MP's threat to impugn Ministers

"The Times of India" News Service

NEW DELHI, May 26.

AN unusual storm broke out this morning at the meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party during the resumed discussion on the interim report of Dr. Hazari when Mr. Arjun Arora threatened to reveal the names of "some Ministers and members" who, according to him, had "close contacts" with the Birlas and had been influencing the Government policies in their favour.

Despite shouts and indignant protests from several members, including those representing the trade and industry, Mr. Arora was understood to have said that he had sufficient information in his possession to prove that the Ministers he had in mind were "in the pay" of the Birlas.

INQUIRY URGED

At least a few speakers who followed him gave powerful support to the demands for a thorough inquiry into what they called big business houses political influence over the Government.

While further alleging that the Birlas had a "grip" over the Congress and the administration Mr. Arora urged the Prime Minister to initiate bold action to inquire into the "undue benefits" derived by the Birla family.

When many agitated members asked him to either withdraw his charges or substantiate them as what he had said was a slur on the party and the Government, Mr. Arora sharply retorted that, if he was provoked, he would mention the names of the Ministers immediately.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai intervened to say that Mr. Arora had made serious allegations. He asked him to pass on whatever information he had to the Prime Minister so that she could look into the matter. But Mr. Arora must withdraw his charges if he was not able to substantiate them.

Thereupon, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, was also stated to have said that the names should be sent to her and not divulged at the meeting.

Mr. Arora readily agreed to send the names to Mrs. Gandhi. He said that, if his charges were proved wrong he would immediately resign from Parliament. But, if those were substantiated, the Prime Minister should have no hesitation in dropping these Ministers from the Cabinet.

The inconclusive two-hour discussion was marked by a demand by several members for a thorough probe into the concentration of economic power and a comprehensive review of the Government's licensing policy. It was generally felt that

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Firm steps urged to end monopolist interests

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the licensing policy, instead of checking monopolies, had contributed to their growth.

Dr. Kothari said that "big money" interfered with and influenced the last general election. The main criterion with the money bags was not who should win but who could win, irrespective of party affiliations. This was the first time that the Congress party, as such, did not get any funds for the election from business houses but more than six times of what was spent in 1962 was spent in the last election on individual Congress members.

He alleged that, in a few States, this money was spent in "collusion" with the Congress Chief Ministers. He demanded a full inquiry into this matter.

He regretted that "policies of conviction" had now been superseded by "policies of convenience." Unfortunately he further said the formal political and constitutional structure was sought to be "vitiated by informal channels so well organised by the big money bags."

LOUD PROTEST

Strong support to the House of Birlas came from Mr. Babubhai Chinai and Mr. P. D. Himmatsinghka. Mr. Chinai provoked a loud protest when he went on to praise the Birlas' contribution to the growth of the Indian economy and said this country would need at least "100 Birlas" to accelerate its economic progress.

This remark was promptly challenged by many members who had that there was already a strong criticism of the "Birla stranglehold over the country's economy and now you want 100 Birlas."

In a strong indictment of the attempts by the big business houses to influence the political policies, Mr. Shashi Ranjan said the strength of a country's economy was judged by the stability of its currency. The value of the Indian currency had been dwindling rapidly in the foreign markets. "How can Mr. Chinai say that the country's economy has grown under the Birlas?" he asked.

Some other members also remarked that Mr. Chinai's statement ran counter to the declared policies of the Congress and should not be allowed to be made in the party forum.

BALANCED VIEW URGED

Mr. Chinai asked the party to take a balanced view of the findings of Dr. Hazari. He had no doubt that whatever the Birla group had got was with the concurrence of the Government. He urged that industrial development should not be retarded in the name of concentration of economic power or monopolies. There could be no equitable distribution without production. Socialism did not mean the distribution of poverty. He opposed the tender system suggested by Dr. Hazari in place of the industrial licence.

Mr. Himmatsinghka said the Hazari report was not against the Birlas. If the Birlas had got licences through rightful means, they should not be blamed.

Mr. D. N. Tiwari said the Government had enough information about the growth of monopolies and the concentration of economic power and it was not the first time these things had been brought to light.

Why did not the Government take any action on the reports of the Monopoly Inquiry Commission and the Vivian Bose Commission? he asked.

Mr. P. C. Mitra suggested that any inquiry should not merely be into one industrial house but all top business houses.

Mr. S. R. Damani said the Birla group owned not more than 151 major industrial units, against a total of 1,529 units as revealed in the Monopolies Inquiry Commission report. The licences received by the Birlas worked out at only four to five per cent. of the total. The figures thus given in the Hazari report were excessive.

Earlier, Mr. Arora congratulated the Planning Commission on having asked Dr. Hazari to go into the question of concentration of economic power. His interim report had brought to light several "dangerous" aspects of the economy, but rumours were afloat that this would be Dr. Hazari's last report and he would not be allowed to complete his work.

When some members asked what prevented him from giving his final report, Mr. Arora said this might happen due to the Birlas' powerful influence over the Government.

SPECIAL ATTENTION

Other points made during the discussion were that Dr. Hazari had given special attention to the Birlas in the report because they received favoured treatment vis-a-vis other business houses and also because of their dominant position.

It was not enough to criticise or condemn the business houses for amassing wealth. The Government must take bold and effective measures to end the manipulations and manoeuvrings of monopolist interests. An impression had been created in the public mind that nothing could be done against the big business houses. The Government should take steps to restore public confidence.

Protest to P. M.

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NEW DELHI, May 26: Mr. Arjun Arora, a senior Congress member of the Rajya Sabha, has, in a letter to the Prime Minister, taken exception to the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Morarji Desai, presiding in her absence over the meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party and its executive committee.

He considers this a violation of the party constitution.

The letter says: "You preside over the meeting of the party not because you are the Prime Minister but because of the fact that you are the elected leader of the party. The Deputy Prime Minister does not occupy any such elected post in the party. He is only our nominee, just like other Ministers and Deputy Ministers.

"The constitution of the party provides for the election of two deputy leaders. Two distinguished members of the party were elected to these posts. In fairness and in accordance with the constitution one of them should preside over the party when you are away.

"The Deputy Prime Minister is neither the elected leader of the party nor its deputy leader. The mere fact that you have designated him as your deputy does not automatically make him the deputy chief of the party."