

PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BEHAR & ORISSA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, HELD ON FRIDAY, THE 22ND MARCH, 1929, AT 6-15 P. M. AT THE CHAMBER OFFICE, BANK OF BEHAR BUILDINGS, PATNA.

Present.

1. Rai Bahadur Bansidhar Dhandhanian, M.L.C.
2. Rai Bahadur Radha Krishna Jalan.
3. Rai Bahadur Ram Ran Vijaya Sinha.
4. Babu Kedar Nath Goenka.
5. Mr. A. L. Ojha, M.L.C.
6. Babu Bhagwat Prasad Jayaswal.
7. Babu Ganesh Lal Gupta.
8. Mr. R. C. Pandit.

Rai Bahadur Bansidhar Dhandhanian, M. L. C. occupied the chair.

The President asked the Honorary Secretary Mr. R. C. Pandit to read out the Annual Report of the Committee for the year ending 31st December, 1928.

The Honorary Secretary read the Report.

The President then delivered the following speech:—

Gentlemen,

I have much pleasure in proposing the adoption of our Third Annual Report for the year 1928.

As you will see, your Committee was busy over a large number of matters of Provincial and larger importance; our work was very difficult; on the one side we had to overcome the natural inertia and apathy of some of our members, and to make them

take a broader view of their duties and responsibilities, on the other, we had to make the Government and the public give due and sympathetic consideration to our views and just demands. It should be our endeavour through this Chamber, to advance the interests of Trade and Commerce. But the foundation work is not always easy.

THE EXCHANGE.

The Exchange question, though the Government consider it settled once for all, is yet on disturbed waters. The ratio of 18 shilling to the Rupee is proving baneful to the interests of Commerce and Industry. Sir George Schuster has declared himself in favour of the Government ratio. The country however, feels that he has not given his impartial consideration to the same. The results are too plain to be smoothed over, by the mere dictum of any authority howsoever high.

RAILWAYS.

The question, which is now uppermost in the mind of the people of this Province, is the acquisition by Government, of the Bengal and North Western Railway. The local Council has unanimously passed, a resolution supporting the proposal for acquisition. This resolution will have the universal support of every body, who has even once travelled on this line, or who has any stake in the area served by this Railway. It would not be fair if the Government of India were to continue the present state of affairs. I take this opportunity of pointing out, that with a view to increase the capital value of the undertaking, this Company is pursuing a policy of withholding necessary expenditure, and thus showing a large surplus. The employees get very low wages, which compels them to adopt unfair means to increase their income. The comforts of the travelling and commercial public, are scrupulously ignored. Goods accomodation, at almost all stations is

insufficient, wagons are doled out on principles, which remain a close secret of the administration, requisitions and complaints are simply put off. A more hopeless state of affairs, it would be difficult to conceive. Monopoly in traffic, always creates an incentive to earn fat income for the bondholders. In this instance, it has been particularly so, the interests of the public, having been held strictly in abeyance. The monopoly is, besides, a bad bargain for the Government. The economy effected by withholding proper service, results in a fictitious increase in the capital value of the undertaking, and the Government is expected to pay this value at the time of acquisition.

It has been suggested in some quarters, that the amount payable would be too large for the Government to arrange for. I do not attach much value to such suggestions, as they probably come from interested quarters.

The Government has done justice in reducing the freight on Coal. The efforts made by the Indian Mining Federation in this connection deserve our greatest appreciation.

This does not practically end our grievances against the Railways. There are many others of these. One is in respect of the working and constitution of Advisory Bodies. As you know the Railway Board has refused to sanction the establishment of an Advisory Committee for E.I.R. at Patna, for no apparent reason.

Our Province has no representation, and our requirements do not receive the attention which they ought to have. The representation of local commercial interests on these bodies is also practically nil. If these Advisory Bodies are to serve any useful purpose, their constitution and functions have to be materially revised.

PIG IRON DUTY.

Gentlemen, another matter in which your Committee had been taking interest, is the operation of the Pig Iron Trust. I admit I have not been able to find any valid reason, why the Tata Iron & Steel Co. have made themselves a party to this obnoxious association, an association which is reproducing the worst evils of a "Trust". Prices are out of parity with cost of manufacture, customers are unfairly discriminated, and besides, the evil desire to strangle workers in the Cast Iron Industry is evident. The Tariff Board is examining the incidence of the import duty on Pig iron. The Tata Iron & Steel Co. have been blowing hot and cold in this matter. On the one hand they urge the Tariff Board to retain the duty. On the other they openly declare that the duty is not wanted. The Tata Company has on their Board some of our best businessmen and I wonder whether this wavering policy has the approval of all of them and whether it is in the interests of the Company, a company which has the sympathy of all Indians.

MR. HAJI'S BILL.

The question which has vitally affected our import and export trade, and which has caused widest difference of opinion between the Indian and foreign capitalists, is the reservation of coastal traffic to Indian shipping. It is obvious, gentlemen, that for any country wishing to advance its commercial interests, a mercantile marine is absolutely necessary. We do not wish to proscribe foreign vessels but we only claim our natural right to carry our merchandise on our own vessels, so far as the Indian coast is concerned. We should lend our strongest support to Mr. Haji's Bill and wish it every success.

THE YEAR'S TRADE.

We have passed through another anxious year. With the extensive failure of the paddy crop in this Province, and of wheat in the neighbouring provinces

of U. P. and the Punjab, our trade can hardly be called a prosperous one. The large number of rice mills, which have been and are being established in many parts of this Province, had practically to remain closed ; rice from Bengal & Burma was being sold at prices, which made working unremunerative. Next in importance is oil milling, and fortunately this industry paid its way, though profits were insignificant. Our province does a very large export trade in other agricultural products, but all of them were affected, and the year's trading everywhere was on a very much reduced scale.

The failure of crops brought about, a very serious situation in our currency position, in that a large number of silver coins from the interior, found their way into Patna. Our treasuries and financing institutions were loaded with hard cash, and remittances to Calcutta and other places were extremely difficult. I hope the Controller of Currency will consider, the desirability of opening a Currency Exchange office at Patna, where notes and coins could be freely exchanged. The Imperial Bank of India, is no doubt, doing this as far as possible, but it can hardly meet any very large demand that often arises.

The coal industry appears to have some revival and deserves our best wishes, on its luck, after such a long period of depression.

POLITICS.

In a modern state, commerce and industry can hardly be divorced and separated from politics. In the West and in self-governing dominions, commerce dominates politics and the main aim of the Government is protection and development of trade. In India it is politics, which dominates everything else, with the result that the interests of trade are overlooked.

The mercantile community has very intimate relations with the people of the Indian Native States, and the recommendations of the Butler Committee are anxiously awaited. Whatever may be the views and intentions of the Government of India, I trust that the People's elementary rights of citizenship, and of free speech, and free association will be recognised.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT.

Our Finance member had been deploring the fact that though ours is one of the major Provinces, our revenue is much lower in comparison with that of others, and that except for our income from Excise, we are badly situated in regards to ways and means. Our people are in no way inferior to others in intelligence and aptitude. Our soil is not less fertile. Our products are not few and limited. Our mineral wealth is the envy of all. With all these advantages, how is it that we are not prosperous? Our labour hardly finds employment at home. Our capital is wasted over litigation and not invested in profitable occupations. We lack enterprise, and rely on foreign people and foreign capital to develop our resources, and we prefer to work only as brokers and commission agents. Unless and until, we work heart and soul to develop our resources, by means of our own capital, and through the agency of our own men, we cannot successfully solve the many problems affecting the development of our trade, commerce and industry.

To bring about these results, we should consolidate our position and increase our activities. If we want the weight of our opinion felt on the authorities and our rights in matters of representation and other things duly recognised we should make our Chamber as representative as possible.

Our university does not afford any facilities for commercial education. A province rich in mineral wealth and agricultural resources, ought to take its

due share in the commercial development of the country, but where there are no means to receive higher commercial education, we cannot hope to do much. It should be the persistent endeavour of our Chamber, to move the Government to start a College of Commerce, as in other provincial centres like Bombay and Calcutta.

Before I conclude, I urge upon you, gentlemen, the imperative necessity of taking an active part in the work of the Chamber. It is only through the joint efforts of all of you, that we can raise the standard of our efficiency, and put our Chamber in the position as other Provincial Chambers of Commerce.

I should not omit gentlemen, to record our best thanks to Mr. R. C. Pandit, who has incessantly worked to make our Chamber what it is to-day.

Mr. R. C. Pandit proposed that the following gentlemen be elected members of the Committee for year 1929.

1. Rai Bahadur Bansidhar Dhandhania, M.L.C.
2. Rai Bahadur Radha Krishna Jalan.
3. Rai Bahadur Ram Ran Vijaya Sinha.
4. Mr. R. C. Pandit.
5. Mr. A. L. Ojha, M.L.C.,
6. Mr. K. C. De.
7. Babu Ganesh Lal Gupta.
8. Babu Bhagwat Prasad Jayaswal.
9. Babu Nirmal Kumar Jain.
10. Babu Gurusharan Lal.
11. Babu Jai Ram Das Shah.
12. Babu Rampal Singh.

Babu Bhagwat Prasad Jayaswal seconded it. It was passed unanimously.

The Honorary Secretary submitted the accounts for the year 1928. It was passed and adopted unanimously.