



G. D. BIRLA
... king maker

FOR ONCE the mighty Birlas are being bludgeoned in Parliament. Like Humpty-Dumpty they had a great fall, thanks to the young, leery-eyed Bombay economist, Dr. R. K. Hazari.

But not all the king's men in the Congress Party — the Bhuvalkas, Babubhais and Himmat-singkas—have failed to put them together again.

And worse, the whole of Indira Gandhi's Government is under a cloud of suspicion following Arjun Arora's allegation made in the Congress Party meeting during the discussion on the Hazari report that some of her Ministers are in the payroll of the Birlas.

LACKEYS

Arora determinedly underlined in the Rajya Sabha on Monday that his name was Arjun which meant that he was not the type who would run away.

But before Indira could complete her pow-vows with Arjun the Brave on whom the Birla lac-

Parliament puts Birlas on the mat

keys are in her Council of Ministers, the storm broke in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

It was sparked by a calling attention motion filed by the ever vigilant S. M. Bannerjee and others to discuss Arora's sensational revelations in his own party meeting.

Before the Prime Minister could rise Giant Killer George staggered to his feet to question her moral authority to give a reply. Reason: the eldest of the Birlas brood had told him soon after the General Election that he was trying his best to instal Indira as the P.M.!

That only proved that Fernandes was in the confidence of the Birlas, not she — snapped the Prime Minister.

PRIVILEGE

There were several rounds of pandemonium. In one of the intervals Bannerjee rammed home some hot stuff. He named Satya Narayan Sinha; K. C. Pant and son of a Cabint Minister as recipients of dollops from the Birlas.

Madhu Limaye who does his home work well put the whole train of allegations on an entirely different rail. He had already tabled a privilege motion against the Indira Government on this count, he announced.

S. A. Dange would add one more ground to Madhu's charge, namely, former Home Minister Nanda's charge that Birlas had



45 MPs under his control. As I write this piece the Speaker has not spoken up on this issue which, if true, is certainly more prickly than that posed by Haridas Mundhra in January 1958.

This dramatic turn in the Lok Sabha has overshadowed the marathon debate in the Upper House on the Hazari report on the mechanics by which the Birlas became a giant.

Monday's debate had a rare quality in this that the general run of Congressmen and the Left Opposition spoke more or less in the same idiom while Babubhai Chinai and Bhuvalka of the Congress and Jana Sangh's Bhandari spoke somewhat in unison.

ANATOMY

The best piece was that of Congress Party Secretary Chandra Shekhar who started it all. He was the chief accuser. He came to kill and succeeded eminently. He was supplemented by Bhupesh Gupta, M. P. Bhargava and Niren Ghosh. . .

Among the supporters of Birlas were Babubhai Chinai, Bhuvalka and Bhandari. At this point of time the Swatantra has not shown its hand.

Chandra Shekhar and Bhupesh Gupta laid bare the anatomy of the biggest industrial octopus that goes by the name of the Birla House, built on "political corruption, blackmail and bribery."

The Congress Secretary described the Birlas "as the greatest menace to this country" and went on dissecting their ugly anatomy. Here are some of his breath-taking revelations:

Before independence the Birlas evaded income tax to the tune of Rs. 12 crores and ultimately compromised with Government.

MENACE

They are keeping a company in New York and another in London for the exclusive purpose of running the invoicing racket.

In November 1964 the Enforcement Directorate raided Texmaco, seized incriminating documents, ordered the arrest of one of the Birla family. What happened to those papers?

Seventy-five of the Birla firms have no capital, no assets.

The Hindustan Motors recently manipulated an import licence. But who are being prosecuted? Minor fry and no Birlas.

Chandra Shekhar exhibited five samples of the Birla textiles in which they have given wrong specifications, to swindle the exchequer. By using wrong specifications the Birlas have evaded four Paise in excise duty on every meter of cloth.

Bhupesh Gupta almost ran out of his immense stock of adjectives in describing the Birla House. "They are the past-masters in double entry book-keeping not only in trade but also in politics."

SECRET

They were a menace to public life! They were buying up Congress Ministers "cheap"!!

Niren Ghosh disclosed that the Hindustan Times owned by the Birlas was given a Rs. 50 lakh loan from the LIC as if the Birlas cannot find that much money.

All of them demanded inquiry, the Vivian Bose type or any other. Only Babubhai Chinai dissented.

What startled me most was M. P. Bhargava's quote from the Hazari report, namely, that "without almost any money the Birlas have been doing business in lakhs and crores."

If only one knew the trade secret of becoming a crorepati almost without a Paisa in the pocket!