

## PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

I. SHRI LOKANATH MISRA (Orissa): Sir, I beg to present the Forty-first Report of the Committee on Petitions.

Sir, I also beg to present the Forty-second Report of the Committee on Petitions.

Sir, I also beg to present the Forty-third Report of the Committee on Petitions.

Sir, I also beg to present the Forty-fourth Report of the Committee on Petitions.

## CALLING ATTENTION TO A MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

### Reported Closure of Tea Gardens in Cachar District of Assam

SHRI N. R. CHOUDHURY (Assam): Sir, I beg to call the attention of the Minister of Commerce to the reported closure of a dozen tea gardens including plantations of Kalticherra, Eraligool and Chorgola which earn foreign exchange, in Cachar district of Assam, resulting in the unemployment of about 6,000 workers.

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYA-YA). Mr. Chairman, Sir Government have received telegrams during the last week from the Tea Estates in Cachar that foodgrains are not available for supplying ration to working labourers and that the situation is getting out of control. It has been urged that Government should intervene in the matter considering the acute situation. The Chairman, Tea Board, has also reported that he has received telegrams from a number of tea estates in Cachar complaining that foodgrains have not been made available for their workers

and as a result they are apprehending violation of law and order; consequently the production of tea is suffering.

The Consultative Committee of Plantations Association, Calcutta, have mentioned that the tea estates in North East India have traditionally been supplying foodgrains to their employees and their dependents at subsidised rates.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY (West Bengal): On a point of order, Sir. The Calling Attention is with regard to the closure of tea gardens. But he is reading about the supply of foodgrains. What is this?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYA-YA: We will cover the things you are interested in.

With the recent change in the Government's wheat procurement policy, it has been represented by them that the Governments of Assam and West Bengal may not now be in a position to continue wheat supplies to them as they had been doing hitherto. Instead, the industry should procure its requirement of wheat from the surplus wheat growing States through trade channels and make its own arrangements of transportation. The Association have urged that having regard to the serious labour unrest which may result from the suspension of foodgrains to the tea estates in North East India, the Central Government may agree to make substantial allotment of foodgrains to the State Governments to cover the requirements of the tea industry in these States.

There have been closure of six tea estates in Cachar District of Assam during the past few years due to uneconomic working, mismanagement and labour trouble. These include Kalticherra closed in October, 1970 due to mismanagement and Eraligood Tea Estate closed in December, 1972

due to low yield and labour trouble. Government are, however, not aware of any recent closure of tea gardens in Cachar District. Problems of management have arisen due to irregular supply of foodgrains to workers of the tea estates. Government's attention has been drawn to the difficulties faced by the tea estates about supply of ration to workers.

Government are fully aware of the need to keep the tea production going and for that to keep a contented labour force. The question of ensuring adequate and regular food supplies to the tea estates workers is being taken up with the Ministry of Agriculture and the State Governments concerned.

**SHRI N. R. CHOUDHURY:** The Tea Association of India and the Indian Tea Association have been trying for quite a long time for adequate supply of inputs like furnace oil and fertiliser to the tea estates and also for institutionalised finance but so long nothing has been done from the side of the Government to keep steady supply of furnace oil and fertiliser to the tea estates in the North-Eastern estates. Sir, so far as institutionalised finance is concerned, tea industry is taken as agriculture for purposes of advance of loans etc. And if we study the advance pattern of the banking system in the country we will see that the States of the eastern region have been discriminated against as compared to some of the States in the Southern, Western and Northern regions. Again, in the matter of these advances also the tea estates which are mismanaged have been given preference.

Sir, the Minister said that he has no information about the recent closure of any tea estates. Let me give him some information. The Chorgola tea estate managed by the Kalimpong Properties is a very big tea estate and is a foreign exchange earner tea estate.

Sir, only two months back this tea estate has been closed because of mismanagement. The INTUC led different workers unions were agitating against the mismanagement of the tea estate and they also represented to the Government for take over of such type of mismanaged tea estates. Sir, this tea estate which had been mismanaged for quite a long period was taken as an ideal unit for advances by banks, the Life Insurance Corporation of India and the State Finance Corporation. The management of this tea estate after cheating the Government, the Life Insurance Corporation and also the Assam Co-operative Apex Bank of an amount of Rs. 58 lakhs, closed the garden and left the area for ever. Sir, now it is in the interest of the industry itself that the said estate should be protected by the Government and if need to taken over by the Government immediately so that we do not miss the plucking season—the current plucking season.

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** I think you might now put the question for the Minister.

**SHRI N. R. CHOUDHURY:** Sir, I would like to know from the Minister whether he is aware of the fact that Eastern India was discriminated against some Southern, Western and Northern States regarding agricultural finance because tea industry is taken as an agricultural industry in the matter of financial help by the banks.

Sir, I would also like to know whether the Minister has received any representation from different tea association of India and also from the workers' unions that the tea industry was suffering for want of furnace oil and fertilizers. Has he received any representation from Cachar Cha Shramik Union or Assam Cha Shramik Union regarding take over of mismanaged units in Assam and Cachar. I would like to know

from the Minister whether he is aware of these facts. If so, what are the steps that the Government is going to take to save the tea industry which is now dying in that area? In view of the recent shortages of foodgrains in that area due to which workers are starving and which is also creating a law and order problem in that area, what steps is the Government going to take to arrest that situation there?

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, thank you.

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYA: Sir, for financing the plantation industry there are numerous schemes. Among the specific financial help schemes, we have Plantations Finance Schemes, Machinery Hire-Purchase Schemes and we have also Replanting Subsidy Schemes. Now, these Schemes are being taken advantage of but unfortunately, in some cases, not to the extent they are available for different plantation industries. Besides these, there is also a scheme for Tea Plantation Workers' Housing. So, there are several schemes.

In regard to the question of discrimination, I do not know what exactly the hon. Member has in his mind but these schemes are substantially meant for North-East India where plantation industry is concentrated. I am not aware of any discrimination meted out to that region.

In regard to the question of receiving representations, I have already said, Sir, that we have received representations from different organisations and trade unions.

Now, about food shortage, Sir, as you are aware, food shortage is a country-wide problem and because of the recent decisions of the Government, now the State Governments of Assam and Bengal are not in . . .

(Interruption)

The Government of Assam did express its difficulties initially to supply food to the tea estates. But later on, thanks to the Government of Assam, they have persuaded the Assam Co-operative Marketing Society, until further notice, to make necessary food supplies available to the tea estates so that the *status quo* regarding workers' food is maintained. Sir I had occasion to mention before this august House that we are in the final stage of taking the necessary legal and administrative steps to take over the management of the sick and closed tea gardens and also of having the power to investigate into the financial and the management position of the marginal tea estates.

SHRI N. R. CHOUDHURY: Sir, my question was specific. Has he received any representation from Cachar Cha Mazdoor Sangh and Assam Cha Mazdoor Sangh regarding takeover of mismanaged units? If so, what steps is the Ministry going to take for takeover of the mismanaged units? Some of the industries are already closed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have put the question.

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYA: Sir, as I have stated, we have received numerous representations. At the moment, I just do not have it in my mind whether the particular organisation that he has referred to has sent the representation. It is quite possible. I have already answered his second point. Even before receiving the specific representation which the hon. Member referred to, we have initiated necessary steps for taking over the closed tea gardens. We have also initiated measures for financial help.

श्री भैरों सिंह शखावत (मध्य प्रदेश) : श्रीमन, सारे संसार में जितना चाय का उत्पादन होता है उसका 40 प्रतिशत उत्पादन हमारे देश में

होता है। इस उत्पादन के अनुरूप ही हमारे देश को काफी मात्रा में फारेन-एक्सचेंज मिलता है। लेकिन दुर्भाग्य की बात ऐसी रही है कि चाए के उत्पादन के संबंध में हमारी सरकार की ओर से ऐसे प्रयास नहीं किए गए जिससे चाय का उत्पादन बढ़े, चाय की क्वालिटी बढ़े और चाय का निर्यात ज्यादा मात्रा में हो।

महोदय, पिछले वर्ष चाय का निर्यात पिछले गत वर्षों के मुकाबले कम रहा है, यह तथ्य है जिसको इन्कार नहीं किया जा सकता अब प्रश्न आता है कि चाय के उत्पादन में किस प्रकार की समस्याएं हैं? चाय का उत्पादन दो स्टेट्स से हो रहा है। एक इस्टेट वे है जिनका अधिकार हमारे देश के नागरिकों के हाथ में नहीं है बल्कि फारेन कंपनीज के हाथ में है। दूसरे ऐसे इस्टेट हैं जो कि न किसी वहाने चाय के उत्पादन के काम को बंद करते हैं, प्लान्टेशन के काम को रोकते हैं और साथ ही साथ मजदूरों का एक्सप्लॉएटेशन करते हैं जहां तक भेरी सूचना का संबंध है मैं कहना चाहूंगा, सभापति जी कि जितना भी फाइनेंसिज अब तक स्टेट्स को मिल रहा है उनमें अधिकांश रूपया उन स्टेट्स को मिल रहा है जो न तो प्लान्टेशन के नाम पर, न रि-प्लान्टेशन के नाम पर और न हायर परचेज के नाम पर...

**श्री सभापति :** शेखावत जी, इसी के मुतल्लिक सवाल पूछिए।

**श्री भैरों सिंह शेखावत :** उसी पर आ रहा हूं।

**श्री सभापति :** यह तो जनरल बात...

**श्री भैरों सिंह शेखावत :** जनरल ही ऊपर, जैसा माननीय मंत्री महोदय ने कहा कि फाइनेंशियल एड् देने के बारे में हमारी इस प्रकार की व्यवस्थाएं हैं, उन व्यवस्थाओं के बारे में जानकारी कर रहे हैं कि सरकार स्वयं इस बात को तय करे कि अब तक हमने जो फाइनेंशियल एड् दिए उन स्कीम्स के मातहत, उस एड् का अचीवमेंट कहां तक

हुआ। अचीवमेंट दो हिस्सों में देखना है, एक तो उसका एक्चअल परफारमेंस कितना है, हमने रिप्लान्टेशन स्कीम के मातहत या प्लान्टेशन की स्कीम के मातहत जो सहायता दी उस सहायता के अनुरूप प्लान्टेशन में कितना अचीवमेंट होना चाहिए था, रिप्लान्टेशन में कितना अचीवमेंट होना चाहिए, और उसी प्रकार से जो मशीनरी हम परचेज करने वाले हैं उससे कितना लाभ होने वाला था। मेरी जानकारी के अनुसार, सभापति महोदय, अभी तक हमने लोगों को लोन्स एडवांस किए हैं लेकिन लोन्स के एडवांसमेंट में हमारा अचीवमेंट कितना हुआ उसकी कोई जानकारी हमने नहीं की।

दूसरा प्रश्न था लेबर का। लेबर के प्रश्न को 2 भागों में विभाजित कर दें। एक तो वे इस्टेट जो आइडल लेबर को पैसा देना चाहती है और किसी न किसी रूप से बहानेवाजी करती है, जैसे कि लेबर स्ट्राइक करता है इस तरह के कई प्रकार के बहाने निकाले जाते हैं। हाल में अन्न की समस्या उठ खड़ी हुई है। आज बंगाल और असम के अंदर लेबर को राशन का पूरा अन्न नहीं मिलता और वे भी इस्टेट्स जो जिम्मेदार हैं उनको आनाज देने के लिए वे भी किसी न किसी बहाने से, मजदूर किस तरह से स्ट्राइक में जाए, किस तरह से उनकी आइडल पीरियड के अंदर सेविंग हो जाए, ये सारी धारणाओं से निकल कर मजदूरों का शोषण करते हैं। इतना ही नहीं, सभापति महोदय, प्राविडेंड फण्ड का प्रश्न है, जो कानूनन प्राविडेंड फण्ड लेबर की तरफ से जमा होता है और जितना इस्टेट्स की तरफ से जमा होना चाहिए। वहां बहुत सी टी इस्टेट्स हैं जो प्राविडेंड फण्ड को समय के भीतर डिपाजिट नहीं करतीं। उसी प्रकार का प्रश्न ग्रैच्युइटी का है, उसमें भी मजदूरों के साथ न्याय नहीं होता।

तो मैं मंत्री महोदय से जानकारी करना चाहूंगा। एक तो फाइनेंशियल स्कीम्स के मातहत जितना रूपया इन टी इस्टेट्स को दिया गया है उस रूपए का

[श्री भैरों सिंह शेखावत]

कितना लाभ मिला है ? लाभ उत्पादन की दृष्टि से कितना मिला और जो रुपया मिला है उसका फुल युटिलाइजेशन किस एक्सटेंट तक किया गया है ? दूसरे, मैं जानकारी करना चाहूंगा कि जो टी इस्टेट्स आज तक फारेनर्स के हाथ में हैं सरकार उनको अपने अधिकार में क्यों नहीं ले रही है ? जो आइडल इस्टेट्स पड़ी हैं, जो किसी बहाने से, जब भी मौका मिलता है, लेबर का एक्स्प्लोइटेशन करती हैं, इस प्रकार की इस्टेट्स के खिलाफ किस प्रकार का ऐक्शन सरकार प्रपोज करना चाहती है ? और साथ साथ मैं यह जानकारी करना चाहूंगा, सरकार ने टी के उत्पादन के संबंध में टी बोर्ड द्वारा इकानामिक सर्वे उन सारी इस्टेट्स का कराया है जिस प्रकार की रेगुलर पब्लिक अकाउन्ट्स कमेटी ने अपनी रिपोर्ट में, इस्टीमेट्स कमेटी ने अपनी रिपोर्ट में कई सुझावों के साथ रखा है, तो क्या उस प्रकार की इकानामिक सर्वे समय समय पर होती रही है जिससे हमारे यहां उत्पादन की दृष्टि से, लेबर की दृष्टि से सारी जानकारी सरकार को मिलती रहे ? मैं ये प्रश्न सरकार के सामने उपस्थित करना चाहता हूं ।

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYA-  
YA: Sir, the hon. Member has referred to the reported decline of tea export. It is true that tea is facing stiff competition vis-a-vis other beverages in the world, and that accounts for the relative stagnant position of our tea export. Even then it would not be correct to suggest that we have fared very badly in tea exports. To the United Kingdom which is one of our main markets for tea, our tea export has gone down. But it has been more than compensated by our exports to other destinations. Our exports in 1973-74 are expected to be of the order of 209 million kgs. as against 201 million kgs in 1972-73. The unit value realisation has also increased.

The other points about financial schemes which are available for the tea estates, I have already referred to

them. There is the Plantation Finance Scheme, there is the Machinery Hire-Purchase Scheme and there is the Replantation Subsidy Scheme. The corpus of the plantation scheme is Rs. 4.50 crores.

And, Sir, for the Tea Machinery Hire-Purchase Scheme introduced in the year 1961 it is ten crore and fifteen lakhs, and our Replantation Subsidy Schemes introduced in the year 1968 provide for annual replantation at the rate of 2 per cent. But, as I have said earlier, all these schemes, all the benefits and the advantages available under this scheme, are not fully taken care of and exploited by the tea estates and, therefore, there are some problems of tea managements and some of the tea estates have been closed down and it is in view of this fact—it is a very unfortunate fact—that we had appointed a tea Task Force last year which went into the problems and the issues connected with tea and they have come out with a concrete report and several suggestions and in the light of . . .

श्री भैरों सिंह शेखावत : मेरा प्रश्न यह था . .

श्री सभापति : आखिर में अगर जवाब नहीं आया, तब आप पूछ सकते हैं ।

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYA-  
YA: Let me finish. In the light of the suggestions of the Tea Task Force, Sir, we have decided in principle that we will take over the closed tea gardens' management and also take upon ourselves the right to investigate into the financial affairs and the management problems of the marginal tea gardens so that these units are not closed down rendering the employees any hardships and difficulties.

श्री भैरों सिंह शेखावत । मैंने सीधा प्रश्न पूछा था कि जो रुपया सहायता के रूप में इन स्कीमों के तहत स्टेटों को दिया गया है, उसका फिजिकल

अचीवमेंट होना चाहिये था। तो मैं यह जानना चाहता हूँ जिस काम के उपयोग के लिए वह रुपया दिया गया, उसका उपयोग हुआ या नहीं?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Will you add anything, Mr. Chattopadhyaya?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: I have generally stated that the advantages available under the schemes have not been fully utilised, but only not fully. But, in concrete figures, under the replantation finance scheme of Rs. 4.5 crores, some Rs. 3.86 crores has been utilised and, therefore, it shows a substantial portion, but they have not taken full advantage of these schemes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Raha.

DR. RAMKRIPAL SINHA (Bihar): What about the foreign tea estates?

SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA (West Bengal): Sir, the present calling-attention motion regarding the closure of tea gardens in Assam, rendering about six thousand workers jobless, is giving us an opportunity to discuss the affairs connected with the tea estates. Sir, the Ministry of Commerce is completely neglecting this industry though tea is a national asset. Sir, at the cost of the tea gardens, the tea gardens owners are enjoying the maximum super-profits out of exploitation of labour in the gardens and the government's finances given under some scheme or the other, either for hire-purchase or for replantation or for building houses for the workers etc. Sir, whether this closure is due to shortage of furnace oil or shortage of anything else, these six thousand people are today jobless due to the negligence of the Ministry. It seems that the tea garden activities are in darkness. Sir, on the 16th November 1973, I put some questions to the Ministry. The question was

about the number of tea gardens then existing and the number of those closed down during the previous three years. The reply was: "The information is being collected." But the information has come after six months. What does it say? The reply says like this:

"The information has been received from the concerned States except those of Assam and West Bengal . . ."

Sir, Assam and West Bengal produce more than 70 per cent of the tea in the country. Now, according to the reply, the information given was this:

"According to the information supplied by the State Governments, there were 36 tea gardens of which 15 were closed down during the last three years."

"... The number of tea gardens operating at present is 465. Information in respect of Assam and West Bengal would be supplied on receipt from the State Governments concerned, who have been reminded again."

Sir, my information goes that today more than 130 ten gardens are sick and closed. In West Bengal, 47 are sick and 7 are closed. Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray proposes to take them over. I do not know whether there is any legal hitch. In cachar of Assam, 15 are sick and 12 are closed. In South India, 36 are sick and 15 are closed. A total number of 98 are sick and 34 are closed.

Tea is the second largest foreign exchange earner. In 1971-72, from Tea we earned Rs. 162.48 crores as foreign exchange. This is the second largest after jute . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have said this already. Kindly put your question.

**SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA:** Tea industry is being neglected. Please give me a few more minutes so that I can discuss some questions.

Secondly, Sir, exports are declining, production is stagnant and in the international market we are losing. Sir, from the reply of the Government, I can quote. This is Unstarred Question No. 112.

“(a) Whether it is a fact that export of tea to the United Kingdom has fallen from 99.5 million kilograms in 1966-67 to 53 million kilograms in 1972-73; and

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor and steps Government are taking in this regard?”

The reply is this:

“(a) Exports of tea to UK declined from 95.9 million kgs., in 1966-67 to 53 million kgs. in 1972-73.

(b) The reasons for decline in exports to UK are:

(i) Fall in consumption of tea in that country; and

(ii) increasing competition from teas of Africa and Indonesia . . .”

These are the reasons . . .

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Mr. Raha, kindly put your question.

**SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA:** The percentage of tea exported by India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, out of their total production, to USA, is as follows.

India :	5.2 in 1967	4.9 in 1971.
Indonesia :	34.3 in 1969	36.1 in 1971.
Sri Lanka :	11.6 in 1969	12.4 in 1971.

India has the lowest percentage. My question is this. In view of the fact that tea gardens are being exploited by the owners, will the Government consider re-structuring tea gardens?

Or will these be nationalised, and the 6,000 workers who have been rendered jobless will be immediately reinstated and the owners, who are the culprits, be brought to book?

**PROF D. P. CHATTOPADHAYA:** Sir, the hon. Member is very knowledgeable about plantation industry, and he has referred to some valid points already agreed to by me in my previous answers to some other hon. Members. As you know, Sir, the problem of furnace oil and fertilizers, which is well known, is affecting adversely not only the tea plantation industry but other industries as well. So within the constraints, not of our own choice, they are experiencing some hardship. But even then, whatever is possible for us to do, we are doing in consultation with the Ministry concerned.

About the importance of Tea in our exports strategy there cannot be two opinions. I entirely share this view that we should do everything possible to see that not only our one time export of tea is maintained but it is also increased. At the moment, Indian tea accounts for 30 per cent of the total world tea exports but our attempt is to see that it increases further. Therefore, Sir, already we have consulted the Government of Ceylon.

I myself had occasion to talk to the Ceylonese Minister during my visit to Colombo in connection with the ECAFE session. Today, perhaps I will have the pleasure to meet the Tea Board President of Kenya who has come here at our invitation. Our officers or may be my colleague will be visiting Indonesia.

Now, it is a fact that after the Second World War, some countries like Kenya and Indonesia have come up in a very significant way in the world tea market and they are putting us to certain competition. As I have already said, certain other

beverages are also there. The causes of all the difficulties that we are experiencing are not internal. The causes are external, namely, other countries joining the industry. We are trying to work out the price pooling system in consultation with the tea-growing countries like Ceylon, Kenya and Indonesia. We have very good reasons to believe that our endeavour will meet with success.

He has asked as to why the State Governments are not taking over the sick tea gardens. As you might be aware, tea is a central subject. But we have also said that there are no two opinions between the State Governments and the Central Government insofar as the problem of the industry and the problem of export are concerned. We are in touch with each other. I have already said that our export quantum to U.K. has gone down. But it has been more than compensated by our exports to other nations.

**SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA:** Is it due to quality?

**PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA:** Not necessarily. But other competitors with comparable quality have come in. They have some other advantages. I do not think it is proper for me to disclose all those details at the moment. That is why we are looking into the price pooling system so that the unit value realisation increases and also there is no unhealthy competition.

In view of our proposed law to take over the management of the closed tea gardens and to investigate into the managerial and the financial affairs of the marginal gardens, we hope that our efforts to restore the health of the tea industry and to augment our production will meet with success.

**SHRI MONORANJAN ROY:** I am surprised that the Minister has again blamed the workers. It has become

a habit of the Ministers to put blame on workers for every thing happening in the country.

**PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA:** I have not blamed the workers.

**SHRI MONORANJAN ROY:** . . . . . with the Government of India to blame the workers, whatsoever the reasons may be. If there is a crisis, workers are responsible and the gardens close because of labour trouble. Is the Minister aware that its one industry in which the wages have not increased and yet the production has gone up, the number of workers decreasing every year? At least in this industry, the Prime Minister's assertion that she has allowed the wages to increase and the production has not increase is not correct. The Minister is aware of it and this disclosure is not a new thing. During the last two years when he has been the Commerce Minister and before that when Mr. L. N. Mishra who is now the Railway Minister beating the workers and their families, was the Minister of Commerce and Foreign Trade, representations have been sent to him and to Mr. Mishra also with regard to the problems of tea industry. The only problem of tea industry is not to supply rations. The Menon Committee's report which is the only authoritative report, was published in 1956. They gave a number of recommendations and I am sorry that not a few of the recommendations have been implemented so far.

They have allotted some funds for the replantation of tea bushes, which is very badly need. And Darjeeling hill still produces the best tea in the world. Your Kenya tea or Indonesia tea or Ceylon tea is no competitor to the Darjeeling tea, which is the best flavoured and fetching the best price also. What is its condition? Sir, 70 per cent of these bushes were planted as early as 1900, and it was said by the Plantation Commission



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that unless immediate steps are taken for the replantation of tea bushes, the whole Darjeeling tea industry will go out of commission in no time. What is the percentage of replantation? Who takes the money for replantation from the Tea Board? Who plantations from the Tea Board? Who chinery? Sir, if the hon. Minister gives us replies to these, it will reveal that the big business—the Goenkas, the Dunken Brothers, the Andrew Yule and other monopoly houses—usurped the entire money. Sir, this is a very serious question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Kindly put your question.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: Then we shall discuss about the repression on the workers. According to the Plantation Labour Commission, the industry is going out of commission in no time. These monopoly houses of which our Minister of Commerce has become an adjunct, have usurped the entire money.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have said this a number of times. Kindly put your question.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: The condition has become such that one Mr. Khemka has purchased three tea estates for Rs. 2 lakhs—a nominal amount. That tea estate is in the name of Great Gopalpur Tea Estate. The Company purchased it in 1954 at a price of Rs. 18 lakhs. That company earned a profit of Rs. 22 lakhs in 1954. Now that Company has been purchased at Rs. two lakhs. And what is the record of that man, Khemka, a swindler? He has taken loans from the Tea Board and from the Bank.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Will you kindly put your question?

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: That garden is now closed. That Khemka & Company has purchased three gar-

dens of Gopalpur Tea Estate—consisting of Rupali, Sonali and Goodhope. And the actual price was Rs. 30 lakhs. He has purchased at Rs. two lakhs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have said that for the fourth time.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: Sir, he has taken loan from the United Bank of India to the tune of Rs. 22 lakhs, purchasing a garden at Rs. two lakhs.

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is the fifth time that you are mentioning it.

SHRI MONORANJAN REV: Sir, he has taken two tractors on hire-purchase system from the Tea Board. He sold them away.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What relevance has it got to this? Somebody purchases two tractors and that becomes a very serious question.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: He sold them away.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You put your final question for clarification.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: I am coming to that, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Kindly have regard to the time.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: The tea gardens have been closed down in West Bengal. In Tripura, more than eight gardens have been closed down. For the information of the Minister I may say that at least in Tripura the State Chief Minister has asked all the owners of the tea gardens to come and see him because the owners have not paid the wages. They have not paid any wages. They have plundered. The Chief Minister has paid money to all the workers out of the funds from the government exchequer. And he has summonsed . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Monoranjan Roy, you are not listening to me. kindly put your question . . .

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: Sir, the gardens were closed in Tripura. When the Chief Minister is taking that step . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you going to put your question or not?

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: As regards the report of the Task Force, it is the monopoly houses . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: The monopoly houses have come again and again. Kindly put your question.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: Sir. I do not understand why you become so angry when I mention about the monopoly houses . . .

They have got the task force.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, this is not a debate, Mr. Monoranjan Roy,

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: This task force's report was with regard to . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you want some clarification, you may ask for that.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: Where is the Report of the Task Force?

He has not circulated it to the Members. What is the hush-hush in that matter? We must see and discuss that question. We have heard that the closed gardens will be taken over not by the management but by the employers and the Minister has requested the employers to take over the closed gardens. It is a dangerous trend. All these monopoly houses have been asked to take over the closed gardens.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Monoranjan Roy, thank you very much. I think you might stop now.

SHRI MONORANJAN ROY: One minute, Sir. There is a rebate for export. But the small gardens do not get it. Excise duty has been imposed

on Darjeeling tea and specially because of that high rate of excise duty, these tea gardens cannot compete. The result is that they are going out of commission. Whatever export rebate is given, that is also usurped by the big houses who are the exporters and not the small planters. The prices paid to them in the last 25 years are not commensurate with those prevailing in the retail market. That also should be inquired into. I would like to know as to what are the steps that the Ministry has taken for the taking over of the gardens and for the nationalisation of the industry. Big houses must be nationalised immediately. 70 per cent of the tea is still controlled by foreign houses.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right, All right. You have asked for the steps so many times. Now, please sit down.

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYA: Sir, the hon. Member is a knowledgeable person in regard to the problems of the tea industry because he was a trade union worker in that area for a long time. That is why he could ask so many questions and raise so many issues. I will touch upon only a few salient points.

Sir, I have never suggested, even remotely, that labour is responsible for the closure of the tea gardens or for their falling sick. I have only said that it is one of the contributory causes. But, the main causes have been listed by me in the body of my main answer to the Calling Attention Notice. Sir, let that misapprehension be removed. The point is, as I have already said, that there are a number of problems of management. It is true that some of the financial schemes introduced by the Government for the benefit of the plantation industry have not been fully taken advantage of by the management. It is also true, Sir, that some people have entered into this industry with a profit making motive. This sudden entry into this industry by some people with

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the idea of making a quick profit, make the garden sick and then disappear, has also created a problem. I have myself gone round many tea gardens and seen and heard from the labourers that instead of two leaves and a bud sometimes even four leaves or six leaves and a bud have been plucked and that accounts for the qualitative deterioration of this industry. That is also partially the reason for the non-competitive character of some very good varieties of our tea. These factors are not even remotely attributed to the labour. It is the management side who are responsible.

The hon. Member has referred to another matter, namely, excise duty. He knows himself that some of these tea estate owners went to court challenging the Government decisions. The whole matter was held up for four years, [or something like that] now they have lost in the court. Now, we are thinking as to how to rationalise the differential excise duty levies. In this connection, we are in touch with the Finance Ministry and we hope, we will soon be able to come to a decision. I have already dealt with the price problem. What price our tea should fetch in the world markets does not entirely depend upon our desire but also upon other competitions and other competitors, their quality, etc. and also other beverages in the market.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Lakshmana Gowda.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH (West Bengal): Sir, he has not answered two important questions. That is why I have stooped up. Otherwise, I would not have stood up. He has to answer these two questions. One is about subsidy.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member has taken more than 10 minutes.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH: I will not take even half a minute. I will point out the question he has not answered

and that is that the subsidy has gone to the big houses and not to the small-scale sector and the Tea Trade Corporation set up has not purchased a single pound of tea.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. Have you to add anything?

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: The Tea Trade Corporation have contracted for a substantial quantity of tea for supplying to the Defence and also to the jail hospitals of the West Bengal Government and as far as I remember, they are also thinking of taking up the tea gardens themselves. About the break-up of the assistance made available to the big houses tea estates and small estates, I am not ready with it. If the hon. Member asks me, I shall be glad to give him later.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Lakshmana Gowda. This is the last question.

SHRI U. K. LAKSHMANA GOWDA (Karnataka): The problem which has been focussed here, touches only the fringe of the problem of the entire tea industry. It is true that many of the tea gardens have been closed down and Mr. Raha has given a complete list of it. To that extent, the problem can be solved by either taking over by the Corporation or providing managerial assistance and finance. But the problem of the tea industry as a whole in the country has become very critical.

The first point is that because of the fiscal policies pursued by the State and the Central Government, the plethora of taxes and excise duties, non-availability of inputs like fertilisers, chemicals and the exorbitant price which has gone into the cost of production of tea, our tea has become less competitive in the international market, as a result of which, Ceylon and others have scored over us. Even in the internal market,

in spite of increase in the cost of production to this extent, the tea prices have more or less remained the same and they are not in a position to find finances to put back into the industry. In view of this difficulty Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister what action he is taking, particularly with reference to the report of the task force on tea and so many other commodities. What action is he taking to see that the fiscal policies of the tea-growing States in the country are rationalised and then inputs are provided? Also, Sir, I would like to know what arrangements are being made or he will try to make for sending food supplies to the deficit States like North-East India where tea gardens are situated. I would also like to know what action on the international front he is taking in view of what he said recently about his discussions with the Ceylon Government and the Kenya delegation which is here and Indonesia in order to see that proper tea promotion is done as a whole by the tea-producing countries so that we do not lose our competitive character in the international market. And also, I would like to know, Sir, in view of certain labour unrest as a result of certain State Governments taking unilateral action in notifying minimum wages when the agreed wages were there, what action he would take in order to see that a proper wage policy is applied to all the tea garden workers in the whole State, particularly in view of what was mentioned by my friend Mr. Monoranjan Roy. In view of all this, I would like to know what overall action the Ministry is going to take so that the health of the tea industry is restored in this country and we continue to maintain our major position as one of the principal foreign-exchange earners.

PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA: Sir, most of the questions raised by the hon. Member have been already answered but there is only one point I would like to add and that is about the character of taking over of the tea gardens. Sir, it is in pursuance of the Task Force Report that we are thinking of bringing legislation for taking over of the management. Here our two considerations are that commercial capital should be deployed here and the expertise which is available in the country should be utilised and the Government should not set up a huge corporation with big overhead administrative expenditure. We want to see that our purpose is served, sick tea gardens are looked after and nursed back to their health, but Government would not be inclined to invest a very huge sum in this sector; commercial capital they would like to attract. Management we propose to take over and necessary legislation will be brought for this purpose before the House as early as possible.

#### REFERENCE TO SITUATION ARISING OUT OF RAILWAY STRIKE

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Thengari.

SHRI KALYAN ROY (West Bengal). Sir, On a point of order. I forgot to take your permission. I have just come; my train was late. You see, some 500 women have been arrested in . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is wrong. I do not want the time of the House to be taken up like this. You should have taken permission.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: My train was late; I could not help it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is another matter.