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No.7(20)/68-NCL(C),
Government of India
National Commission on Labour
D-27, South Extension, Pt. II
-.-.-.-.-

New Delhi, dated the 3rd Oct., 1968.

To

The Chairman and Members of the
National Commission on Labour.

Sub:- Record of discussions of the National Commission on Labour - Himachal Pradesh:

Sir,

I am directed to forward a copy each of the following papers:

(1) Record of discussion - Himachal Pradesh.

(2) Record of informal discussion with the Lt. Governor, Himachal Pradesh held on 31-8-68.

(3) A Note on Commission's visit to Narkanda (Himachal Pradesh) on 1-9-1968.

Yours faithfully,

(P.D. Gaiha)
Director

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

(CAMP : SIMLA)

Date : 30.8.1968 Time : 3.00 to 4.15 P.M.

Record of discussions with Himachal Pradesh branch of I.N.T.U.C. and its affiliated unions represented by the following persons:

1. Mr. Durga Singh Rathaur,
General Secretary,
INTUC, Himachal Pradesh.

2. Mr. Bharat Mittar,
Municipal Employees' Union (Regd.),
Simla.

3. Mr. Gauri Nandan Sharma,
Municipal Employees' Union (Regd.),
Simla.

4. Mr. Amar Singh Thakur,
H.P.Govt. Press Workers' Union,
Simla.

5. Mr. Brahm Singh Rana,
Snowdown Hospital Employees' Union.

6. Mr. Sant Ram,
H.P.P.W.D. Labour Union.

7. Mr. Devi Saran,
H.P.Govt. Press Workers' Union, Simla.

8. Mr. Bhagwan Singh,
H.P.Govt. Press Workers Union,
Simla.

9. Mr. Bhunger Ram Sharma,
Snowdown Hospital Employees' Union.

10. Mr. Dola Ram Thakur,
Snowdown Hospital Employees' Union.

11. Mr. Ganga Ram,
H.P.P.W.D. Labour Union, Mahasu.

12. Mr. Paras Ram,
H.P.P.W.D. Labour Union, Mahasu.

13. Mr. Sita Ram Sharma, O/Secretary,
B.S.L. Workers Union,
H.O. Sundernagar.

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There is no full-fledged labour department in the State, although such machinery has been provided under the Act. The Labour Commissioner is also Director of Industries, and as such he cannot devote full time to labour. There is no staff at the lower level. There are no regular and exclusive conciliation officers. Conciliation machinery is essential to the welfare of labour.

2. The present Himachal Pradesh is formed out of the old territory of Himachal Pradesh and the areas transferred as a result of trifurcation of the Punjab. As a result of this, certain anomalies persist. For instance, labour laws were in force in the territories transferred from the Punjab, but now the labour machinery and other facilities existing in these territories have been withdrawn by the Punjab Government.

3. The Organisation claims a membership of above 5,000. The membership has been duly verified. The total number of workers, both industrial and non-industrial, is about 50,000 mostly employed in forest, PWD, transport and public sector undertakings. The private sector is small. An important industry in the private sector is the brewery at Solan; there is another distillery at Kasauli.

4. There are cases of victimisation of unions representatives. As soon as trade unions are formed and they start functioning, these workers are transferred. For instance, one Nagina Ram, employed in P.W.D. was transferred to a far away place because he happened to be the president of the union. A note on such cases of victimisation will be sent.

5. There is no machinery or provision for enforcement of minimum wages. There is no fixation of minimum wages except in three or four industries, and even in these minimum wages tend to vary. For instance, in transport they are as high as Rs. 3.00 and in forests as low as Rs. 2.10 per labour per day. In other industries minimum wages are not fixed.

6. There is also discrimination against local labour in favour of outside labour. The latter are paid higher wages. The outsiders consist of Tibetan and Nepali labour, and they are engaged in transport, construction of roads and electricity. The wages earned by Tibetan labour are as high as Rs. 3.50 or Rs. 4.00 per day. Local labour get only Rs.2.50 or Rs. 3.00 per day. Outside labour also gets rations. There is no difference in the output of outside and local labour. In fact, local labour is better at work. There should be equal wage for equal work for both outsider and local labour.

7. Labour employed by PWD is now facing difficulties on account of housing, because labour huts have been converted into store sheds. There are some colonies for transport workers. Housing for labour in public sector is very limited. However, the

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foundry at Jabon does provide housing accommodation. Private sector may claim a better showing in this regard. About 60% of labour is provided with housing. For instance, at Solan Brewery a large labour force is provided with accommodation. The gun factory at Mandi has also provided accommodation. But, by and large, only a small percentage of workers on Government work have been provided with housing. One way to overcome shortage of housing is to provide local labour with work at site not far from his village.

8. Minimum wages should be fixed at national level subject to regional variations in living standards. Minimum wage should be a living wage. It should provide for workers' subsistence needs, health, education and savings for future. Need based wage should be higher than the minimum wage. It should be achieved gradually.

9. Minimum wages were fixed by a Committee about 1½ years ago at Rs. 3.50 in three or four industries. Even this is not being paid. This should now be revised in view of rising prices. It should be fixed at Rs. 4.00.

10. National minimum wages should not be uniform because in hilly areas the cost of living is high and a worker needs warm clothings and more fuel to keep himself going in winter.

11. There should be equal pay for both men and women workers.

12. There are different scales of pay within the department such as Electricity and PWD. These should be made uniform.

13. Workers employed in orchards get wages as high as Rs. 5.00 and in some cases even Rs. 8.00 to Rs. 10.00. But this is seasonal employment which lasts for about two months. The workers in the tea gardens at Palampur do not get the same wages as their counterparts in Assam or in the South.

14. Child labour does not exist.

15. A large number of workers send their children to schools and some send their sons even to colleges. In fact poor men's sons are more interested in higher studies and are more hard working.

16. Contract labour is smaller in number than departmental labour. Contract labour is also better paid and there is no special problem concerning it. The only advantage that the departmentally employed labour has over contract labour is that the former is permanent and 'continuously employed'.

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17. There is no particular problem relating to agricultural labour. Everyone has some land and/or works with a peasant. Nepali labour from outside works as agricultural labour in villages.

18. A major problem is shortage of labour. This is primarily due to home sickness and immobility of local labour. Outside labour is, therefore, brought in. The Labour Commissioner explained that this is done by paying labour inducement allowance to cover overhead expenditure. The Nepalese are also recruited by agents. Tibetan labour is now settling down in permanent and semi-permanent occupations and in industrial occupations. Outside labour is averse to getting organised.

19. Local labour is in minority; it cannot be organised into unions.

20. The framing of an All-India Labour Code was favoured.

21. Labour should continue in the Concurrent List. The views of the Central Organisation in these matters are endorsed.

22. There should be a common pattern of labour judiciary. The High Court should appoint judges. The judges should be of the rank of District or Sessions judge. If they are retired or acting judges, they should be appointed for a fixed term. Judges with a knowledge of industrial law or with industrial experience should be preferred.

23. LAT should be revived. Central Organisation's reply in this matter is endorsed.

24. Collective bargaining in an absolute sense was not favoured. The present system should continue.

25. Both parties should be allowed to go to a court of law direct. The Government should not intervene.

26. Arbitration was not favoured.

27. Labour laws are not being implemented. Even Minimum Wages Act is not enforced in municipal bodies. The transitional period (after the addition to the Original Himachal territories) within which to bring a uniformity in labour administration has been too long.

28. There is no rival union to I.N.T.U.C. There are 30 INTUC unions and they are all recognised. The membership of the INTUC was not challenged. It was verified in 1966. The membership of AITUC then stood at below 100 in 1966.

29. For the purpose of determination of representative character of a union, the verification method was preferred and

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considered satisfactory. There should be no election. Verification may be by any impartial body - official or non-official.

30. There are no industry-wise unions. Unions are organised plant-wise. There are a large number of municipalities in Himachal Pradesh and each one has a union of its own. Now a federation has been formed. Within the municpality, there are craft-unions for fire brigades, sweepers, and other categories of staff. They are not against craft-unions.

31. Multiplicity of unions should be avoided.

32. About outsiders the opinion was divided. Some said that outsiders are politicians and they exploit workers for personal ends. Others said that there should be 'right' leadership, no matter whether it comes from outside or inside.

SA/-

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

(CAMP : SIMLA)

Date : 30.8.1968. Time: 4.15 to 4.45 P.M.

Record of discussions with Himachal Pradesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry represented by:-

1. Mr. Joginder Singh, Secretary,
   H.P. Chamber of Commerce & Industry,
   Chandigarh.

2. Mr. K.G. Khanna, Secretary,
   Mohan Meakin Breweries Ltd.,
   Solan Brewery.

The organisation does not have any local problems. It has not experienced any labour problem either. It has just come into being. It is affiliated to the Northern India Chamber of Commerce & Industry. There are 40 local units of the organisation; most of them are small units.

2. The biggest unit is the Brewery at Solan which employs 500 workers. The remaining 1500 workers with units belonging to the organisation are distributed over 39 units.

3. Local labour is preferred because it is conversant with local conditions. It does not pose any housing problem. It is loyal and sincere. Most of the technical and skilled workers are outsiders. The management advertise posts of skilled workers.

4. Efficiency is the main criterion for determining wages for local and outside labour: If efficiency is the same there is no difference in wages for local or outside labour.

5. Conciliation proceedings entail delay, but if conciliation officer is competent, delay is avoided.

6. The organisation is not aware if all labour laws are applicable to the two parts of Himachal Pradesh, one which was transferred from the Punjab and the other which constituted the old Himachal Pradesh.

7. Framing of a common labour code was favoured but it should allow for regional 'difficulties' or variations.

8. The labour should be on the Union List.

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9. There should be a common pattern of labour judiciary and the judges should be appointed by the High Court. Retired judges of proven calibre and integrity may also be appointed.

10. LAT should be revived because it will provide an additional appellate authority.

11. Collective bargaining is useful. If collective bargaining fails, conciliation and adjudication may follow. Arbitration is not suitable.

12. Statutory recognition of labour union by management was not advocated.

13. Verification procedure for determining the representative character of a union was favoured. There is no objection to election by secret ballot in case of a dispute over verification but it should be limited only to members. Only the unions which have at least 40-45 per cent of the membership of workers in industry should be recognised. Other unions may exist but management should deal with only a single bargaining agent.

14. Outsiders pose a problem. They disrupt work in industries. The representative offered to send a list of such cases. Outsiders should not be allowed to interfere. An outsider is one who is not an employee. A dismissed employee is an outsider. During the pendancy of the dismissal proceedings a worker may continue to be insider. With the consent of the management a worker may be full-time trade union functionary and may still be treated as an insider.

15. Minimum Wages should be higher in hilly areas such as Simla but the capacity of industry to pay should also be taken into account. Industry should not be overburdened, but industry must pay subsistence wage or it should close.

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

(CAMP : SIMLA)

Date : 30.8.1968 Time : 4.45 to 5.15 P.M.

Record of discussions with the Himachal Pradesh Trade Union Congress represented by:-

1. Mr. Kameshwar Pandit, President, Himachal Pradesh Trade Union Congress.

2. Mr. Anokhi Ram Betab, President., H.P. Agricultural Labourers' Union (Regd).

3. Mr. Salig Ram, Office Secretary, H.P.T.U.C.

The organisation, which is affiliated to the A.I.T.U.C., claims a membership of 3000 workers who are organised into 12 unions. There has been no verification of membership. These workers are mainly employed in transport and P.W.D. The total strength of organised labour is 3000 and of unorganised labour more than 20,000 including those employed on construction of roads. In transport, majority of recognised unions are affiliated to this organisation. There is no recognised union in P.W.D. belonging to either this or any other organisation.

2. There is no proper labour set-up in the State. Director of Industries is also Labour Commissioner. This is not desirable. No patronage is sought from Government, but there should be proper implementation of labour laws.

3. Labour is dispersed and unorganised. In forest areas, for instance, labour is scattered over areas as wide as 50 miles. It is difficult to organise them.

4. There is no effective machinery for granting recognition. The attitude of the Government is one of delay in this matter. The organisation endorses the A.I.T.U.C's stand on determination of representative union by election through secret ballot. A machinery to conduct elections by secret ballot should be set up. On such major issues the local organisation endorses the views of the parent organisation.

5. Agricultural labour are either semi-serfs or semi-slaves. They do not get any money wage. They are steeped in indebtedness. In remote areas of four districts such as Mahasu, Mandi, Chamba and Kulu, this form of bonded or attached labour prevails. Labour is attached to money-lender

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or is given a piece of land. In such area landless agricultural labour constitutes about 20 per cent of total labour force. Workers are also given some food but no cash or clothing. They are so attached to money-lender or so tied to a small piece of land that they cannot move away from the village or they are not allowed to move. They may till a piece of land as share-croppers but they are not recorded as such in revenue records, and, therefore, these records should be reformed.

6. Minimum wages should be fixed and implemented for agricultural labour.

7. All forest labour is on contract. It is given some money by way of advance before it is employed. It works from sun rise to sun set, and throughout the hard winter season. It is given poor food and lives in un-inhabitable tenements at work-sites.

8. Forest operations include such works as timber floating, felling and sawing. These tasks call for exercise of different types of skills. There is specialisation of work according to areas the labour comes from.

9. There is no intermediary for recruitment of labour. Labour is recruited mostly by employers directly. While labour is mostly local, Nepali and Tibetan labour form a sizeable force in border areas. Most of such labour is employed on consturction of roads. There is no problem posed by a local versus outside labour.

10. There is no discrimination against local workers in favour of outsider in regard to wages, which are paid according to their skill. In fact an outsider works more and for longer hours than local labour which does not put in hard work.

11. There is no shortage of labour. Shortage of labour is experienced only during some periods for specific type of work such as plucking fruits at orchards.

12. Outside labour can never be organised; Nepalese labour, for instance, is immune to organisation.

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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

(CAMP : SIMLA)

Date: 31.8.1968 Time : 10.00 to 11.00 A.M.

Record of discussions with the State Labour Department and employing departments represented by:-

1. Mr. P.K. Mattoo,
   Secretary,
   Industries & Labour and
   Labour Commissioner,
   Himachal Pradesh.

2. Mr. Bachan Singh,
   Chief Conservator of Forests - cum-Secretary,
   Department of Forests,
   Himachal Pradesh.

3. Mr. H.R. Mahajan,
   General Manager,
   Himachal Govt. Transport.

4. Mr. B.D. Sharma,
   Superintending Engineer,
   Giri Hydel Project, Nahan,
   Himachal Pradesh.

5. Mr. W.F. Desouza,
   Superintending Engineer,
   Hydel, Solan,
   Himachal Pradesh.

6. Mr. Avtaar Singh,
   Personnel Officer,
   Beas-Sutluj Link Project,
   Sundernagar, Himachal Pradesh.

7. Mr. M.P. Gupta,
   Conservator of Forests,
   Department of Forests,
   Himachal Pradesh.

8. Mr. K.C. Shandil,
   Surveyor of Works, P.W.D.
   Himachal Pradesh.

9. Mr. Maharaj Singh, L.W.O.,
   Beas-Sutluj Link Project,
   Sundernagar, Himachal Pradesh.

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10. Mr. Y.D. Sanadhya,
Legal-cum-Welfare Officer,
Himachal Govt. Transport,
Simla.

11. Mr. T.S. Sodhi,
Vocational Guidance Officer,
Employment & Training Directorate,
Himachal Pradesh.

12. Mr. C.L. Sharma,
Superintendent,
H.P.P.W.D.,
Simla.

The representative of the Public Works Department stated that contract labour was smaller in number than departmental labour. This was because of shortage of contractors in the State. 90% of the work was executed by the local labour and only 10% labour was imported from outside. A large majority of this labour was on daily wage. The total strength of workers was 40,000, but it fluctuated according to seasons. A major part of labour engaged in such work belonged to agriculturists and they were available for work only during agriculturally slack seasons. The department employs 30,000 workers. 5,000 workers are employed on permanent maintenance works.

2. Minimum wages were fixed by the Labour Department in 1966, at Rs. 2.75. The actual wages paid by the Department are Rs. 3.00. Outsiders are being paid 25 paise more than local labour.

3. Local labour has other resources such as agriculture to fall back upon. Nepali labour come voluntarily and they are paid more because they have to maintain two establishments. Higher wage for outside labour is based on administrative decisions. Nepali labour is hardier than local labour. There is also shortage of labour during agricultural seasons, since the peak agricultural season coincides with forest operations. It becomes necessary, therefore, to call in outside labour.

4. It is not a fact that local labour protests against discrimination in wages payable to outside labour; some sections of labour leadership do protest.

5. Contract labour is also employed. A fair wage clause is inserted in the agreement. Prevailing wage is fixed as minimum wage. Fair wage in the 'fair wage clause' is the prevailing wage. It is not the fair wage of the Fair Wages Committee. Inspections to ensure that these wages are paid are casual. There are no reports about underpayment of wages. The inspecting officers at the lower level do not submit any report about the default in payment of these wages.

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6. It is also not necessary to inspect because contractors are paying higher wages than the minimum wages fixed by the departments. There are norms for work laid down on the basis of which the wages are fixed.

7. The Superintending Engineer, Multipurpose Projects stated that his department adopted the schedule of wages drawn up by the Public Works Department. Discrimination against local labour is wrong. Nepali labour is being discouraged. But because of shortage of labour it has to be employed and higher wages have to be paid. The Department employs about 10,000 workers. 80% of them are employed as work-charged. The regulars account for 20%. Atleast 60% of the workers should be regular, 30 per cent work-charged and 10 per cent casual.

8. Linesmen need not be retired early because of the physical handicap in climbing electric poles; usually this work is done by assistant lines-men. Each Lines-man has three such assistants. Linesman generally guides Assistant linesmen.

9. The Chief Conservator of Forests stated that both local and outside labour are employed. Forest operations coincide with sowing and harvesting of crops. Therefore, importation of outside labour becomes necessary. There is direct recruitment of casual labour.

10. In certain schemes temporary huts are provided and a provision for such schemes is shown under 'welfare'. But generally these workers are left on their own. They set up improvised structures or they go to live in nearby villages. There is also provision for field hostel for workers engaged in timber extraction special schemes.

11. So far as discrimination in wages is concerned, it is limited only to casual labour and not to permanent labour employed in forests.

12. As a rule, a worker puts in 8 hours of work and there is a break for an hour. In practice, however, the break is longer. It is not a fact that workers have to work from sun rise to sun set. The work period may vary but they are not putting in more than 8 hours' work.

13. The representative of Public Works Department stated that some workers outside labour force go back to their villages on their own and at their own cost.

14. The representative of the Transport Department stated that a driver does not put in more than five hours on the wheel.

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If he puts in more work he gets an additional allowance which is fixed at double the wages. A schedule of overtime allowances has been drawn up. There is no limit to overtime. Ordinarily a driver puts in five to six hours of duty on longer routes. If they stay out at night they are paid night allowance at the rate of Rs. 4.00 or Rs. 5.00 per night.

15. Minimum wages have been fixed but the department is paying more than these wages. There is no discrimination against local workers in the matter of payment of the wages. There are fixed scales of pay.

16. There are 528 drivers and 210 conductors. The sanctioned personnel strength per vehicle is 4.5 but in practice it is much lower. The total strength of regular workers is 2037 spread over a fleet of 750. 80 per cent of these workers are permanent. 350 workers are casual. Casual labour is required to fill up leave vacancies. Now the Government has initiated measures for providing leave reserve workers.

17. At this stage the Commission posed general questions to which the Commissioner of Labour who is also Secretary of Industries replied on behalf of his department and also on behalf of the representatives of other departments who were present.

18. A minority union should function only if it subscribes to the Code of Discipline. Both labour and employers have to act in a disciplined and responsible manner. Trade unions have to conform to both qualitative and quantitative tests. If an employer does not abide by the Code he may not be given any facility by the Labour Department. The Code of Discipline should become a part of the Statute so that both labour and employer may be prosecuted for breach of its provisions.

19. To determine the representative character of a trade union, verification procedure was favoured. A labour movement should work towards the welfare of labour and should not be converted into the political wing of a party. The trade union is meant exclusively for labour welfare. There is no doubt, a political aspect to a labour's behaviour because he is also a voter. However, there has been no direct instance of politicalisation of trade union in the State so far. Representatives of other departments agreed with this.

20. The charge that Government discouraged formation of unions is not true. In fact the State has become a major employer and as such it comes into contact and conflict with workers. So far as charges of some vague allegations in respect of transfers of workers on the ground of their being functionaries of trade unions were looked into and were found without substance.

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There was no such complaint from Public Works Department and forest department. A bonafide transfer of a trade union worker is always looked upon by union leaders as malafide. The same is true of punishment in which union organisers are involved.

21. It is not a fact that labour laws are not being implemented in the State. About 31 demand notices were served; 22 of these cases were settled at conciliation stage in 1967-68 and two have been referred to labour court. Basic laws are enforced in the two areas of the State, (i) which was transferred from the Punjab and (ii) which constituted the old Himachal Pradesh. But there are two sets of laws; one progressive and the other less so. Already the Government has taken measures to bring about uniformity in laws. Two laws have been passed and some are pending approval of the Government.

22. Creation of a separate labour department will satisfy workers psychologically. But the nature and load of work does not warrant setting up a separate department.

23. Government should continue to have a say in reference of disputes for adjudication. There is no instance of Government delaying such matters. In fact major issues are settled by discussion among parties. It is only minor issues which come up for reference. The Government have already sent two cases to courts.

24. If collective bargaining fails, conciliation and adjudication should follow. Government has to intervene at some stage. Adjudication should stay because it results in quicker settlement of disputes.

25. Framing of an All-India Labour Code was favoured.

26. Labour should remain on the Concurrent List because Central Government is becoming a big employer through its undertakings in the State.

27. There is difference between the adjudication machinery and 'pure labour judiciary'. The first is headed by adjudicator; he is therefore not necessarily a judge. In fact, there is a case for conciliation officers and persons having knowledge of labour laws to be appointed adjudicators. Judges may, however, be nominated on the panel of adjudicators. In such cases and even in normal cases a High Court should be consulted in the same way as a district judge is appointed in consultation with the High Court. A district sessions judge has been appointed head of the tribunal in the State.

28. A panel of names should be suggested by the High Court out of which State Government should select a person for appointment.

29. LAT need not be revived. But an appellate machinery should figure in the 'pure labour judiciary' if it is set up. Such

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a 'judiciary' will have jurisdiction on original and appellate sides of a labour dispute.

30. Lawyers have to appear before adjudication authorities to plead the case of labour because labour has not equipped itself for such court appearances.

31. 'Conciliation is adjudication in embryo'. It should not be done away with.

32. Minimum wages have to be fixed at regional level. A worker in hilly areas needs more warm clothes and so higher wages. A minimum wage is subsistence wage. There is no instance of workers being paid less than minimum wages. In fact, even in small sectors they are being paid more than minimum wages. At a later and second stage need based wage may be worked out. But it should be phased out over a period of time. The Himachal Pradesh Government has already undertaken to guarantee the minimum wage which is subsistence wage. Once it is introduced in all the industries, the need for working out a need based minimum wage will arise but this will be at a second stage. It should, however, be left to workers and management to work out either through collective bargaining or through some other means.

33. In fixing need based wages the capacity of the industry run by the State or private management should be taken into account. But a subsistence wage must be paid by all irrespective of capacity. In the Government undertaking, Nahan Foundry, workers have been paid a bonus; in breweries workers get more than subsistence wage.

SA/-

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

Record of informal discussions with Lt. General K. Bahadur Singh, Lieutenant Governor, Himachal Pradesh, held at 4.00 P.M. on August 31, 1968, in Raj Niwas, Simla.

Low labour productivity now-a-days needs to be looked into, and improved. A worker, at present, is poorly motivated to his work and as a sequel thereof his output is low. Inadequate supervision, or even absence of it at times, is also responsible for low productivity. Proper supervision and periodic and timely work inspection can definitely show better results in the form of improved productivity, both quantitative and qualitative.

Discipline has a key role to play in augmenting labour efficiency and productivity, and needs to be inculcated in the labour force. To imbibe discipline, a worker is to be convinced; his behaviour has to be watched and suitably moulded to conform to certain norms of industrial life. In army training, discipline is given prime importance. Industrial labour needs to be similarly disciplined though sanctions may, or have to, be different. In civil life persuasion is the only sanction. In army they have developed an approach which though on surface may appear rough, has in it adequate human consideration. This is what is very much required in training and disciplining personnel.

Equipped with the right type of training and experience of handling human material of varied character, retired army officers can, with the necessary orientation in management, be profitably employed in industrial concerns and can play a useful role in inculcating discipline in the labour force which may ultimately result in better productivity and labour-management relations.

Most of the offices are over-staffed. As a result of this, the clerical staff whiles away a good part of the paid working hours in activities unconnected with their work. This has led to over-time bill mounting up. Even at officers' level, the files are tossed about without taking decisions whereas in army if a task is not attended to and decisions are not taken quickly the officer will get a bad name.

It is advisable to adopt labour intensive techniques which would provide employment and purchasing power to masses as we have abundant capital in terms of labour in our country whereas cash capital is scarce. This will not only raise their living standard but also create market for the goods produced. However, for technical reasons or yield considerations, modern machinery may (or must) be substituted for human labour. Mechanical operation for timber extraction which gives much better

yield of timber than is possible through manual operation and thus enables a more profitable exploitation of forest wealth is an instance on the point. Only in cases where mechanical devices are sure to give a better yield that machines need be given preference over human labour.

Though it is said that Himachal Pradesh has labour shortage, one often hears about unemployment. Probably unemployment is more among the educated class because of lack of initiative in the educated youth. Himachal Pradesh can offer many remunerative avenues of self-employment in the nature of growing of vegetables, apple orchards and sheep rearing. Establishment of farms and orchards has already yielded, and is still yielding, dividends and it was felt that raising a cross-breed of sheep by importing varieties like Merino from America will undoubtedly result in much better yield of high quality raw wool, saleable at higher prices. It is advisable for an educated youth to explore these avenues of self-employment, involving small amounts of investment, than aspiring for a clerk's position.

As regards National Minimum Wage, regional variations have to be permitted to suit the different patterns of living. For instance, workers in hilly areas may need woollens whereas those in plains need lighter garments. Such cases could be multiplied.

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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

Commission's visit to Narkanda (Himachal Pradesh) on Ist September, 1968.

In Himachal Pradesh the farmers and agricultural workers near Simla appeared to be well off. At Kumarsen, a small place near Narkanda, three women visitors to a fair were interviewed for a brief period.

The first woman was a Nepali. She had a general merchandise shop at the fair. She was owning her regular shop at Narkanda. Like a Nepali, she was sturdy and looking healthy. She was well clad in her colourful gown and a scarf over her head. She was busy attending to her customers and could spare only a few minutes talking. She stated that she had good income from her shop to provide her a fair living. Shop-keeping was her only vocation. She appeared to be generally happy and had nothing to complain against the outside world of which she knew so little. Over the years because of her enterprise, she has improved her income and her way of life.

A young lady in her tidy dress - a blouse and ankle-low skirt, was another visitor to the fair. The cold was not much to talk of, but still the woollen cardigan on her was there as a status symbol. She was found purchasing items like balloons and small money purse partly for her own use and partly for the kids at home. She stated that her father had an apple orchard at Kotgarh, the village she was coming from. This village is said to be the most prosperous village of India having a per capita income very much above the average. All her brothers were working at the orchard with the father. They were engaging a few workers also. The lady was not aware how much payment was made to them. The ladies in the house-hold were not required to work in the orchard nor did they engage themselves in any paid occupation. She could not say how much land her father owned; was modest to admit that land was more than adequate. This year the apple crop was not good. She could get all her requirements in the area, she was living in. Transport facilities were developing, buses were introduced, but she came down to the fair by a shorter foot track.

The third woman was one in a huge group of onlookers waiting to witness the holy dance of their deity. She was married four years back and was having two kids. She was living in a joint family with her father-in-law. She said they had some land on which they were growing vegetables, cereals and fruits. The lady had to do all types of work. Some adult members in the family were doing work outside also. Women in the family were also working at the farm, they did not have very big farm but had enough

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for their own living. They were able to afford a good diet and adequate clothing. She herself was dressed in a printed cotton gown and a scarf over her head. She had no difficulty in her village and showed complete satisfaction with her way of life. The purchases in the family were made by the male members and she was not aware of rates she was paying for daily consumption articles like ghee and pulses etc.

We interviewed some workers in Narkanda. Some of them belonged to road gangs; they got work all the year round. In winter they migrated to milder climate. Some of them stated that the wage rates for local labour differed from those for labour which comes either from Nepal or from plains. They did not seem to mind this difference so long as they were not underpaid. They sent their children to school, had their own huts from where they cannot be displaced, and the work in the vicinity kept them busy. Their main complaint was about the steep rise in prices. When asked why it should affect them since they had some land, their reply was that the piece of land was inadequate and to make it yield better it needed investment.

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