APPENDIX-II

EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH OF THE HON'BLE BABU GOPABANDHU DAS IN
THE BIHAR AND ORISSA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON THE 13TH MARCH,
1920.

"YOUR HONOUR,

"I do not know, Sir, if it has ever been the misfortune of any non-official member of this council to move a resolution like this since the creation of this Province. Non-official members generally urge for sanitation, education and for such other matters as help the progress and advancement of the people. But what would education or sanitation mean a people that has no food to eat, no clothes to wear and even no hut to live in. Famine is a terrible thing. To think of it is painful, to speak of it is grievous and to live in it is fatal. But, alas ; hundreds of my people are struggling under its terrible grips for over a year. Coming as I do, from a part of the country where some tract or other is liable to flood or drought almost every year, I am not easily moved by the effects of an ordinary scarcity which it is very hard for people under more favoured conditions to bear. I would not have brought this motion before this Council were I not forced to do so by the painful necessity of circumstances.

During the year which is about to close, famine has been declared only in three districts and the revised expenditure on Famine Relief has been estimated at Rs.7,80,000 though Rs.16,00,000 has been provided in the budget for the purpose. The Government may congratulate themselves upon being able to avert the danger with less than half the estimated cost. But I may be excused if I say, and I say it deliberately, that the measures taken for the relief of famine have not been on the whole adequate to meet the situation; may, with regard to
certain areas the Government have hitherto failed in their duty to the people in distress. There have been places where distress has been so acute that nothing short of full famine relief measures would give adequate relief to the distressed. While I say this I have particularly in my mind the parts of the Puri district which I have myself seen.

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Now permit me, Sir, to say a few words to justify the contention that I have all along been making for the declaration of famine in the Puri district. At the outset I would assure your honour and the Members of the Council that I am always careful not to exaggerate things especially in grave and serious matters like famine. Nor is my experience of famine conditions new. During the last twelve years I have had the experience of distress on two occasions, in the Sub-divisions of Kendrapara and Jajpur of Cuttack in 1907, and in the Chilika areas of the Puri district in 1917. I never urge any point of which I am not myself convinced; for, I always believe that in public life as in all other spheres of activities, truth, and sincerity are the only invincible forces which win. The conditions of some of the villages of the flooded areas are such as many of the members of this Council will not easily imagine. Ever since November 1918, when the gloomy prospects were clearly visible, I have been putting questions on this subject in almost all the meetings have been passed; graphic descriptions of the conditions of the people have appeared in the Press. Even the Utkal Conference, the National Assembly of the whole Oriya people moved the Government in the matter. But all to no purpose. Conditions are growing worse everyday. I quote below one of the paragraphs that appeared in the papers. It described the conditions as they were in October last."
"In many places the worst has came at last. What was but an apprehension has become a reality. The mother is snatching away the morsel of food from the child. People under the pang of hunger have eaten fruits, roots and leaves which were never used as food. These, too, have become scarce now. In affected areas, specially in flooded tracts, distressed people are moving about everywhere in mere skeletons appearing at every moment to fall down. They look like fearful specters. Some of them are falling down dead. Such dead bodies are to be found along the roadside. Many are committing theft in expectation of being better fed in the jail. People do not get food to buy. Those that have still some strength to work do not find labour. The mother has left her child and the husband his wife. Many have fled away, nobody knows where. Every one is now for himself. Little orphans are seen here and there under the grips of death. The terrible scenes of the great Orissa famine of 1866 have been repeated in several places."

"This description is true to the letter. I bear testimony to it. Had the Government complied with the request made by the Utkal Union Conference to depute some responsible officers to co-operate with the non-official members of the Committee appointed by the Conference to enquire into the actual state of things. I am sure there would have been no room for Government to doubt or dispute the correctness of this description. Since these paragraphs appeared in the papers, conditions have grown still worse. Some villages have practically been deserted. The number of deaths is increasing. Whatever cause might be assigned to these deaths by the local officers, it can be stated with perfect certainty that most of them are due directly or indirectly to want of food. These
facts will be brought to light in detail when the result of the non-official committee, appointed by the Conference will be published. I have, however, to acknowledge the co-operation of the District officer of Puri with the non-official gentlemen in organizing private relief measures which inadequate as they were, gave some help to the people who were in sore need of it, the subscriptions from outside and specially from the Hindi Natya Parishad and the Oriya Samaja of Calcutta, as also from the Provincial Famine Relief Fund. But all these did not go a great way in alleviating the miseries that are so wide and intense. The private source of help has practically ceased to exist. Government help has now became more absolute and urgent than ever."

"I do not wish to take up the time of the Council for any further detail. After I sent notice of this resolution, I visited some of the affected villages on the 8th instant with a view to making myself perfectly certain of the grounds which I should have to urge. I went into some houses. A year ago they were in good condition. The householders were known as well to do people. Now they have become absolutely destitute. I could find nothing on which they can lay their hands for their maintenance. Lands they have sold or mortgaged, utensils and ornaments they have already parted with, cattle they have lost. If they have still anything left, it is because they could not find buyers. I have brought some samples of their foodstuffs which I found in one of the houses I visited. Here I place them on my table. This specimen with green leaves is a kind of herb which nobody would ever use as food. The powder is made of husks with some particles of rice. The food which they take once a day and often at longer intervals, is prepared by boiling
the herb with the powder. Many cannot afford to add a little salt to it. When this is the condition of those who were the families of fair competency in the village only a year ago, the sufferings of others might be more easily imagined than described. I have also on my table a photo of a group of famished people. It was taken in a village near Gop early in January last. It will speak for itself. If conditions like these do not constitute famine. I do not know what famine is. I leave, the matter to the judgement of your Honour and of this Council."

"Even after all this I cannot lose faith in the goodness and wisdom of a Government presided over by a considerate and popular administrator like your Honour. Let the dead past bury its dead. Pray, have mercy on those that survive. It is their due. Let me hope and trust that famine will be declared. In that case larger expenditure will have to be incurred ... Now the visit of the Divisional Commissioner to the distressed parts has given me hope that the matter will be sympathetically and carefully considered. And as a member of your Honour's Council bound by solemn affirmation to faithfully discharge the duties on which I have entered, I consider it my duty to avail myself of this opportunity to plead the cause of the suffering humanity in that ill-fated tract which I represent.

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I am not definite about the number of unions that are affected. But in answer to a question of mine in the Council the information that I was supplied with justified me in saying that in three thanas nearly 250 villages are more or less affected. Of course, there is no use discussing over a matter on which the officials and an humble non-official like myself could not come to a definite agreement, especially when people
are dying. I have seen things with my own eyes and I cannot
disbelieve my senses. Beyond this I cannot say anything. The
Hon'ble Member in charge has given me assurance that money will
be found if a proper case would be made out for the declaration
of famine. Declare famine or not but save the human lives
there. That is my earnest prayer. The honourable Mr. Gruning
has said that everything that could be done has been done and is
being done. All right, I do not find fault with the Government
Officers for what they have done, but I urge for what they can
do even now? Well, it is said that only a small tract in a
little district is affected and for this there is no reason that
in the provincial budget the expenditure should be raised. But
it does not matter whether it is a little tract or big tract.
If any human being in an unknown corner of this province within
the great empire of His Majesty dies for want of food, I think
that his blood will be upon me and upon all those who are
directly or indirectly responsible for conducting the
administration. With these words I leave the matter in your
Honour's hand."