

*** Promotion of Labour Welfare in India**

Question relating to dearness allowance for industrial workers, absenteeism, maintenance of service records and canteens were among the subjects discussed at the fourth meeting of the Standing Labour Committee which was held on January 25 and 26 in Lucknow.

The meeting was held at the Council House, the Hon'ble Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Labour Member, Government of India, presiding. Five delegates each of employers' and workers' organisations, five delegates of Provincial Governments and three delegates representing the Indian States attended.

Dr. Ambedkar's Speech

In his opening remarks, the Chairman, referring to the steps which are being taken by the Central Government to implement the decisions taken at an earlier session of the Standing Labour Committee, indicated that the Government had decided to introduce the Fair Wages Clause in contracts entered into by the Central Public Works Department. The question of introducing a similar clause in contracts entered into by other Departments of the Central Government, he said, was under consideration.

The Chairman also announced that in pursuance of the resolution passed at the last Plenary session of the Labour Conference, the Government of India had appointed a Labour Investigation Committee for the investigation of wages, earnings and other conditions of labour. The question of extending the enquiry in a suitable manner to agricultural wage earners, he said, was also being considered in consultation with the Provincial Governments.

The Committee then discussed the method of Statutory Wage Control in India if and when such statutory control was found necessary.

*Indian Information, February 15, 1944, pp. 151-52.

It appeared that the delegates generally considered that Wage Boards, when a decision was taken to set them up, should be on a Provincial basis and deal with individual industries.

After a brief discussion on the Employment Exchanges Scheme and statements by Provincial Government representatives on the progress of the Scheme in the provinces, the Committee considered Model Provident Fund Rules circulated by the Central Government for eliciting the opinion of the delegates as well as some details regarding the management of the Fund, the contribution of Employees and Workers and Advances from the Fund.

Dearness Allowance

The Committee also considered the report on Dearness Allowance, submitted by the Gregory Committee which was constituted by the Chairman of the Tripartite Labour Conference in pursuance of a resolution passed at the last session of the Conference. Among other points arising out of the report questions relating to general principles for fixing dearness allowance, the nature of these principles, the desirability of having different rates for different industries or different regions, and the relation of dearness allowance to rising or falling Cost of Living Indices, were discussed.

The Committee, it is understood, agreed that general principles should, to the maximum extent possible, be laid down by the Government for dealing with the question of dearness allowance paid or to be paid by industrial concerns. Agreeing that the report of the Subcommittee would serve as a useful guide to Government in laying down principles for dearness allowance, the Committee decided to forward the report to the Government of India for consideration in the light of opinions expressed by the delegates.

Absenteeism

A draft scheme for a sample survey into absenteeism in industrial undertakings especially undertakings engaged on war production was one of the items on the agenda. The Scheme aims at a factual survey of the problem including investigation of causes like sickness, accident, leave, social or religious reasons, transport difficulties, lateness which result in absenteeism. It is learnt that the scheme was generally agreed to with some amendments.

Earlier during the Session, the Committee reviewed the progress achieved in respect of opening cooked food and refreshment canteens for workers in industrial concerns. It was revealed that in spite of difficulties such canteens were functioning in considerable numbers and were proving popular among the workers.

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***Coal Mines Labour Welfare Ordinance, 1944**

An ordinance entitled “The Coal Mines Labour Welfare Ordinance, 1944,” has been promulgated today, constituting a fund for financing activities to promote the welfare of labour employed in the coal mining industry. The Ordinance extends to the whole of British India and comes into force at once, said a Press Note issued by the Labour Department, Government of India, on January 31. It continued :

To create the fund, the Central Government will levy a cess on all coal and soft coke despatched by rail from collieries in British India, at a rate to be fixed from time to time by notification in the *Gazette of India* after consultation with an Advisory Committee. This duty will not be less than one anna and not more than four annas per ton. The duty will be collected, on behalf of the Central Government, by the Railway Administration by which coal or soft coke is carried.

While the Ordinance generally provides that the proceeds thus realised will be credited to a Labour Welfare Fund to meet expenditure on measures “necessary or expedient to promote the welfare of labour employed in the coal-mining industry”, it specifies a number of items for which the fund may in particular be utilised. The labour welfare programme to be financed from the Fund aims at providing housing, water supplies, facilities for washing, improvement of educational facilities and standards of living among the workers, including nutrition, amelioration of social conditions and the provision of recreation and transport facilities.

The improvement of public health and sanitation, the prevention of disease, the provision of medical facilities and the improvement of

*Indian Information, February 15, 1944, pp. 153-54.

existing facilities are also included. Provision has also been made for giving grants out of the fund to a Provincial Government, a local authority, or the owner, agent or manager of a coal mine in aid of any scheme for the welfare of labour which is approved by the Central Government. This provision will ensure that the fullest use is made of existing organisations with such strengthening as may be necessary, and of existing approved welfare schemes to which support can be given from the fund.

Advisory Committee

The Ordinance further empowers the Central Government to set up an Advisory Committee whose members will include, among others, an equal number of members representating colliery owners and workmen employed in the coal mining industry. One member of the Advisory Committee must be a woman. The Committee will advise the Central Government on matters on which the Central Government is required by the Ordinance to consult it and on any other matters arising out of the administration of the Ordinance.

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