATEL: When we have already announced that these questions will be considered, the bonus question will also be decided after the

Study Group's recommendations have been received and considered.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is correct.

SHRI U. R. KRISHNAN: Sir, a couple of days ago the Union Minister of Industry has said that there will not be any wage freeze. Is it not in an indirect way indicating the mind of the Government to the Committee? Will the Minister give an assurance that it will not hamper the Committee's work?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: I do not understand the question. There is some reference to a statement made by the Minister of Industry. When was that made? That is after the Committee has completed its work. When I said that the report is going to be in our hands in a few days, it only means that it is being typed, printed and some such work is being done.

SHRI U. R. KRISHNAN: But it has not been finalised so far.

श्री टी० अजैया : सभापति महोदय, अभी जो वेजेज स्टडी करने के लिये गवर्नमेंट ने कमेटी बैठाई है वह फेयर वेजेज के लिये है, मिनिमम वेजेज के लिये है, केजुअल वेजेज के लिये है, कौन सी वेजेज के ऊपर यह कमेटी बैठाई है और इस कमेटी की कब तक रिपोर्ट आने वाली है। क्या अभी मिनिमम वेजेज की जो कमेटी बैठ रही है उसकी वजह से कोई इंडस्ट्रीज अपने कर्मचारियों को जो फेयर वेजेज मिलनी चाहिए इसकी वजह से जहां एग्रीमेंट होना चाहिए वहां नहीं हो रहे हैं। तो गवर्नमेंट का मकसद क्या है? यह लीडिंग वेज है या फेयर वेज है, किस वेज के ऊपर यह कमेटी बैठाई है?

SHRI H. M. PATEL: Sir, I can only repeat what I said before, that the Study Group's report will be in our hands in a matter of few days and thereafter we will take a decision fairly speedily.