

Mr. M.R. Masani (Rajkot) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I hope that after these exciting exchanges, we may now turn to some topics of less excitement, perhaps of more light. While on the subject of light, in a free society it is important that the people should know the truth and that no obstruction should be put in the way of their knowing what is happening, whether in their country or elsewhere and of knowing of what goes on in the political life of our country.

Now, Sir, there are two separate issues about which I would like to talk this afternoon. But both relate to the right of the people to know the truth. The first subject, Sir, is about Shri Dange's letters in our National Archives which have become a subject matter of controversy recently and the other is the banning of a book 'Peking Vs. Delhi' by Mr. George Patterson. In regard to both these matters, I have criticism to make of our Home Ministry's handling of these affairs.

The Home Minister has, in response to a request made that the people of India should know whether these letters alleged to be written by Shri Dange are or are not authentic, has taken the line that there is no occasion for Government to examine whether these letters are genuine or not. I say with all respect this appears to me to be an evasion of duty on the part of the Government to leave the people in the dark as to whether these are authentic documents or not. This is something which concerns a leader of a political party which, in other countries, is banned as subversive or disruptive but to which our Government gives full liberties and all facilities. This party has denounced these documents as a forgery attributed either to the British Government or the present Government of India. It is necessary for the Government to establish the veracity of these documents by proper handwritten or other evidence and then to guide the people about its veracity.

Now the facts are briefly these as is evidenced by the file. The story starts before the launching of the Kanpur prosecution. Col. Kaye, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, commenting on the question whether Shri Dange should be prosecuted or not, writes on the 27th July, 1923 the following:

"All information about him (Mr. Dange) reaches the same conclusion that he is personally a mere worm; and this does support the belief that he is not worth powder and shot."

He then refers to Dange's "confession of personal cowardice. I think a severe official talking to by someone in authority - not a police authority - will probably frighten Dange very effectively; he is quite obviously very nervous already."

On the same side, against prosecution, comes Mr. Montgomery, the Home Secretary of the Bombay Government, on the 3rd August, 1923. He says, he, that is Mr. Dange, "is one of the most fruitful sources of information as to Bolshevik activities." So, both these officers advised against Mr. Dange's prosecution. However, the decision was to the contrary. The Kanpur prosecution case was launched and he was convicted.

Then there are four chapters in this story. The first is of 25th May, 1924, when Mr. Dange wrote a letter to the District Magistrate, Kanpur, from Sitapur jail. He says that the climate is either too hot or too cold in these parts, the language is not his, and he would like to be interviewed by his people. Could he be transferred to Bombay? On the 25th July, 1924, the Government's decision is made that there should be no transfer till after the appeal had been disposed of. That is the first chapter.

The second chapter is that Mr. Dange and Nalini Bhushan Das Gupta, a fellow-prisoner, write to the District Magistrate on the 7th July, 1924, expressing their readiness to give an undertaking not to commit any more offences and requesting their release, and they say they "are undergoing suffering we cannot sustain." Again, the application is forwarded to Delhi, and on the 11th August, 1924, the Government's

[the] reply is given that they are not prepared to take/petition into consideration pending appeal.

Then comes the controversial chapter, the third one. This time, Mr. Dange separately forwards to the Governor-General a petition dated 28th July, 1924, and in that petition he makes that objectionable offer to serve as an intelligence agent. Mr. Dange refers to a conversation with the Deputy Commissioner of Police in Bombay, Mr. Stewart: "Mr. Stewart said: 'You hold an exceptionally influential position in certain circles here and abroad. Government would be glad if this position would be of some use to them.' I think I still hold that position. Rather it has been enhanced by the prosecution. If your Excellency is pleased to think that I should use that position for the good of Your Excellency's Government and the country, I should be glad to do so, if I am given the opportunity by your Excellency granting my prayer for release." (3)

Now, this letter is the one that has been claimed a forgery by Mr. Dange and those who support his point of view. Then, that letter was forwarded. On that, on the 26th September, 1924, the Home Secretary in Delhi makes a noting: "This is interesting and rather amusing." On the 1st October, 1924, Dange's letter to the Governor-General-in-Council - the appeal - is rejected and relief is not given. Then, finally, on the 16th November, 1924, comes the fourth communication, another letter to the Governor-General, asking for a remission of the sentence. This too is rejected.

Now, Mr. Dange's claim regarding the last two letters is that the signature has been spelt with a T and not a D, and that, therefore, these two last letters, where there come the objectionable offer, which was rejected, are not authentic.

In the light of this, the question arises - either these papers are genuine or they are fabrications as Mr. Dange claims.

All the circumstantial evidence, the notes on them, the jail stamp and the handwriting generally, seem to show that these letters are authentic. But I think we have to be judicial and fair in this matter. We should not be left to making our own guesses. I think it is right, fair to Mr. Dange and fair to the people of this country, that the truth should be established; whether these letters claimed to be a forgery were fabrications or authentic. Why does the Home Minister, who was approached and has given this reply in writing to me, evade this obligation? Can it be his desire to shelter Mr. Dange? Is it an appreciation of that bogus nationalism which passed that pseudo-patriotic resolution of October-November, 1962, in the face of opposition within his own party? Are we trying to placate Mr Khrushchev by protecting his man? These are questions that do arise.

A local journal in Delhi - Thought - says that Mr. Wanda "cannot be happy at any harm being done to 'friendly' Mr. Dange." This is not the kind of suspicion that we, who want to have our public life above suspicion, should tolerate. If we do not face the issue, if we evade our obligations in ascertaining the truth in this matter, then these fears will be expressed. I do not mind saying that, for a year or two now, there are people in the INTUC who have been complaining that Mr. Wanda, as Labour Minister, was too friendly to Mr. Dange and the Communist Party. This evasion of responsibility would strengthen that suspicion and I therefore urge that the Home Minister and the Home Ministry face their obligations and, by handwriting evidence and other expertise, ascertain whether these signatures that Mr. Dange says are not his, these handwritten letters in his own hand, are genuine or are not genuine. We should all keep an open mind on this question. This is a matter that concerns the country and not just one political party.

I come to another issue, which is the issue of the banning of a book recently which is entitled Peking vs. Delhi by Mr George N. atterson.

An Hon.Member: How did you get it?

Mr. Masani: I will explain. It is a pity that it is necessary to protest against the