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T. Nadu C.M. Determined to Fight for Autonomy

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The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, to-day said he was even prepared to step down from office to fight for State autonomy.

Replying to a four-day discussion in the Legislative Council on the official resolution on State autonomy, which the House later adopted, Mr. Karunanidhi said he felt that an important phase in his public life had come to an end with focussing attention on this issue. He was now prepared to go to the extent of giving up his office and even court imprisonment if need be to achieve "my objective and fulfil my duty."

In his hour long speech justifying the State autonomy demand the Chief Minister said that under the Constitution as it stood to-day the States were still kept under Centre's surveillance just as in the years following the grant of provincial autonomy under the 1935 Government of India Act. The Constitution gave room for misuse of powers for political reasons by the Centre through the Governors just as in the British days. In support of this argument he pointed out how a situation was contrived to topple the Nambudripad Government in Kerala in 1957. In contrast in Gujarat when there was a big people's movement against the Government recently, the Assembly was not dissolved but only the Chief Minister was asked to step down. It was not until the situation got out of hand that the Government quit office.

Mr. Karunanidhi said that the Centre did not act with alacrity during the spontaneous anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu in 1965 and take action against the Bhaktavatsalam Ministry. He said it was this attitude on the part of the Centre which differentiated between one State and another that created an urge for State autonomy. When these shortcomings were pointed out, the Congress party did not relish it but kept on repeating "we are demanding separation when actually it is 10 years since we have given it up," he said.

CONGRESS LEADERS' PLEA CITED

The autonomy demand was not something that DMK alone was voicing. Well-known Congress leaders and legislators in other States had been urging the need to amend the Constitution to give greater powers to the States.

The Chief Minister said that the national anthem composed by Rabindranath Tagore denoted unity in diversity. It referred to different States composed of people with different languages, cultures etc., but forming one nation. "What we have been stressing all along is also that we can find unity in diversity."

Referring to the suggestion of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. K. Rajaram Naidu, that the Chief Minister should mobilise the support of other States, Mr. Karunanidhi wondered why the member had not suggested such a course

on Prohibition. Like Prohibition, Tamil Nadu would be showing the way for others on State autonomy, he added.

Earlier during the debate, Mr. M. P. Sivagnanam said that real socialism could not be achieved so long as the powers were concentrated at the Centre. Supporting the autonomy demand he said it would have been better if the Chief Minister had fixed a time limit for the acceptance of the demand by the Centre. As leader of the Tamil Arasu Kazhagam, Mr. Sivagnanam offered to place his services at the disposal of the Chief Minister to achieve the goal.

Mr. K. Rajaram Naidu said that the phrase "State autonomy" led to confusion and it should be coined to mean "State autonomy to achieve greater powers." He said that there was no difference of opinion on the need for greater powers to the States. He wanted this to be achieved in consultation with the Chief Ministers of all the States, even without amending the Constitution. If this was not possible a Constitutional amendment should be sought.

(Mr. Rajaram's amendment seeking to incorporate these suggestions in the resolution was however rejected.)

He said it was not proper to speak as though the Centre was an "alien Government." It should be remembered that the same people who had elected the State Government had also voted for the Government at the Centre.

Mr. Sakti Mohan said that the Chief Minister should canvass support from other States also to strengthen the case for autonomy.

After the Chief Minister's reply the House adopted the resolution which wanted the States to have autonomy to "secure the integrity of India" to promote economic development and to enable the State Governments having closer contact with the people, to function without restraint. It called upon the Central Government to effect changes in the Constitution to establish a truly federal set-up with full State autonomy accepting the views of the Tamil Nadu Government and the recommendations of the Rajamannar Committee.

The House adjourned 'sine die' after adopting a resolution seeking legislative powers for the State to nationalise the sick mills which were taken over in the State.