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★ *Reports on Industries*

★ *Reports on Condition of Workers in Certain Industries*

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per thousand. The after effect of this discrimination has resulted in further anarchism in the industry and affected the possibility of better wages and improved industrial relations. The encouragement to unbranded beedies has affected the working and living standards of the workers. In the name of giving protection to the small tobacco farmers, the Janata Party government also exempted beedi tobacco from excise duty. The benefits of this exemption have flowed into the pockets of traders and not the farmers. However, despite the tax exemption the price of tobacco has gone up.

The impementation of the Beedi and Cigar Workers' Act of 1966 has been left in the hands of the state governments. They have not implemented the act simultaneously and certain important provisions of the act have not yet been implemented. The Janata party government constituted a compact committee consisting of state government representatives in place of tripartite committee to examine the question of implementation of the Act, but the committee has not done much in this regard. Hence the workers and trade unions have demanded the constitution of tripartite committees at the state levels to examine the implementation of the act and set down guidelines for the same.

Though the central government was earlier from time to time advising the state governments to fix minimum wages there is no uniformity in respect of wages. In some states the wages are even below those of the agricultural workers. Hence the issue of a national minimum wage for beedi workers assumes additional importance.

The Beedi Workers' Welfare Fund Act of 1976 came into force on 15 February 1977 and the rules under the act came into force from 7 October 1978.

Since the government in its 1979 budget exempted unmanufactured tobacco from the levy of excise duty the levy of cess on the issue of tobacco from warehouses for the purpose of the welfare fund has also been discontinued. The resources for the fund will have to be provided by the government and a tripartite advisory body at the central level will have to be set up for the formulation of policies and programme under the fund.

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ROAD TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

by

Dr. Raj Bahadur Gour

President, National Federation of Road Transport Workers

Road transport constitutes a vital infrastructure for the country's economic advance. It opens up the countryside, connects the villages to centres of trade and industry and carries men and material from place to place.

Road transport is becoming increasingly important in the country's life. Between 1960-61 and 1975-76 the railway share of goods transport has fallen from 72% to 67% while that of the road transport has gone up from 28% to 33%. The railway share of passenger kilometers carried has in the same period fallen from 58% to 39% and that of road transport gone up from 42% to 61%. In 1965-66 railways carried 96 billion passenger kilometres while road transport accounted for 62 billion passenger kilometres. But in 1976-77 the railways carried 164 billion passenger kilometres, when road transport carried 261 billion kilometres.

The policy enunciated was one of progressive nationalisation of passenger road transport. But as on March 31, 1979, only 55.5% of passenger road transport fleet operated in the public sector. The total fleet owned by state road transport undertakings was 61,661 passenger vehicles and a mere 1556 goods trucks. The capital employed was Rs. 1,043.92 crores. The total number of workers employed were 4.62 lakhs and the fleet carried on an average about 3 crore passengers daily.

The total earnings of all the country's state road transport undertakings in 1978-79 was Rs. 1000.10 crores while the aggregate cost of operation was Rs. 1056.21 crores accounting for a loss of Rs. 56.11 crores.

The central government investment is routed through the railways. The central and state government investment is in the nature of non-returnable loan carrying a guaranteed interest of 6½%.

Among the 46 State road transport undertakings 21 are corporations functioning under the Road Transport Corporations Act. Of these, 12 are companies registered under the companies Law and 6 undertakings are managed departmentally, and the remaining 7 are run by the municipal corporations.

State Road Transport undertakings are subject to both heavy taxation by the government and a crippling loot by the monopolies.

The taxes are not uniform in all the states nor are the passenger fares uniform. If in 1960-61 the total taxes amounted to Rs. 166.94 crores, in 1974-75 they had shot up to Rs 1238.25 crores. If in this period the central taxes had gone up from Rs. 111.70 crores to Rs. 883.81 crores the states taxes had shot up from Rs. 55.24 crores to Rs. 354.44 crores.

The monopoly loot of state road transport was staggering. Tatas have revised the chassis prices 19 times and Ashok-Leyland 24 times between 1974 and 1980. Tata chassis that was available for Rs. 86723/- in 1974 was sold at Rs. 1,49,991/- in June 1980. In the same period Ashok Leyland chassis price has shot up from Rs. 84,345/- to Rs. 1,62,123/- a rise by 92.21%.

Tata ordinary bus body price has gone up from Rs. 50,024/- in 1974 to Rs. 79,750/- in 1980 and that of Ashok Leyland make has, in the same period, shot up from Rs. 52,444/- to Rs. 84,390/-.

Tyre price has been raised 15 times between 1974 and 1980. The tyre that was available for Rs. 955.76 in April 1974 was costing Rs. 1803.00 in July 1980. The Government of India raised the price of high speed diesel from Rs. 1,604.65 paise per kilo litre on 1.4.1974 to Rs. 3,223.96 paise per kilo litre on 1.4.1979. The price was further raised in October 1979 by Rs. 754/- per kilo litre and again in May 1980.

No wonder the gross profits of monopolies have gone up. Ashok Leyland profits have gone up from Rs. 13.76 crores in 1978 to Rs. 16.22 crores in 1979, Dunlop India profits have gone up from Rs. 3.95 crores to Rs. 8.80 crores. CEAT profits have increased from Rs. 3.51 crores to Rs. 6.36 crores. Goodyear, whose books showed a loss of Rs. 21 lakhs in 1978, earned a gross profit of Rs. 2.53 crores in 1979.

Oil India has earned a profit (before tax) of Rs. 15.67 crores in 1978.

Inspite of heavy taxation the condition of the roads is awful. As on March 31, 1980 the total length of roads of all descriptions in our country was 14.9 lakh kilometres. Out of this only 6.1 lakh kilometres of road were surfaced. Unsurfaced roads which cost road transport operation more by 20% in fuel, 53% in tyre, 60% in repairs and 66% in spares, constituted as much as 90.67% of total roads in Arunachal Pradesh, 92.53%, in Mizoram, 82% to 86% in Himachal, Manipur and Assam, between 72% and 79% in Orissa, U.P., Bihar, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, West Bengal and Kerala. It was about 52% in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, 44.42% in Karnataka and Tamilnadu and 40.04% in Gujarat.

The expenditure on roads that stood at Rs. 94.27 crores by the centre and Rs. 262.0 by the states in 1972-73 fell to Rs. 84.41 crores in 1974-75 in the case of the centre and rose to a mere estimated Rs. 345.00 crores in the case of the states.

Bad roads and poor vehicle condition are the main causes for vehicle failures that the frequent and accidents that are on the increase. Breakdowns in 1978-79 per million kms have been as many as 412 in Tripura, 508 in Delhi, 280 in Kerala, 176 in Pallava Transport and 114 in Bihar. They were 890 in Ahmedabad and 265 in Pune.

Accidents for every 10 million kms in 1978-79 were as many as 879 in BEST, 270 in Kerala, 250 in Pallavan, 106 in Delhi, 234 in Ahmedabad, 200 in Pune, 89 in Tripura, 41 in Maharashtra, 36 in Gujarat, 35 in Karnataka and so on. Out of a total of 14,790 vehicle accidents in 1975, as many as 4353 were due to overloading, 2880 due to defective brakes, 1262 due to defective steering, [illegible]364 due to puncture or tyre bursts, and 3084 due to other various mechancal defects.

Such is the condition of the industry, its finances and its organisational situation.

The workers in state sector road transport have secured revision of wages in a number of states like Rajasthan, Kerala, Karnataka and the latest in Tamilnadu. Negotiations are going on for a final settement in Andhra Pradesh, pending which interim relief is granted. In Bihar, the union has demanded revision following that in the case of state government employees.

DA is linked to state consumer price index in Kerala and is subject to month by month revision. In all other cases it is mostly linked to state government employees' D.A.

Bonus is paid more than what is provided by law only in Kerala. In government departmentally managed undertakings bonus is denied.

In the private sector the wages are miserable. For the most part the industry is in small sector covered by the minimum wages act and the wages fixed are very low in most states.

The main demands of the National Federation of Indian Road Transport Workers whose sixth conference was held only recently in August in Jaipur are:

* Progressive nationalisation of passenger road transport.
* Road transport to be included in plan core to entitle it for preference in plan allocations and credit from financial institutions.
* Relief in taxation and government goods transport to be handed over to state road transport undertaking to augment its earnings and resources and avoid undue fare hike.
* Nationalisation of automobile and tyre industry.
* Immediate setting up of chassis industry and tyre industry in public sector.
* Surfacing and widening of roads to be undertaken.
* States and centre should compensate for the losses suffered by state road transport undertakings due to operation on unremunerative but socially necessary routes, for offering concessional travel to students, physically handicapped and others
* Indian Oil should supply HSD at a different rate to state sector undertakings or, as recommended by the standing committee of the National Road Transport Council in 1974, provide assistance to state sector road transport undertakings from its earnings.

* The vehicles that are off the roads for repair or any other reason should not be taxed for the period they remain idle. Vehicle taxation should be less in case of vehicles operating on unremunerative routes and in cities, and should be progressively reduced as the age of the vehicle advances. Aged vehicles are more costly to operate.
* Private operation illegally encroaching on the state road transport earnings should be severely punished.
* The transport workers are governed by different laws. The traffic staff is governed by the Transport Workers' Act. The workshop and the depot maintenance workers are governed by the factories law. The administrative offices staff is government by the state shops and establishments law if at all it is applicable to them. There is a need for comprehensive and improved legislation governing the working conditions of transport workers.
* DA in all cases should be linked to consumer price index.
* All transport workers should be eligible for bonus.
* There should be a tripartite road transport industrial development committee.
* Workers' participation with full powers must be ensured in all public sector road transport undertakings at all levels.

REPORT ON RAILWAYS

by

Parvathi Krishnan

President, Indian Railway Workers' Federation

The Indian Railways are the nation's largest undertaking in the nationalised sector. The entire system is divided into nine zones: Central, Eastern, Northern, Northeast Frontier, Southern, South Central, South Eastern, Central and Western. The railways have three main production units: Chittaranjan Locomotive Works, Diesel Locomotive Works at Varanasi and the Integral Coach Factory at Madras. A Wheel and Axle Plant is being set up at Bangalore and a Traction Motor unit at Nasik. There is a Research and Designs Organisation at Lucknow in Charge of a Director General directly under the Railway Board. The nine zones and the production units are administered by General Managers. The administrative responsibility of the railways as a whole rests with the Railway Board which functions as a government department under a Union Cabinet Minister. The Railway Board exercises all powers in respect of regulation, construction, maintenance, and operation of railways.

The total investment of the railways today stands at Rs. 6,187.5 crores (an increase of Rs. 5,332.3 crores from Rs. 855.2 crores in 1950-51). The route mileage increased from 53,596 kms in 1950 to only 60,777 kms in 1978-79, but the total track mileage which includes double and multiple tracks and tracks in yards and sidings has increased from 77,609 kms in 1950 to 103,567 kms in 1978-79. The motive power today consists of 8082 steam, 2126 diesel (17 in 1950-51) and 944 electric (72 in 1950-51) locomotives. Passenger coaches have increased from 13,022 to 26,830, electric multiple coaches from 460 to 2412 and wagons from 205,596 to 401,880. There are about 50 main repair workshops located in the nine zones as well as 300 locomotive depots and 400 carriage and wagon "sicklines".

During this period, 1950-51 to 1978-79 (the latest figures available) the number of passengers using the railways has increased from 1284 millions to 3719 millions and the passenger earnings from Rs. 98.2 crores to 672.8 crores, the average increasing from 1.48 paise to 3.49 paise. In respect of freight, the increase has been from 73.2 million tonnes to 199.6 million tonnes of revenue earning traffic. The net tonne kms of goods traffic has increased from 37,565 millions to 143,870 millions and passenger kms from 66,517 millions to 192,946 millions resulting in an increase of average earnings per passenger of 203% and per tonne kilometre of 178%.

The number of regular staff of all categories including officers and administrative staff has increased from 913,600 to 15,25,000. Casual labour employed on the railways number more than 229,000. These figures do not include the workers under contractors who are engaged in construction and repair works in several parts of the railways. Nearly 13,51,000 of the workers are employed directly on operation and maintenance, this figure including workshop and artisan staff (4.37 lakhs) and running staff (1.09 lakhs) The Railway Protection Force consists of 60,995 and 34,903 are engaged in the manufacture of rolling stock.

During these years the railways have made considerable headway in modernising the operation in the sphere of signal and telecommunications panel interlocking, route relay interlocking, centralised traffic control, automatic signalling, mechanisation of marshalling yards—all these have proceeded apace. In this manner the line capacity of the existing routes has been increased. Tracks have been strengthened to meet the requirements of greater speed resulting in the introduction of super fast trains on the major trunk routes. A number of marshalling yards have been mechanised with a view to increasing the handling capacity while reducing the incidence of damage to wagons and their contents. The old wooden bodied coaches have been steadily replaced by the modern all-steel non-telescopic integral coaches which have a higher speed potential also. The 4-wheeler goods wagon, which was a "box-on-wheels" is being replaced by larger capacity bogie wagons, and commodities of a fluid nature are being moved in more sophisticated tank wagons. Many fragile commodities are being carried in special container carrying wagons. With all these changes, the maximum speed which was pegged at 96 kilometres per hour has now been increased to 130 kilometres per hour on the Indian railways.

It will be seen from all this that there has been considerable progress on the Indian railways in the last 28 years. And yet the fact remains that the railways have in achieving this progress concentrated mainly on achieving intensive utilisation of existng routes, particularly the trunk routes. Rolling stock has been improved and modernised and modern techniques developed—all of which is creditable. But on the other hand, the railways have been sadly lagging behind in developing new routes, in guage conversion to achieve a single gauge system throughout the country and many other aspects of development. Most workshops continue to have obsolete equipment making it a hard task to keep up with maintenance to the extent required of the rolling stock and other equipment.

In other words, there has been a continuation of the unequal facilities in different parts of the country as they were inherited at the time of independence. The British constructed railways in India with the express purpose of building a transport infrastructure which they needed for the economic exploitation and political domination of the country. The successive governments at the centre, in pursuing a path of capitalist development, have paid scant regard to the improvement and provision of rail services in economically backward regions or to the social aspects of railway transport in these regions. Vast tracts of the country are not served by railways.

For instance, prior to the partition of the country in 1947, the east-west line of the Bengal Assam Railway served the needs of the present north-east region. After partition, the Assam Rail Link was constructed on a priority basis to ensure access to this region by railway. But this was also limited and little has been done since then to develop railways in the region. Similarly there are rail routes in such states as Tamilnadu, Gujarat and Rajasthan which continue to be served only by metre gauge. All this leads to severe handicaps in the development of the economy of the regions and it is not surprising that the people of these regions, particularly in the north-east, feel negected after 33 years of independence.

The average route mileage since 1950-51 has been less than 10.34%—though the total track mileage, serving industry and trade has increased at a faster pace. Hence, though the operation and efficiency of the railways compares favourable with even the most advanced countries, the route length compares unfavourably with those countries and even with such countries as Egypt, Sri Lanka, Malaysia whether in terms of population or land area.

When this question of planned development of the railways to serve the economic, social and transport needs of the total population are raised, far from giving attention to them and laying down a firm policy of such development, the Government and the railway administration reduce the whole question to one of resources. It is not a quetion of mere resources.

But the tendency is to arrive at facile conclusions that resources —whether they be for the development of the railways or for meeting the just demands of the railway workers—can only be raised by increasing fares and freights and a case is being made out for such an increase. The costs of inputs, wage costs, operational costs—these are all calculated to show that unless there is an increase in fares and freights, railways will not be in a position to find the funds for further all round development.

It is forgotten that, in the same manner as development of railways has been based on the system inherited from the Britain, so also the case of finance of the railways. Dating back to the days of the British, the railway budget was so constructed as to ensure a high rate of profit and return on the investment of the British companies. The same system continues today. The dividend paid to general revenue on the capital-at-large which was 6% until the year 1978-79 has now, on the basis of the recommendation of the Railway Convention Committee been reduced to 5½% on capital invested upto March 1964 but remains at 6% for the ensuing years. Even with this burden the railways earned a net surplus upto the year 1965-66, and again in the year 1972-73 and 1978-79. Part of this amount of course in this earlier years went to offset the compensation paid to the British companies—which was grossly exaggerated and fixed at a notional charge amounting to Rs. 860 crores in 1947. When independence was achieved, the railways were in poor shape and according to the railway administration's figures, a sum of Rs. 2049.92 crores had to be spent for addition to or replacement of rolling stock and a sum of Rs. 786.88 crores for renewal of track and bridges during the period 1951-52 to 1973-74. This entire amount, over and above the compensation paid for this overaged stock was credited to the capital-at-large! In the years since independence, however, railways have contributed more than nearly Rs. 4500 crores to the general revenues. Therefore, if the loan capital is treated as investment and revenue surplus arrived at after deducting depreciation reserve fund and pension fund, there will be a surplus in the budget which would then be divided, in the ratio required, between investment and development. In other words, railways should be treated as an industrial undertaking and not as a department of the government.

Another question that requires examination is the social burdens which are borne by the railways. In most countries, these burdens are borne by the government. In 1950-51, the loss on coaching services was to the tune of Rs. 59 crores and on low rated goods traffic Rs. 52 crores—a total of Rs. 111 crores. In 1978-79, coaching services accounted for a loss of Rs. 175.45 crores and low rated goods traffic Rs. 68.09 crores, freight concession on relief meaures Rs. 0.15 crores, totalling Rs. 243.69 crores.

The gvernment and railway administration constantly defend the cost of social burdens, carrying certain goods at concessional rates, on the plea that this practice is aimed at keeping down prices of essential commodities. And yet, during this period, while the social burdens have not only continued, but have steadily increased, the prices of commodities carried at concessional rates have also steadily risen—sugar, jagree and sugar cane in 1978-79 accounted for a loss of Rs. 3.26 crores to the railways. But the consumer is now being charged between Rs. 8 and Rs. 15 per kilo of sugar! Similarly, Rs. 28.24 crores is the loss on transport of foodgrains, and the price of rice and wheat has also risen. Edible oils have been continuously rising in prices to the consumer, and the loss to the railways in 1978-79 has been Rs. 1.10 crores. The loss on suburban traffic (coaching services) in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras is borne by the railways. Most of the passengers on these lines, apart from students, are employees of the big monopoly and multinational firms. In many major industrial centres such as Bangalore and Hyderabad, in public sector units, such as Hindustan Aeronautics, Hindustan Machine Tools, etc., the transport of the employees is provided by the Management. Hence, this burden should be borne either by the government or by the employer and not placed on the railways.

Here again, the whole concept of "social burden" dates back to the days of the British. In the name of unifying the country, railways were declared a public utility service under the Indian Railways Act, 1890 and government reserved the right "in public interest, to direct the railways to give preference to the transport of certain goods at below cost". In other words, government can direct the railways to carry goods at low rates and then force the people to pay through increased fares while granting concessions to the businessmen who exploit the resources of the country. This has been the picture of social burdens all these years.

Apart from these factors, the railways can also mop up resources in many other ways. Resources are being continuously drained away by payments towards claims of loss, pilferage and damage. Since 1950-51 alone the total paid by the railways towards such claims is more than Rs. 120 crores. About 60% of the claims paid in 1978-79 were on account of loss, theft and pilferage. Again money is lost to the railways due to the large scale corruption in the purchase of stores, in writing off demurrage charge of large companies and in a myriad other ways. The need for gauge conversion is pertinent in the context of pilferage and theft which is widespread in transhipment yards.

The finances of the railways cannot be viewed apart from the issue of an integrated transport policy for the country. Over the years, road transport competition has been steadily growing. Though one committee after another has gone into the question of an integrated transport policy, the reports of the committees have been put into cold storage. Inland Water transport has been virtually neglected. Road transport has become competitive to rail transport instead of being complementary to it. National highways, far from serving areas which have hardly any transport facilities have grown more or less parallel to rail trunk routes. There are today vast areas in the country which do not have either rail or road transport facilities. Uneconomic branch lines are run by the railways due to political pressures—these could be better served by road transport. Since the railways are part and parcel of the government apparatus they cannot withstand political pressures. In respect of freight traffic the railways themselves state that:

"While the railways were gaining bulk traffic, they were losing some of the high-rated traffic to the road. The road traffic has certain inherent advantages over rail traffic in that a road haulier, apart from offering door-to-door service, is free to pick and choose traffic and is also not bound by any fixed tariffs. The railways, on the other hand, being a nationalised undertaking, are under statutory obligation to carry all traffic offered to them and to show no undue discrimination and charge as per the publicised tariffs".

The railway administration sees the problem only from this limited point of view and argues that railways are at a disadvantage due to being a nationalised undertaking! But the reality is that an integrated transport policy would to a large measure guarantee that the traffic more suitably carried by the railways would come to the railways. For instance, where freight is moved first by metre gauge and then has to be transhipped it has to face delays and the danger of theft and pilferage-the user would then prefer to use road transport. Hence the need for speedy gauge conversion. It must also be noted that the running costs of metre gauge are higher than broad gauge.

A further point to be noted is that the national transport policy committee has recommended that, for shorter distance motor transport would be more suitable in terms of overall resources costs, and the railways should concentrate more on medium and long-distance transport. Thus an integrated policy would help to bring about such a change in goods transport.

Only an integrated transport system would serve the interests of the people at large, ensuring a harmonised transport system which would serve public needs and result in running an economic system. Particularly today, in a period of growing energy crisis, with the relative scarcity of petroleum products resulting from continuous price hikes, it is imperative that an integrated transport policy be evolved. The railways have finalised a corporate plan for a 15 year period, ending in 1988-89. This plan does not reflect in the least any features of an integrated transport policy nor of developing railways by extending the route mileage—a study of the plan will reveal that it continues on the same old lines of keeping the railways to the task of serving the interests of the monopolists and multi-national combines. The concentration hitherto has been mainly on existing trunk routes, which has been of greatest benefit to the monopolists both in terms of transport facilities and in terms of freight concessional rates. Railwaymen should come forward to study these problems and take them up. They cannot remain indifferent to the ills which beset the industry. The prosperity of the industry, the development along the lines required for all round development of the country are as much their concern and responsibility as these cannot be viewed in isolation from their own working and living standards. The balanced development of all branches of transport systems are to serve the interests of the whole of society and of all regions and naturally of the transport workers as well. A democratic transport policy can only be evolved when transport workers and their trade unions have the right to be consulted on all basic points of transport policy. To exercise this right the transport workers should also come forward to study the transport requirements. The question of integrated transport policy should be taken up and diversion into resources question combatted.

II

When the general elections to the Lok Sabha took place in the beginning of 1977, railway workers by and large demonstrated through the ballot that they wanted a change in the government at the Centre. The scars inflicted on them during the historic general strike of May 1974 had not healed. The six demands were still pending and the victimisation had yet to be vacated.

'When Madhu Dandavate took over as Railway Minister in the Janata Party Government which was elected to power, his very first gesture of reinstatement of the victimised workers of the May 1974 strike raised high hopes in the minds of all railwaymen that many pending demands would be speedily settled. But the process of reinstatement itself was a slow one. The undemocratic set-up of the railway administration was such that there were numerous instances of obstructions in the process of reinstatement. However, this process gradually continued though it was not fully completed. Another step forward was that for the first time the administration began to receive representations from the unrecognised unions on the railways and to hold discussions with them. This resulted in some issues, long neglected by the two recognised federations and their affiliates, being settled at divisional and local levels. But on the key issues of settling the pending demands of the 1974 strike—particularly the revision of wages and bonus—there was no progress at all and Madhu Dandavate, became a prisoner of the very system.

As railway minister he was sympathetic on occasions when he had direct talks with representatives of unrecognised unions and federations. The Indian Railway Workers' Federation met him and put forward the demand for a new industrial relations policy on the railways for resuming negotiations on the six demands of the 1974 strike and for recognition of the federation. However he later took shelter behind the Bhoothalingam panel and the announcement of a comprehensive industrial relations legislation to evade further discussions. Even after the Bhoothalingam Committee recommendations and the industrial relations bill were rejected unitedly by all sections of the working class including the railway workers, he did not come forward for any discussions. And so the old position continues to this day.

Over the years the failure of the two recognised federations, the National Federation of Indian Railwaymen and the All Indian Railwaymen's Federation to pursue policies which would reflect the sentiments of all sections of railwaymen and settle various sectional demands of categories, particularly anomalies arising out of the recommendations of the three pay commissions, has led to unrest amongst the railwaymen. The period since the Jamshedpur session of the AITUC has witnessed a number of strikes of various categories in different regions and zones and the problems are yet to be solved.

It is in this background that the pressure from the railwaymen brought the recognised federations on to a common platform with all other organisations in 1979. At a meeting of the representatives of the AIRF, NFIR, IRWF, BRMS, All India Loco Running Staff Association and the All India Railwaymen's Confederation held on 7 October 1979, a preparatory committee was set up and the a common charter of demands adopted. It was also decided to hold a joint meeting of the working committees of the six organisations to endorse jointly the charter of demands. But during October and November the recognised federations failed to respond actively for joint campaigns at the lower levels to prepare for action though this had been discussed at the meeting.

Hence when the meeting of office-bearers of the federations and associations was held on 9 November 1979, the NFIR and AIRF, supported by the BRMS, had nothing to add to the October meeting except to press for on early date to launch a strike. The NFIR and AIRF also arrogated to themselves the right to negotiate on behalf of all the organisations-a different position from the May 1974 strike when all members of the NCCRS formed at that time to conduct the strike were parties also to the negotiations. Thus they took up a position which militated against the very spirit of a united struggle. The meeting therefore came to an abrupt end.

On 14 November the general secretary of the AIRF announced that a settlement had been reached with the government on the issue of bonus and "negotiations" on the remaining demands were continuing with the Ministry of Railways. The very next day came the announcement of a productivity-linked-bonus scheme for railway workers, giving the go-by to the demand of 8.33% minimum bonus. It became clear that while all other organisations were working for the widest possible unity of all railwaymen for the demand of wage revision and 8.33% bonus, the NFIR and AIRF were conducting negotiations with the government on their own and not taking the representatives of the other organisations into confidence at any stage.

The demands of the railwaymen hence still remain unsettled.

The entire pay structure of railwaymen as fixed by consecutive pay commissions requires drastic revision. The pay commissions were charged with the task of recommending wage scales for categories in the administrative services of the government—they have therefore failed to take into account the special features of the railway work as well as to measure the degrees of skill involved in different categories on which to fix the differentials. At the same time modernisation of different operations of the railways have resulted in the workers being called upon to perform newer skills in their work. Productivity of the workers in all fields has increased. But their wages are not commensurate with their skills and types of work which they are called upon to perform.

The 8th session of the Inland Transport Committee of the ILO stated that the pay scales of transport workers should bear a reasonable comparison with those for jobs in other industries calling for similar skills and similar degrees of responsibility, and this principle was upheld as far back as 1968 by the study group on rail transport of the National Commission on Labour. But to this day this principle is being studiously ignored by the government and the railway administration. Figures are trotted out only to try and prove that railway workers are better off than others. The latest figure being continuously quoted is that the expenditure by the railways on their employees has risen by 441% since 1950-51, and this is claimed at a time when the minimum wage of a railway worker is only Rs. 330 per month! Whatever may be the jugglery behind these figures the fact remains that the average cost per employee on the railways falls far short of the pay of the employees in major public sector undertakings.

At the time of the railway strike of May 1974 when the principal demand was that railway workers' wages should be revised and an industrial wage-structure introduced, the annual cost per railway employee was Rs. 3714 in 1972-73 whereas the annual pay per employee in major public sector undertakings was Rs. 6313—this disparity continues.

Hence the main demand before railwaymen continues to be that of wage revision, and introduction of an industrial wage-structure as recommended by the ILO. At the same time the wide gulf in difference in wages on the railways and other industries is further widened by the retrograde DA formula applied to railwaymen. This formula also requires revision.

The next major demand affecting all railwaymen is that of bonus. Railwaymen have been discriminated against in the matter of bonus. A productivity-linked bonus scheme has now been introduced but this does not meet the demand for a statutory minimum bonus of 8.33%. Performance bonus is paid in many industries—but only over and above the statutory minimum bonus. Railwaymen as industrial workers have right to such minimum bonus.

A long standing demand of railwaymen is that of decasualisation of the nearly three lakhs casual workers. This large army of railwaymen are the worst exploited class of workers being paid too low a wage violating the principle of 'equal pay for equal work'. Large numbers of these workers have to their credit service ranging upto 15 years and even more. Some progress in this field was registered under Madhu Dandavate's ministership. But still they are deprived of all service benefits and security of service. All casual labour needs to be brought on permanent rolls and their earlier years of service taken into account for all benefits due to them as railway employees.

Many categories of railwaymen are called upon to work for more than 8 hours at a stretch without payment of overtime. In all fairness the existing classifications of "excluded" and "essentially intermittent" should be discontinued and all railway workers brought on a 8-hour per day roster, excluding those who are already rostered on a 6-hour duty.

The victimisation connected with the strike of May 1974 and the emergency have not yet been completely vacated. Hence the unions on the railways have demanded that penalties which have not been cancelled should be reviewed and cancelled with retrospective effect, full wages for the dismissal, removal and termination and suspension periods be given to those who have not yet received the same and one additional increment be given to those who have not been given the same on account of their participation in the strike.

Today one of the problems affecting railwaymen is that of large scale stagnation. There are numerous cases of rail staff who have stagnated at the maximum pay of their grades for years. This also arises out of the totally unscientific wage-structure existing on the railways. Hence a scheme for time-bound promotions has to be evolved also so that an employee gets at least three promotions before he retires from service.

These are some of the major overall urgent demands of railwaymen as a whole but there are innumerable other demands before each category also arising out of the increasing anomalies since the appointment of the First Pay Commission itself.

To achieve these demands railwaymen have to come forward to build up the widest possible unity amongst all railwaymen's unions and organisations and strive for solidarity in action. At the same time the demands for democratisation and drastic revision of the existing industrial relations policy on the railways has to be taken up.

The reality today is that due to various reasons several organisations of workers exist on the railways. The industrial relations policy of the administration is based on the recognition of only two federations to the complete exclusion of all negotiating rights for all other organisations. They are not even given a hearing. The emergence of other unions and associations can also be traced to this system of industrial relations—the administration have only patronised the recognised federations all these years and these federations in turn have failed to respond to the needs of the railwaymen and to function in a democratic manner. The administration has even manoeuvred in more than one instance—as in the case of the N. E. Railway and S. E. Railway-to give recognition selectively and not on the basis of judging the real representative character of the leadership. Unions at the zonal level are at the mercy of the leadership at the central level for purposes of recognition. So in more aspects than one the whole industrial relations policy and the industrial disputes machinery of the railways need a thorough change in a democratic direction. It has to be recognised that the basic questions of wage revision and bonus have to be settled speedily through bilateral negotiations in which all wings of the railway trade union movement should participate. The railway workers are coming forward for unity on these lines and it is only such a wide and broadbased unity which will also be a guarantee for achieving their outstanding demands.

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CEMENT INDUSTRY

by

H. N. Narendra Prasad

General Secretary, All India Cement Workers' Federation

Cement constitutes an important segment of the modern industrial economy of India. There are 55 cement producing units in the country, excluding one unit at Wuyan in Jammu and Kashmir. Cement is a chemical industry. Calcareous and argillaceous materials like limestone, coal, gypsum, clay, laterite and bauxite are the important raw materials required for making ordinary portland cement. Cement is also an energy-intensive industry using coal, furnace oil, and electricity depending upon the process adopted.

There are two processes by which cement is manufactured. They are the "wet process" and the "dry process". The wet process is currently employed in 35 units for manufacturing cement, while 16 units adopt the dry process and 4 units the semidry process.

Of the two main processes now in use, the wet process is the older method of preparing a homogeneous mixture of various ingredients into slurry and is characterised by high consumption of fuel. In the dry process, various raw materials are blended in the dry state, eliminating the fuel consumption needed to evaporate water as in the wet process.

Cement units are mainly owned by a few business groups like the Associated Cement Companies (ACC), the Dalmia-Jain, the Birlas and the public sector units of the central and state governments. Of the 55 cement units in the country, 9 are in the public sector and the rest in the private sector. ACC is the single largest private sector company owning as many as 17 cement manufacturing units.

In terms of ownership, the share of the public sector (both central and state) in the total production was about 11% in 1975. In the private sector, the ACC contributes 33% of the total output in the country. The following table gives a picture of the distribution of capacity according to ownership:

MANAGEMENT GROUP	CAPACITY (Million tonnes)	PERCENTAGE SHARE
1. ACC	6.99	33.02
2. Public Sector (Central & State)	2.31	10.90
3. SAHU-JAIN	1.87	8.85
4. BIRLA	2.83	13.38
5. DALMIA	1.17	5.51
6. J. K.	0.25	1.19
7. Others:	5.75	27.15
Total:	21.16	100.00

The total investment in the industry in 1975 amounted to about 3,500 million rupees, providing employment to nearly 80,000 workers.

Unlike most other modern mineral-based industries, the location of cement in the country is widsepread with the main concentration in the southern and western regions. This corresponds to the availability of the basic raw materials, viz. limestone, which, though concentrated in the southern region is also found in other regions. Abou 67% of the installed capacity is to be found in the south and the west. From the point of view of availability of resources, the cement industry has an advantageous position to the extent that the known reserves of the major raw materials are adequate to maintain the operation of the industry for quite a long time.

In 1951, for the first time, targets of cement production were drawn up as part of the first five year plan. Since then there has been progress in the industry itself and the second plan period saw the manufacture of new type of cement including white cement and portland blast furnace slag cement. It is also about this time that the demand position of cement underwent a major change, and the demand-supply position was reversed. In the post-independence period, demand for cement registered a sharp increase, and the annual capacity in the third plan period was stepped upto 15.0 and 13.0 million tonnes.

By 1976 the capacity of the 55 cement producing units in the country was 21.33 million tonnes though actual production achieved was only 19 million tonnes. In 1977 with 88% utilisation the production was 19.17 million tonnes and in 1978 with 89% utilisation production increased to 19.62 million tonnes.

An analysis of the emerging trends in cement manufacturing in India showed that there was a gradual shift from the wet process plants towards the dry process plants combined with pre-calcinator technology. This had to be imported though research is being carried on to develop this process by the CRI at Delhi. It is envisaged that the introduction of this technology will lead to capacity expansion in about 23 of the existing cement plants.

Utilisation of industrial wastes like furnace slag and flyash was acquiring popularity in recent years. Slag based cement was found to have the advantage of avoiding a long and expensive list of machinery and raw materials upto the kilning stage. At present, the total availability of molten slag in India is about 6.22 million tonnes, of which about 2.5 million tonnes is used or committed for cement manufacture.

The granulation capacity is expected to be increased to 4.4 million tonnes by 1981-82.

Mini-cement plants are yet another development towards alternative and improved technology in cement manufacture. The advantages of mini-cement plants include possibilities of exploitation of smaller limestone deposits, meeting the smaller market demands at lower transportation cost, using much less power, water and other inputs and reduction of strains on transportation facilities. Furthermore, there is a possibility of cement manufacture being opened to smaller entrepreneurs whose access to financial and technological resources is limited. It is expected that an additional 1.2 million tonnes of cement could be produced in India through the installation of mini-cement plants.

The workers in the cement industry were covered in respect of their emoluments by the national cement wage structure settlement which expired on 7 May 1975. At that time the All India Cement Workers' Federation endeavoured to bring about unity of all cement workers' unions with a view to drawing up a common charter of demands and work unitedly to achieve the demands. However this could not fructify as the INTUC affiliated Indian National Cement & Allied Workers' Federation went on its own and submitting a charter of demands, gave a call for strike. This raised high hopes in the minds of the workers but suddenly the strike call was abandoned by that federation and they agreed to arbitration without even the demand of interim relief being acceded to. The government and employers had a field day. The fourth conference of the All India Cement Workers' Federation held at Ammasandra in Karnataka on 25-26 October 1977 drew up a charter of demands and resolved to see that government was compelled to refer this charter also to the arbitrators. The federation was successful in compelling the government of India and the cement manufacturers' association to accede to this demand and the arbitration board had to accept a joint reference between the federation and the cement manufacturers' association.

The board gave its award thereafter and all workmen gained an increase of Rs. 55, HRA increase of Rs. 10 and lumpsum payment of arrears of Rs. 650 with effect from 1 October 1978. Apart from these other demands and benefits such as dust allowance, night shift allowance, rain coats, uniforms, etc. were also conceded. At the same time the arbitration board also conceded additional demands such as acting allowance, prevention of pollution, etc. These two awards benefited the 90,000 cement workers throughout the country. The minimum wage in the cement industry today as on 1 September 1980 is Rs. 580.30 paise.

As soon as the award was announced, the cement manufacturers started to pressurise the government to increase the retention price. The government, as usual, succumbed to the pressure of these monopoly houses and in December 1978 and again in May 1979 the retention price was raised, the total being more than Rs. 55. The amount envisaged by the arbitration board was only a mere Rs. 5 to enable the industry to meet the commitments under the award. Inspite of this, some of the employers did not willingly implement the award and it is only through sustained and united action that the workers of Birlas and Kanorias could achieve implementation of the award.

The problem before the cement industry today is mainly that the installed capacity should be fully utilised. The marketing of the cement which is manufactured is plagued by corruption and there is a blackmarket which fleeces the common man. The government is not taking any steps to ensure that cement is distributed fairly and at the declared prices. The manufacturers, hand in glove with unscrupulous elements, are earning huge sums. Hence, it is most urgentlv called for that government immediately take up the question of distribution of cement and ensure that the supplies are made at the controlled rate which already ensures a wide enough margin of profit to the manufacturer.

The trade unions, while taking up the problems of the workers in the industry should lend attention to this aspect also and government should ensure the cooperation of the workers in carrying out steps to check blackmarketing.

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THE ALUMINIUM INDUSTRY

by

D. C. Mahanty
General Secretary, All India Aluminium Workers' Federation

The aluminium industry in India is second in importance only to the steel industry in the field of metals. It is yet small in dimensions though a vital industry to the country's economy. The industry can be broadly divided into two sectors—that of basic production of alumina, metals and extrusions and that of manufacture of utensils and other common consumer goods.

In this report we are dealing with the first aspect which is the most important.

Today there are five companies engaged in the production of alumina and aluminium, etc. In the public sector is the Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO) which has also taken over the JK owned Aluminium Corporation of India (ALUCOIN). The other companies in the private sector are the Indian Aluminium Company (INDAL), a subsidiary of the Canadian based multinational ALCAN Aluminium company, the Hindustan Aluminium Corporation (HINDALCO) started in collaboration with the American multinational KAISERS by Birlas, and the Madras Aluminium Company (MALCO).

The present installed smelter capacity of the industry is as follows:

INDAL	120,000 tonnes
HINDALCO	105,000 tonnes
MALCO	25,000 tonnes
BALCO	100,000 tonnes
ALUCOIN	10,000 tonnes

Hence, the total installed capacity in the country is 360,000 tonnes only. The production in the world is 14 million tonnes.

The aluminium industry in our country has been steadily expanding. The discovery of huge bauxite deposits in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, which are estimated to be about 1/6th of the world deposits, has resulted in India becoming an important centre of world aluminium production. The first public sector unit was set up in Korba under BALCO with Soviet assistance. An aluminium complex is now being planned in Andhra Pradesh with further Soviet assistance. The Government of India has also planned establishing an aluminium complex in Orissa with assistance from the French multinational PECHNIEY which will have a production potential of 2.2 lakh tonnes metal and 8 lakh tonnes alumina. The investment in this project is Rs. 1600 crores.

The total production of aluminium in 1979-80 is about 250,000 tonnes. The utilisation of the installed capacity however is about 65%, the world figures being 85% to 95%. This industry is a power intensive one. For every tonne of metal, 18000 units of power are required. But on the whole, the industry requires only 2% of the electric power produced in the country. However, since it is scattered throughout many states, one can estimate that the consumption of power would be 8% in each state.

The aluminium consumption needs of our country in 1979-80 has been about 325,000 tonnes and government has therefore imported about 75,000 tonnes, which has entailed an expenditure of about Rs. 100 crores. One of the consumers of aluminium in the country is the electrical industry which accounts for 50% of the consumption, while transport industry accounts for 10%. Electric power generation in the sixth plan will increase, and it is estimated that the installed power capacity will increase from 15,000 MW to 44,000 MW. Hence the demand for E. C. grade aluminium will also go up from 142,0050 tonnes in 1978-79 to 201,4500 tonnes in 1982-83. If the existing installed capacity is fully utilised there would be no need to import the aluminium and the country could be self-sufficient.

From the figures given earlier it is clear that the private sector dominates this industry—in other words, the monopolists in collaboration with multinational combines. When the plants come up in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh the public sector will acquire a dominant position.

The companies in the private sector have been earning a very high rate of profit over the past few years. INDAL's gross profit in 1978-79 was to the tune of Rs. 1613 lakhs, HINDALCO, Rs. 918 lakhs and MALCO, Rs. 213 lakhs, amounting to a total of Rs. 2745 lakhs. INDAL alone has increased its profits by 350% during the last ten years.

The successive governments at the centre have pursued a policy of appeasing the monopolies and the multinationals. This is most evident in the aluminium industry. This industry is supplied cheap electricity at the cost of the state and the state electricity boards. These companies in the private sector were being supplied electricity at the rate of 4 paise to 9 paise per unit whereas the public sector BALCO is being charged 14.4 paise per unit. Bank loans and advances from financial institutions have been readily forthcoming to the private sector units. A system of double-pricing was introduced which exploited the common consumers the most. The government has consistently evaded all demands for nationalisation of this nationaly important industry.

The central government has now allowed a further rise in aluminium prices. The revised price for commerical grade and electrical conductor grade metals have been fixed at Rs. 15,723 and Rs. 15,867 a tonne respectively inclusive of excise duty. The revised price for wire rods is Rs. 15,349 a tonne—the earlier price for these items was Rs. 13,718, Rs. 14,089 and Rs. 14.669 per tonne respectively.

The problem of the workers in this industry are manifold. While the industry has been given concessions in such spheres as electricity charges and increase in prices, etc. the interests of the workers have been sadly neglected. The minimum wages prevailing in these companies are low compared to those in the steel and coal industries. In INDAL the total wages would amount to Rs. 430, in HINDALCO to Rs. 427.50 and in the public sector BALCO it is only Rs. 417. Hence one of the primary demands before the workers in the aluminium industry is not merely revision of wages but also standardisation of wages on an all-industry basis.

There is always an argument that the industry does not have the capacity to pay. A closer examination of available figures will show that this industry is certainly in a position to pay a better wage. For example, the percentage of the total revenue spent on salaries, wages and benefits to employees in INDAL is very low—only about 9% of the total revenue. The Reserve Bank of India has pointed out that the "remuneration to employees component" in the total value added by manufacture in this industry is as low as 13%, whereas it is 25% in iron and steel, 21% in cotton textiles, 28% in jute textiles and 17% in engineering. According to the same source, the manufacturing expenses in the aluminium industry is about 57%—leaving a residue of about 33% towards interest and profits.

It must also be added that to this day about 25% to 30% of the labour force in the industry are engaged through contractors in blatant contravention of the law since they are working in perennial areas of production and manufacture. These workers are paid no more than Rs. 10 per day and denied a host of other benefits which are enjoyed by regular employees.

Bonus has mostly been paid at 20%. In INDAL the annual bonus is linked to productivity. There is also an element of a special allowance of 4% to 8% in different factories which is paid in addition to the annual bonus which has been limited to 20%. In BALCO bonus will be paid only from this year, The monthly incentive bonus is prevalent only in INDAL. BALCO had agreed to the practice in principle but the scheme has not yet been implemented. HINDALCO has also paid bonus in consonance with the provisions of the Bonus Act.

The industry demands a very high level of technology and mechanisation. This is resulting in the imposition of higher workload on the workers and at the same time loss of job opportunities and shrinkage of employment. The trade unions therefore have put forward the demand that no unilateral imposition of increased workload should be permitted, but work norms should be drawn up in consultation with the trade unions. At the same time the technical and scientific personnel and engineers employed in this industry are being equally exploited by the multinationals and the monopolies and do not have proper conditions of service. While steps should be taken in this direction, in the public sector the management should be democratised and bureaucratic functioning done away with and workers' participation in management ensured.

In the period under review, there have been numerous struggles by the aluminium workers for their demands. These have met with severe repression also but the workers have stood firm against all provocations and attacks. For instance, the 800 workers in INDAL's Kalwa foil plant resorted to a one-day strike on 14 October 1978 in protest against management's refusal to accept their demands. The police were used to evict the workers from the factory premises.. The struggle continued till 30 April 19[illegible] when a settlement was reached. Similarly, in August 197[illegible] 4000 workers of HINDALCO were lathi-charged when they had gathered at the union office at Renukoot to discus the assurance of the state labour minister requesting them to withdraw the strike notice. However, in spite of severe repression that followed, the workers stood firmly by the union in negotiating their just demands. Six months' struggle of the Hirakud workers of INDAL preceded a comprehensive long term settlement on wages and other conditions of service. It is in this period that the All India Aluminium Workers' Federation was formed in January 1977 and has been systematically taking up the demands of the workers and problems of the industry. In 1979, a national convention of all unions in INDAL of all affiliations was held and prepared a joint charter of demands and prepared for a countrywide struggle. The strike that was launched in Alupuram unit of INDAL lasted for as long as 123 days, and on 21 November 1979 workers of INDAL thoughout the country observed demands day expressing also solidarity with the striking workers of Alupuram. The strike ended with a settlement which provided for increase in wages, DA, leave travelling allowance, etc.

On 30 March this year the All India Aluminium Workers' Federation submitted a charter of demands to the union steel minister demanding nationalisation of the private sector in the aluminium industry and unifrom wages for aluminium workers in line with the wages in the steel industry. In its memorandum the federation has pointed out that "so long as the industry is in the private sector, the major part of production being in the former and the companies operate under markedly different conditions with significantly different paying capacity, it will not be possible to accept or implement the suggestion of the Federation". It has pointed out that both in the interests of the national economy and in the interests of the workers the issue of nationalisation is an urgent and important one. It is only such a measure that can provide a sound basis for expansion of this vital industry on scientific lines, guarantee maximum production and ensure uniform and just wage structure for the workers of the industry.

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THE PLANTATION INDUSTRY

by
Parvathi Krishnan
General Secretary, All India Federation of Tea Plantation Workers

The plantations in India which come under the purview of labour legislation and the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 are those of tea, coffee and rubber. The tea plantation industry is the oldest of the plantation industry and was developed and owned originally by British companies in India. The next were coffee and rubber. They were all developed in outlying areas and mainly served the needs of the metropolitan countries These plantations provided attractive openings for capital investment and yielded fabulous profits. The first plantation started was a tea plantation in Assam which dates back to the year 1823.

The industry—in all these segments—are so profitable that it quickly developed and spread to other regions in the country. Tea plantations are to be found in Assam, West Bengal, Tamilnadu and Kerala in the main. Coffee is mainly in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamilnadu and rubber in the main in Kerala. On the question of the profitability of the industry the Plantation Inquiry Commision observed that "The fact that a profit equal to investment was made every five years should be taken note of." This is in reference mainly to the tea industry. But the coffee and rubber plantations were no less profitable

When the country became independent it was clear that the British owners began to feel uncertain of their own future and hence the industry was neglected by them—this was borne out by the investigations undertaken by the plantation inquiry commission. The demand of the democratic and trade union movement from the very outset was speedy nationalisation of the plantation industry. This was not taken up by the government and though now Indianisation has taken place to some extent, mainly through sales of estates, the issue of nationalisation is in abeyance. It was only at the time of the Achutha Menon Ministry in Kerala that a decision was taken to nationalise the plantation industry in that state—this decision is how evei not implemented as the central goernment is still dragging its feet.

The industry—in all three spheres—trade, management, etc continues on the same lines as prior to independence, and no democratisation of the running of these industries has taken place. The tea trade continues to be dominated by auctions held at Calcutta and Cochin, the trade is dominated by the foreign owned companies and the country's earnings from this trade are substantially affected. Coffee trade is also under severe restrictions and the rubber trade is at the mercy of the mutinational companies.

In 1979 the production of tea is estimated at 545 millions kgs. compared to 570 million kgs in 1978. In 1979-80 the export earnings have been estimated to be valued at Rs. 369.44 crores, the quantity being 210.57 million kgs. The average price of tea in the country ranged from 16.11 per kg at Calcutta and Rs. 12.04 at Cochin.

Coffee is also a significant foreign exchange earner for the country. The price of coffee in the international market has been fluctuating with a downward trend after reaching an all-time high of Rs. 34.33 per kg in 1977-78. In 1979-80 the price has been as low as Rs. 23.77 per kg. The quantity of coffee exported during April 1979 to February 1980 was 51,971 tonnes valued at Rs. 148 crores. The target for the year was fixed at Rs. 145 crores. Internal price of coffee has been kept steady through the efforts of the Coffee Board and 48,000 tonnes were allocated for domestic consumption in 1979, that is to say, nearly 2000 tonnes more than in 1978. It is significant that the share of small growers in the total production of coffee has gone up from 35 per cent to 48 per cent by the year 1979. As a member of the International Coffee Organisation, India also has some influence on fixing international prices of coffee. A new feature is that India has now come into the worldmarket of instant coffee which is mainly being exported to the East European countries under bilateral agreements.

The production of natural rubber in 1979-80 has increased by 11,900 tonnes over the production of the previous year. The increase was mainly due to intensive production drive launched by the Rubber Board as well as comparatively favourable climatic conditions. With all this there has been a deficit and imports during the year 1979-80 were to the tune of 45,000 tonnes. The minimum price of natural rubber was raised from Rs. 655 per quintal to Rs. 825 per quintal with effect from 18 April 1979 to 30 June 1980. The registered area under rubber cultivation by the end of 1979 was 236,474 hectares and the number of registered estates and holdings was 145,144. The cash subsidy scheme for replanting has had some effect but still the rubber industry has to be brought under the supervision and control of the democratic forces. Efforts are underway also to extend rubber cultivation to newer areas such as Tripura, Assam, Maharashtra Goa, etc. Trial plantations have been raised in these areas. The general downward trend in the rate of replanting and new planting of the prevous years has to be overcome speedily if rubber is to be sufficient to meet the needs of the national economy.

The workers in all these three spheres of the plantation industry are still amongst the lowest paid in the country. Prior to independence the plantations, owned as they were by British companies, were in isolated areas. The labour in these plantations were in the main imported from distance areas—they were from the landless labour and belonged to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. They lived under conditions of slave and bonded labour and were cut off from the common national stream of the movement for liberation from the foreign yoke. However, after independence, trade unions came into being in the face of severe harassment and repression.

And still the plantation workers do not have a uniform wage pattern. The wages of the plantation workers are decided on the state-wise basis and not on an industry-wise basis so that they differ from one state to another though their work is essentially of a similar nature.

The first achievement of the plantation labour after independence was the enactment of the plantation labour act in 1951 which gave some protection to plantation labour and also recognised the plantations as an industry. However, this act is still defective and needs amending to meet the current needs of the industry and the workers. To this day many of the provisions of the act, such as proper housing facilities, sanitation, drinking water, medical aid, education, etc. remain to be implemented. The figures that are given from time to time by the plantation owners' associations tend to reflect the few plantations where the benefits are implemented to some extent.

To remove the lacunae that exist in the 1951 act, and to bring the act up-up-to-date, an amendment bill was introduced in parliament in 1973. After being referred to a select committee, the bill is yet to see the light of day. The select committee had made certain unanimous changes in the bill and the report was submitted in 1975. The objects of the bill were to extend the plantation labour act to plantations of 6.5 hectares and to those employing 16 workers and more. Apart from this an important amendment is the inclusion of other plantations under the purview of the act—citronella grass, cardamom, arecanut, medicinal herbs, banana, apple, pineapple, cashewnut, olive, cocoa and coconut. These plantations have grown in the last 33 years and many are owned by industrialists and monopolists who invest their black money in these plantations.

The amending bill has suggested the payment of Rs. 10,000 compensation for death due to house collapse (a frequent occurrence in plantations which are situated in heavy monsoon regions and due to the appalling state of the housing), and Rs. 14,000 in case of injury. The select committee increased these amounts to Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 15,000. The select committee has also recommended that the payment of overtime for more than 48 hours a week should be double the rate of ordinary wages and no work should be allowed for more than 9 hours on any day and more than 54 hours any week.

The important demand before plantation workers today is the speedy passing of the amending bill as recommended by the select committee. The successive governments at the centre have been dragging their feet on this issue.

The next issue which is of importance is that of equal pay for equal work. Women workers form half of the work force in the plantations, particularly in tea. Plantation workers were previously being paid on the basis of men workers and women workers. With the enactment of the equal remuneration act the task before the trade unions has been the implementation of the act. The owners have tried their best to circumvent it by devious means and there has not been effective machinery in the labour department to monitor and check the implementation. The implementation machinery has, therefore, to be strengthened, and the committees envisaged under the act which are obligatory should be set up and activised if the workers are to derive the benefit from the legislation.

The wages of the plantation workers continue to be depressed in general and in relation to the high profit earned in these industries. The issue of bonus is also a key one—with many foreign companies still extant, having their head offices in Britain, the plantation workers are defrauded of their dues in the field of bonus. At the same time the DA which is payable to plantation workers by and large has no relation to the DA paid to workers in other industries.

Hence the main demands which are before the workers in the plantations today is firstly wage revision and a uniform pattern of wage and dearness allowance, amendment to the plantation labour act, strict implementation of the equal remuneration act and nationalisation of all foreign owned plantations. The structure of the industry has to be radically changed so that the domination of the Calcutta and Cochin auctions is removed and the regions such as Assam where tea is grown in large areas should be developed to become centres of the tea trade instead of just feeders to big traders and monopoly houses.

The industrial committee on plantations which was constituted after independence should be revived to give the plantation workers the opportunity to raise not only problems of the workers but also problems of the industry. With mechanisation being introduced in some areas, the employment of workers is also affected. The issue of replanting and other relevant matters for developing the industry will continue to be neglected and have severe repercussions on the national economy—this demands the attention of the government and the trade unions also. The workers' representatives will be in a position to take these matters up with all strength in the industrial committee and hence play their role in safeguarding the interests of the industry while fighting for the just demands of the workers.

GENERAL INSURANCE

by

J. G. Kothare
Joint Secretary,
General Insurance Employees' All-India Association

The movement demanding nationalisation of general insurance in which the general insurance employees through their trade unions played a leading and important role met with success finally in 1971 when, on 13 May, the government of India took over all the 107 private general insurance companies including foreign companies on payment of compensation and enacted the General Insurance Besiness (Nationalisation) Act in 1972. The general insurance corporation of India was formally constituted on 22 November 1972. It had four subsidiary companies—New India, National, Oriental and United India.

On 1 August 1971 the general insurance employees' all—India association (GIEAIA) was formed bringing under single organisation the 17 trade unions earlier operating in various parts of the country. The GIEAIA submitted a memorandum to the government on the organisational pattern of the general insurance corporation of India, expansion of its activities to areas other than the traditional ones, etc. Government had originally planned to constitute four independent corporations competing with one another. But due to the pressures built up on the initiative of the GIEAIA, the plan was modified and the final picture was that of a corporation with the four subsidiaries emphasising the need for inter se competition.

The nine years passed since nationalisation, management of the corporation continues to be influenced and guided by the private sector. This has precluded the development of the general insurance business in rural areas in the country. The glaring example of this is the proposal to set up a "rural development corporation" to take care of the business in the rural areas. The four subsidiary companies should undertake business in the rural areas as well but the same is not done as the managements allege that this would not be profitable.

Another feature is that the agency system continues inspite of the opposition by the employees. There is a complete failure in popularising non-traditional business such as the Janata personal accident policy, agricultural pump insurance policy, poultry farm and cattle insurance—all this as a result of lack of interest shown by the agents working on commission basis. When, under the late president Mujibur Rehman, the government of Bangladesh nationalised general insurance and abolished the agency system, a top official of the general insurance corporation was in Dacca. And it is interesting to note that to this day the reinsurance arrangements which involve foreign exchange are carried out through an agent. Hence this is an important demand put forward by the GIEAIA as abolition of the agency system would result in improved working and increased business and earnings.

The total premium of the GIC as a whole in 1978 is Rs. 3258.1 millions as against Rs 2223.4 millions in 1973. The rise in the premium is due to market inflation and not due to the expansion of business under the public sector. Net underwriting profits for the year 1978 is Rs. 477.6 millions as against Rs. 138.5 millions in 1973. These are excluding investment profits. This shows a phenomenal rise in under-writing profit. Investment profits is yet another plus point under the public sector. Scientific surety measures made available to technological advancement reducing the hazards have contributed to the increase of profit apart from other factors.

The unbridled powers vested in the government by the provision of nationalisation act have been misused by the authorities. This has reduced from fully pay basis to half-pay basis.

After nationaliation the government apspointed a general insurance services integration committee to go into the service conditions of the employees. The recommendations of the committee were not acceptable to the employees. Protracted negotiations then ensued between the corporation and the trade unions and finally agreed terms of service conditions were reached. However, government stepped in and raised objections on the dearness allowance formula which was agreed upon. Negotiations were resumed on this issue. The employees also launched an agitation and the formula was then amended. It may be pointed out that the terms of service of the employees of the former 107 general insurance companies had more than 104 service conditions which had to be rationalised, revised and uniformly applied all over the country. This was no small task. However, the finally agreed terms compared favourably with the terms existing in other financial institutions.

But the struggle was not over with the signing of the agreement and its notification in the gazette. The union had to strive for its implementation at all levels, appropriate categorisation of each employee, medical benefits, promotion and recuritment procedures, housing, regularisation of the services of certain employees and payment of bonus—this still remains undecided.

The employees of the GIC have been consistently struggling in closest unity for their just demands. When, in 1976, bonus was declared at 4% of the gross wages for the year 1974, the GIEAIA called on all employees to boycott the payment of bonus and this boycott was successfully conducted till the management was forced to raise the bonus to 9%. Earlier bonus had been paid uniformly at 15%.

In February 1977, the GIEAIA drew up a charter of demands which included the demand for evolving a more rationalised wage-structure and to bring the wages upto present levels of prices. The management has been stalling on the matter of signing a settlement. Numerous campaigns including dharnas, hunger strikes, token strikes have taken place demanding that the charter be taken up for a negotiated settlement.

However, inspite of all actions, the deadlock on the question of settlement of the demands continues. The deadlock is on the question of signing an agreement under the industrial disputes act, ceiling of dearness allowance and withdrawal of some benefits such as the cut in the provident fund rate, sick leave, stagnation increment, reduction in holidays, etc.

However, inspite of all actions, the deadlock on the question of settlement of the demands continues. "The deadlock is on the question of signing an agreement under the industrial disputes act, ceiling of dearness allowance and withdrawal of some benefits suc has the cut in the provident fund rate, sick leave, stagnation increment, reduction in holidays etc.

Contrary to the agreed conclusions earlier arrived at the GIC has also surreptitiously introduced automation, patronising privately owned computers by Mafatlal and Tata. The resistance movement launched by the GIEAIA has so far resulted in stalling the nefarious programme. The trade unions have stated that mechanisation can only be introduced after consultation with the trade unions—this was part of the settlement at the time of the setting up of the corporation and settling the new terms of service conditions of the employees after nationalisation.

Hence the demands of the employees, finalising the terms of the settlement on the charter of demands, democratisation of the running of the corporation, abolition of the agency system—these are the main issues before the employees of the general insurance corporation.

TEACHERS' MOVEMENT

by

Mrinmoy Bhattacharya
General Secretary, All India Federation of University & College Teachers' Organisations

The organisations of teachers in higher education in various states were engaged in negotiations with their respective state governments demanding among other things implementation of the new revised UGC scales of pay. At the call of the All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations (AIFUCTO) teachers in some of the states had launched an examination boycott movement. They had to face severe repressive measures. In such states as Assam and Maharahstra, the leaders of the movement were put behind bars. Many state governments were going back on their earlier commitment of accepting and implementing the new scales of pay. However, till the lifting of the emergency, teachers were not in a position to launch any direct movement.

With the withdrawal of the emergency, teachers were in a position to launch a movement which took the form of demonstrations, squatting and strikes. This resulted in one state after another accepting the demanding of implementing of the UGC scales of pay.

In August 1978, the AIFUCTO held its tenth conference which adopted a programme for demanding implementation of UGC scales of pay uniform throughout the country, statutory security of service, democratisation of management of universities and colleges, representation of teachers' organisations on all official bodies such as the central advisory board on education, the University Grants Commission etc.

In August 1978, the Janata Party Government introduced a bill on the conditions of service of employees of hospitals and educational institutions as a part of the notorious industrial relations bill. The AIFUCTO opposed and condemned the bill and participated in the united convention and demonstration of all trade union organisations held in Delhi in 1978 before parliament. It directed all its units to unite teachers of all sectors against the black bill, join hands with working class organisations and oppose the bill by all means. On 23 April 1979, all national organisations of teachers participated in a protest demonstration before parliament. The teachers from secondary and higher educational institutions also participated in this rally which was initiatied by the AIFUCTO.

During this period the state level organisations—units of the AIFUCTO—conducted major struggles. Coordination committees of teachers of colleges and universities of Tamilnadu held a massive movement in the form of civil disobedience in April 1979 demanding security of service and preventing demotion and forced transfer as a result of introduction of the 10+2 +3 educational pattern. The teachers of Bihar also conducted a valiant struggle demanding the abolition of private management from the field of collegiate education. It may be noted that Bihar is the only state in which all private colleges have been taken over by the government and made constituent colleges of the universities. AIFUCTO plans to take this up as the most important issue for conducting the future movement.

In this period, the governments of Gujarat, Bihar, Tamillnadu, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh introduced various objectionable and anti-democratic conditions of service for teachers. In almost all the cases, as a result of the organised resistance from the teachers, the governments have had to rescind such rules and orders.

On 8 August 1980, the AIFUCTO organised a massive demonstration before parliament and held negotiations with the Union Education Minister and the Prime Minister. A call has been given to observe teachers' day on 5 September as demands day. Telegrams have been sent from all colleges and universities of India to the Prime Minister demanding the conceding of the AIFUCTO charter of demands.

The AIFUCTO is one single organisation representing more than 125,000 teachers from all the states and is confident of moving forward to achieving further successes in the demands of the teachers.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

by

N. C. Dutta

President, All India Confederation of Construction Workers

Generally people know that the construction workers means those who are working in road or building construction. But the fact remains that lakhs of people are working in remote jungles, hills, working underground and building dams, barrages, power houses, atomic power plants with engineers, supervisors, technicians, highly skilled, skilled along with semi-skilled and unskilled workers—these are all construction workers. The average yearly accident death rate in the construction industry is much higher than in mines or steel industry.

Our newspaper correspondents cannot reach in remote areas nor is the government having any machinery to collect the information and because of this, hundreds of workers' families lose their legal dues. Sometimes after a month people come to know that a worker is missing. Then, after approaching the contractors' management, the general reply is that the concerned employee has left his job and if you argue any more you have to lose your job also. Thus the matter ends.

Another feature we find in big industrial centres like steel plants. Thousands of contractor workers are working in the factory side by side along with the permanent workers in perennial jobs. Certain work which ten years earlier was assigned to permanent employees has now been handed over to contractors. These problems are under discussion in the bi-partite machinery existing in the steel ministry. In doing this the employers, both in private and public sector, are violating the law and the supreme court has already held the no employer should have contract labour in works of a perennial nature.

The vast majority of construction workers are employed by contractors. These contractors—petty contractors, supply contractors, job contractors—do not maintain proper registers as required by the law. If any worker brings forward any complaint or puts up any just request he is immediately thrown out of employment. Any attempt to form a trade union is foiled by discharging the workers taking the initiative to do so, or using the force of hired hoodlums to terrorise the workers. If workers still face such tactics, they are severely manhandled and there have been cases of deaths on this account also.

Construction labour in many projects of national importance are no better than bonded labour. They are brought from Orissa, Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh to outlying projects in the north and are forced to work for unlimited hours and do not get even the minimum wage prescribed in the state where the project is situated. Their conditions of work are also inhuman.

For example, in the Munneri Valley Project and the Salal Project, thousands of bonded labour are working. They do not have any toilet or sanitation facilities, and there is no housing. If a worker meets with an accident or falls sick he is summarily sent home.

The construction companies under the central or state governments (public sector) are also employing small contractors or sub-contractors. Through this the workers are getting less emoluments for the same job which they were earlier performing. Big contractors keep their employees as regular employees, work charged employees, daily rated employees. While they are all doing similar work, they are paid wages at differing rates. Even after working for ten years as work charged staff, when work is over on a particular site, the worker will be retrenched and re-employed on another site on lesser wages in the same company. The contractors are taking full advantage of the unemployment situation obtaining in the country.

Many representations have been made to the central government to amend the industrial disputes act to list construction also as an industry and ensure that workers in the industry are treated as industrial workers with all the rights and benefits that accure from being so categorised. But this demand has not yet been granted.

The vast majority of workers in this industry belong to the scheduled castes or scheduled tribes. In other words from the most oppressed and backward sections of society. By and large they remain unorganised.

The All India Confederation of Construction workers held its first conference in June 1980. More than 155 delegates representing 480,000 workers participated. The conference has formulated a charter of demands:

1. The setting up of a time-bound wage board for construction workers.
2. Regularisation of service of all construction workers and uniform service and living conditions.
3. Equal pay for equal work and strict implementation of legislation in this regard.
4. Abolition of the sub-contract and bonded labour system.
5. Formation of an industrial committee at the national level.

6. Water and power be made a central subject.
7. Industrial disputes act should be amended in such a manner as to provide for construction workers to be treated as industrial workers for all purposes.

WORKERS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

by

M. M. Gope

General Secretary, All India Hotel Workers' Federation

The public sector in the hotel industry is represented by the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), a government of India undertaking which runs 20 hotels, including 2 beach resorts, 3 forest lodges, 13 travellers' lodges, 14 restaurants. 16 transport units, 5 duty free shops and 3 sound and light shows. More than 7000 employees are working in the catering and non-catering establishments of the ITDC all over the country. The private sector, though larger in its totality, has no single unit to compare with the ITDC.

In the recent period, the workers of the ITDC, represented by the AITUC-affiliated All India ITDC Employees' Union has succeeded in achieving uniformity in wages and perquisites irrespective of the sphere of activity, classification of establishments, business turnover and type of service. A strike notice on the charter of demands, served in April 1977, led to the appointment of a committee under the chairmanship of N. P. Dube, with one representative each from the AITUC and the INTUC included to examine the charter of demands and make recommendations on it.

The committee submitted its report to government in June 1979. Pending finalisation of the report the committee had recommended an ad-hoc payment of dearness allowance for the period from April 1 1973 to December 31, 1977. This was granted by government only after a prolonged struggle by the employees and a sum of Rs. 30 lakhs was paid towards settlement of dearness allowance in proportion to the length of service of the employees as on 31 December 1977. Workers again launched a struggle for interim increase due to the delay in the work of the committee and were successful in gaining Rs. 40 interim relief with effect from 1 January 1978. This was to be adjusted against dues to be paid under the final recommendations of the committee.

When the committee submitted its report in June 1979, the government agreed to implement the recommendations on condition that the unions signed a settlement for not less than four years. To expedite negotiations a joint action committee of trade unions in the ITDC was formed—negotiations commenced on 14 January and a settlement was arrived at on 28 January 1980.

The details of the agreement are given as an annexure. Prior to this agreement there were as many as 37 scales of pay in different categories of ITDC throughout the country and there was no uniformity. The scales have now been reduced to 15 which are uniform to all units.

ITDC employees have also had to struggle for bonus. After protracted negotiations it has been agreed to evolve a formula for the computation of bonus for headquarters establishments of the ITDC for the year 1977-78 and onwards for a period of five years with effect from 27 October 1978. According to the formula, the headquarters employees of the ITDC will receive bonus at 14.12% for the year 1977-78 and 14.58% for the year 1978-79. ITDC employees in operational units were already receiving bonus based on profit and the rates were ranging from the minimum to 20%. This practice will continue. The formula for the employees of the headquarters branch will be calculated by allocating the overheads of the headquarters to units on the basis of their turnover under each group and appearing in their respective balance sheets which will then be pooled together. Other details have been worked out to ensure a fair rate of bonus to these employees.

In respect of the private sector, as a result of a prolonged struggle, the Hotel Mazdoor Sabha (AITUC) signed a settlement with the Hotel and Restaurant Association in the northern region.

The broad features of the settlement were that Rs. 90 of the dearness allowance would be merged with the basic pay. DA will in future increase at Rs. 2 in A and B class hotels and Rs. 1.50 in the case of C Class hotels based on the Delhi cost of living index with base 1939 = 100. The minimum and maximum benefit to every employee will vary from Rs. 20 and Rs. 42 per month in addition to the lumpsum amount as solatium ranging between Rs. 55 and Rs. 95 for peaceful solution to the problems. Meal allowance would also be paid at the rate of Rs. 35 in lieu of 2 meals and tea, Rs. 25 for two meals and Rs. 12 for one meal and Rs. 10 for tea only. Privilege leave will be raised from 15 days to 20 days per completed year of service subject to a maximum accumulation of 60 days. The settlement is for a period of four years, from January 1978 to January 1982.

The All India Hotol Workers' Federation has been taking up problems in other centres also. However, to achieve a uniform wage in this industry has many hurdles as the condition of the industry is such as to have many variations from one region to another. A common norm of work has to be achieved and working and living conditions settled accordingly.

ANNEXURE

WAGES AND SERVICE CONDITIONS OF ITDC EMPLOYEES AS SETTLED ON 28 JANUARY 1980

	A GROUP	*B GROUP*	*C GROUP*	*D GROUP*
Unskilled Workers				
	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
Entry point	200-360	200-360	200-360	200-360
After 5 years' service	230-410	220-395	210-375	200-360
After 10 years' service	250-440	230-410	220-395	210-375
Semi-skilled Workers				
Entry point	230-410	220-395	210-375	210-375
After 5 years' service	250-440	230-416	220-395	220-395
After 10 years' service	260-460	250-440	230-410	230-410
	270-480			

Skilled categories and clerical staff	260-460	260-460	260-460	260-460
	270-480	270-480	270-480	—
	280-500	280-500	280-500	280-500
	300-545	300-545	300-545	—
	330-595	330-595	330-595	330-595
	360-680	360-680	360-680	—
	400-800	400-800	—	—
	450-900	450-900	—	—
For Managers	500-1000	500-1000	500-1000	500-1000
	600-1200	600-1200	600-1200	600-1200

Dearness Allowance — is uniform for all the Non-HCE employees throughout the country which is as follows:

Fixed DA = Rs. 63.00 on 320 points as on 1.1.1978

Variable DA = Rs. 10.40 (linked to industrial DA formula at Rs. 1.30 per point shifted to All India consumer price index for industrial workers. Base 1960=100).

House Rent Allowance — at government rates

Night Duty Allowance — was raised from Re. 1 to Rs. 2 to those who put in a minimum of 4 hours duty after 8 p.m.

Graduation allowance — to all graduate employees in HCE units at Rs. 10 per month.

Children's Education Allowance — As per government rules.

Special Allowance — of Rs. 20 per month to all kitchen staff handling food in addition to free meals.

Long Service Merit Allowance	— shall be given to those who have put in five years of service and have not got any promotion. They will get one increment and those with 10 years service will get two additional increments.
Uniform and Protective Clothing	— Every hotel employee will get a set of woollen coat and pant every three years, two sets of terrycot pants and shirts every two years and 5 cotton shirts and 5 cotton pants in a year.
Meal Allowance:	— Rs. 45 per month
Washing Allowance	— Wherever washing facilities are not provided, every employee will receive Rs. 8 per month as washing allowance.
Leave Travel Concession	— every employee is entitled to LTC as per government rules.
Encashment of leave	— Every employee in the HCE units is entitled to have 50% of his due privilege leave encashed with a maximum of 30 days and minimum of 15 days at a time.
Hills and Winter Allowance	— As per the government rules, for all entitled employees.
Trade Allowance	— An allowance between Rs. 30 and 80 per month will be given to specialised and rare skilled employees on the basis of trade tests conducted every year in the catering units.

Leave and Holidays — All employees in operational side who are enjoying government holidays are entitled to have four days' privilege leave in addition to present with a maximum of 26 days in unit. Wherever workers are get-getting more than 26 days, the same will continue.

Benefits for non-hotel and catering establishments: As all employees in the non-HCE units are getting the service benefits including their scales of pay, etc. on the guidelines of the central government employees have now been made entitled to get their reimbursement of Rs. 25 per month as token of tea and snacks allowance, because the employees in the HCE units are getting free tea and snacks while on duty.

Besides this, house rent allowance in case of Delhi-based non-HCE units also the percentage has been raised from 25% to 30% without production of any rent receipt.

WORKERS IN PORTS AND DOCKS

by

M. V. BHADRAM

General Secretary,

Port, Dock and Water front Workers' Federation of India

In October 1974, the government of India had appointed an official committee to revise the scales of pay and other service conditions of the port and dock workers. The wage revision committee (WRC) submitted its report in early 1977, after the Janata party came to power. After the strike of the port and dock workers in January 1976, government was committed to hold negotiations with the representatives of trade unions of the port and dock workers on the recommendations of the committee.

The labour minister, Ravindra Varma, therefore convened a meeting with the representatives of the four federations of port and dock workers to discuss the recommendations of the WRC. After protracted negotiations, an agreement was reached on 14 July 1977, and the implementation took effect from 1 January 1974.

According to this agreement, the minimum wage was fixed at Rs. 325 at 250 points of the consumer price index, 1960 series. The fixed dearness allowance was at rates ranging from Rs. 40 to Rs. 80 and variable dearness allowance at Rs. 1.30 per point for every rise over 250 points. The agreement also contained the stipulation to review the rate of Rs. 1.30 per point when the index of the same series crosses 362 points. The index reached 363 points on 1 January 1980 and hence the agreement in respect of variable dearness allowance no longer holds good.

During the discussions when certain anomalies were pointed out, it was agreed to constitute a machinery to go into such cases. Though the Port, Dock and Waterfront Workers' Federation endeavoured to have a bipartite machinery set up for this purpose, this could not be achieved. A committee consisting of government officials known as the anomaly group was formed. The report of this group only resulted in creating further anomalies whch necessitated prolonged discussions in several meetings which took place from November 1978 onwards and were concluded in April 1980. The negotiations have resulted in a number of scales being upgraded with effect from 1 January 1974. The number of scales have also been reduced to 24 and these were modified by changing the rate of increment.

The period of the operation of the agreement expired by 31 December 1979. The question of wage revision was therefore on the agenda. A great deal of discussion took place on the machinery that could go into the question. The Port, Dock and Waterfront Workers' Federation was the first to initiate the move for bipartite machinery. This had been the consistent stand of the federation from the very outset even prior to the setting up of the earlier committee in 1974. Government had come to realise that there was no alternative but to accede to this demand which was supported by all trade unions in port and docks. One of the factors was the realisation that the problem of anomalies had arisen in the case of the recommendations of the earlier wage revision committee mainly due to the absence of labour representatives on the committee.

Once the principle of bipartite negotiations was agreed to, the problem of representation arose. However, after discussions with all sections of the trade union movement in port and docks, an agreement was finally reached and the bipartite machinery was set up.

On the intiative of the Port, Dock and Waterfront Workers' Federation, a meeting of representatives of all four federations was held and a common charter of demands drawn up. Efforts to sustain this unity and take a common approach at the bargaining table are continuing and it is hoped that the unity ahieved so far will bear fruit and serve the needs of the port and dock workers.

The All India Port and Dock Workers' federation, affiliated to the HMS, during this period tried to go it alone and even conducted a strike in November 1978 on its own. The attempt to emerge as the sole bargaining agent on behalf of port and dock workers, however, did not bear fruit as can be seen from the setting up of the bipartite machinery with representatives from all federations, and the compulsion to prepare a common charter of demands.

In this period one of the unique struggles conducted was that of the workers of the New Mangalore Port. When they were fighting for their demands, representatives of all other units, in rotation, of the Port, Dock and Waterfront Workers' Federation, sent batches to participate in a relay hunger strike in solidarity with the Mangalore port workers. This gave a fillip to the movement and strengthened the AITUC union in the New Mangalore Port. Another new major port coming up is that in Tuticorin where workers, fighting for their rights, resorted to hunger strike and were given support by all other unions belonging to the Port, Dock and Waterfront Workers' Federation.

The main issue before the port and dock workers today is that of wage revision and the review of the variable dearness allowance of Rs. 1.30 per point. This was fixed by the Bureau of Public Enterprises and the port and dock workers are in the forefront of the struggle of all workers of the public sector to see that this arbitrary fixation by the BPE is rejected and changed.

STEEL WORKERS

by

N. C. DUTTA
President, All India Steel Workers' Federation

There are today 210,923 workers employed in the steel industry in the country. At the time of the Janata party govemment, the then steel minister stopped the functioning of the national joint consultative committee (NJCC) which was contsituted in December 1969. A standardisation committee with six study groups was set up in the name of democratising the system to hold discussions with all the registered trade unions existing in the different steel plants and captive mines. The committee submitted its report in six months.

At the end of November the minister for steel called for im-and social objectives, on workers' participation in management, on pricing, financing and marketing, on expansion of the steel industry and on the modalities of one union in one industry, were unanimous and presented to the minister in October 1977.

At the end of November the minister for steel called for immediate elections in all steel units to elect the majority union for purposes of recognition. He also announced that he would take steps for implementation of the reports.

Unfortunately all the assurances remained in the air and there was no communication with the workers by the ministry or the steel authority of India. It is only when the workers prepared for a one-day strike along with other public sector workers on 28 June 1978 that the ministry allowed SAIL to summon the reconstituted NJCC. Negotiations then commenced on the question of wages,

The All India Steel Workers' Federation at this time took up a programme of agitation action for a thorough and just wage revision. But other unions when approached were reluctant to unite for action. However, when the Minister took up the position of Rs. 375 as the wages for all newcomers as a consolidated wage, the workers' representatives came together to discuss a common approach on the matter and decided to boycott the NJCC until or unless the conditions in respect of new entrants was given up.

After 19 days, this condition was finally withdrawn and a settlement was reached on 19 June 1979, under which the revised minimum for the lowest paid worker would be Rs. 505 per month at the all India average consumer price index figure of 327 (1960-100). The new wage would take effect from 1 September 1978. The break up of the wage was: Basic: Rs. 400, fixed DA: Rs. 85.50 and variable dearness allowance: Rs. 19.50.

The agreement also provides some improved fringe benefits such as construction of 25000 to 30000 new housing units within the next four years, increase in educational facilities, medical facilities, leave facilities, retirement benefits, etc.

This agreement represents a defeat of the wage freeze policy of the government and the interference of the Bureau of Public Enterprises to some extent.

After the agreement was arrived at the management in a confidential circular imposed the BPE's concept of recruiting new people at a consolidated wage of Rs. 375. The AITUC was the first to draw attention to this fact in July itself, but nothing happened until the workers' representatives jointly boycotted the NJCC meetings from January to March 1980. Ultimately, the circular was withdrawn with retrospective effect.

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ENGINEERING WORKERS

by

N. C. Dutta
General Secretary, All India BHEL Workers' Federation

Engineering workers do not have a national wage pattern. The number of workers in this sphere are altogether 232,860, with 135,430 employed in heavy engineering and 94,730 engaged in medium and light engineering. This figure, however, does not include the workers who are employed in the engineering units in small scale industry.

During this period a number of struggles of engineering workers have taken place. One of the notable ones was that of the workers of the Garden Reach workshop involving 10,000 workers in West Bengal which continued for 124 days. Another strike was that of the workers of the Kulti workshop with 8000 workers on strike for 68 days. In both instances the central and state governments adopted indifferent attitudes, and it must also be said that the trade unions did not conduct much solidarity actions in support of the striking workers.

One of the major agreements of this period was that arrived at in the Bharat Heavy Electricals. In June 1977 an agreement was signed on the question of leave to the workers which had been under discussion. As a result the following were agreed to:

No. of years of service	*No. of days per annum leave*
1 to 5 years	22 days
6 to 10 years	24 days
11 to 15 years	26 days
16 to 20 years	28 days
Above 20 years	30 days

This agreement also provided protection to those workers who were already enjoying higher number of days' leave.

Another interim wage agreement took place in July 1978. Under the terms of this agreement, 10% wage rise was given to all workers except those in the supervisory level. The management later took the stand that this was the final agreement, but the workers' group rejected this contention and called for a one day token strike to register the protest. A united strike of 55 thousand workers of the 10 units took place.

Wage agreements have also been signed in the engineering industries in Bangalore and in West Bengal.

While there was been some advance in some spheres, there is yet not a uniform wage scale throughout the country and agreements have been arrived at either on unit wise or region wise basis. United action of all engineering workers is necessary to bring about a radical change.

The National Federation of Metal and Engineering Workers of India has taken up these issues and held meetings to prepare for united work amongst the engineering workers. The problems faced in building such united action are varied and complex. But a concerted effort in this direction will enable the movement amongst engineering workers to gather strength and bring about a radical change in the existing situation.

CONDITIONS OF WORKERS IN THE BEEDI INDUSTRY

by

N. C. Dutta

President, Beedi, Cigar and Tobacco Workers Federation

After 33 years of independence, the beedi workers in the country continue to face untold suffering. The tragic conditions under which the beedi and cigar workers are at present labouring are a battle of survival. More than 30 lakh workers are toiling in this unorganised sector. The workers mostly belong to the scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and half of them are women and children. The industry is spread throughout the country.

In 1966, parliament enacted the beedi and cigar workers' act and in 1968 the rules under the act were framed. But until today, except for Kerala, no state government has implemented all the provisions of the act.

The wages of the beedi workers are not uniform and vary from state to state, though the rate is for rolling 1000 beedies.

In Andhra Pradesh, after revision in 1979, the workers are paid in various zones, Rs. 5.85, Rs. 5.60 and Rs. 5.35 respectively. They are entitled to annual leave since 1974 at the rate of 5% linked to wages from 30 July 1975. The 3000 workers in Warangal are also entitled to ESI and EPF benefits.

In Assam the wages are Rs. 5.00 since 1977. In Bihar, the rates are Rs. 4.90 and 3.90 since 1974. These workers, since 1976, also receive DA at the rate of 0.72 per 1000 beedies at 2 paise per point and hence their total emoluments vary from Rs. 5.56 to Re. 6.56. In Gujarat, the wages are Rs. 5.00, Rs. 4.75 and Rs. 4.50 since 1975, with DA for every 5 point rise or fall at 0.15 paise per day or Rs. 3.90 per month from 1975, and Rs. 27.30 since 1976.

In Karnataka the rates are Rs. 5.75, Rs. 6.44 to Rs. 7.25 since 1979. In Kerala the rates are Rs. 2.30, and 8.60 to Rs. 9.42 according to the cost of living index since December 1979. They are also receiving 8.33% bonus since July 1974. In Madhya Pradesh the rate is Rs. 6 since January 1960 and in Maharashtra Rs. 8.00 and Rs. 6 since 1979. Bidi workers in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are also entitled to bonus and annual leave, at differing rates. In Rajasthan the rates are Rs. 5.50 and Rs. 4.50 for sada and Rs. 6.30 for special bidis since 1975. In Tamilnadu there has been a settlement in May 1980 by which they receive Rs. 5.50, Rs. 6.00 and Rs. 5.25 to 5.50 for jadi, Rs. 5.25, Rs. 5.75 for sada. In Uttar Pradesh the rate is Rs. 5.00 and Rs. 4.75 since 1979 and in West Bengal Rs. 2.00, Rs. 2.06 and Rs. 2.25. In Purulia district the rate is Rs. 7.00 and in Calcutta and 24 Parganas Rs. 12.75.

From the above one will see that there is total anarchy in the scale of wages of beedi workers from state to state, as well as their working and living conditions.

The last budget of the Janata Party government of 1979 increased the excise duty on branded beedies upto Rs. 3.60 paise