

* Advisory Committee on Coal Mines Welfare Fund

The Central Government have set up an Advisory Committee to advise on matters arising out of the administration of the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Ordinance, promulgated in January last.

The Committee, when fully constituted, will consist of the Secretary, Labour Department, the Coal Commissioner, the Labour Welfare Adviser, the Chief Inspector of Mines ; one official each nominated by the Railway Board, the Bengal Government, the Bihar Government and the Central Provinces and Berar Government; two nominees of the Indian Mining Association; one nominee of the Indian Mining Federation, the Indian Colliery Owners Association and the Central Provinces and Berar Mining Association: two mining engineers and representatives of interests other than the colliery owners or workmen employed in the coal mining industry.

In addition, there will be five persons nominated by the Central Government to represent the interests of colliery labour. Four have already been appointed and the fifth will be appointed shortly. Under the ordinance, the Advisory Committee should also include a lady member and this nomination, too, is expected shortly.

The Committee, as so far constituted, include the following representatives of the Government of India : Mr. S. Lall, Secretary, Labour Department; Mr. R. S. Nimbkar, Labour Welfare Adviser ; and Mr. W. H. Kirby, Chief Inspector of Mines. The representatives of the Railway Board and of the Bengal, Bihar, and Central Provinces and Berar Governments are : Mr. A. Orr; Mr. A. Hughes, I.C.S., Labour Commissioner, Bengal; Mr. A. G. Bunn, I.C.S., Additional Deputy Commissioner, Dhanbad; and Sardar Bahadur Ishar Singh, Labour Commissioner, Central Provinces and Berar. Messrs. J. Latimer,

* Indian Information, May 15, 1944, pp. 522-23.

S. F. Tarlton, M. N. Mukerjee, R. D. Rathore and A. E. Douglas have been nominated to represent the mining industry on the Advisory Committee.

First Meeting

Of the four spokesmen for colliery labour, Messrs. P. Bhattasali and H. Ghosal represent organisations, affiliated to the Indian Federation of Labour and Messrs. Nirpada Mukerjee and Chapal Bhattacharya represent those affiliated to the Trade Union Congress. Messrs. S. N. Mallick and W. N. Burch are mining engineers nominated to the Committee.

The first meeting of the Advisory Committee was held at Dhanbad on April 27, the Hon'ble Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Labour Member, Government of India, presiding.

In a short opening speech, Dr. Ambedkar recalled the Tripartite meeting held in Dhanbad in December last to consider, first, the problem of coal production and, secondly, the securing of a continuous flow of labour. He said that the suggestions made at that meeting had come to fruition. While the question of production was being dealt with separately, this meeting was convened to consider measures for the welfare of labour in coal-mines. As discussed at the last meeting, the Government of India had promulgated an Ordinance constituting a fund for the welfare of colliery labour and this Advisory Committee had been appointed under the terms of the Ordinance.

The Committee then discussed draft rules, placed before them, relating to the composition of the Advisory Committee and to expenditure and welfare schemes to be financed from the Fund. The rules provide that the Advisory Committee should have a secretariat, with headquarters at Dhanbad, under the executive authority of its Chairman. There will be a number of sub-committees attached to and elected by the Advisory Committee for carrying out its functions—a Finance Sub-Committee to advise generally on all expenditure debitable to the Fund, a Works Sub-Committee to consider all major projects for works and constructions the cost of which is to be met from the Fund, and a separate Coal-field Sub-Committee for each of the main coal-fields in Bengal, Bihar, the Central Provinces and Berar and Assam to advise on all matters relating to expenditure from the Fund in their respective regions. In constituting the Sub-Committees equal representation will be given to colliery owners and workers employed in the coal-mining industry.

Administration Of Fund

The rules discussed by the Advisory Committee also provide that, within the sanctioned budget, the Advisory Committee may suggest schemes of expenditure to the Central Government for approval. These schemes will be in two parts—administrative schemes, to cover secretariat expenses and salary, etc. of the staff appointed by the Chairman, and welfare schemes which will be either of an obligatory or permissive nature.

The rules further empower the Central Government to impose certain conditions on a Provincial Government, the local authority or the owner, agent or manager of a coal-mine to whom a grant is made from the Coal-Mines Labour Welfare Fund in aid of any schemes approved by the Central Government. These conditions may be imposed to ensure that the work for which the grant is made is duly and promptly executed, that all the necessary facilities are given for any inspection that may be made for checking, and that proper accounts are maintained of the money granted.

Before making a grant from the Fund to a local authority or the executive agent or manager of a coal-mine, the Central Government will require the Party concerned to execute a bond for the fulfilment of these conditions.

The Committee also considered the extent to which the Jharia and Asansol Boards of Health and the Jharia Water Board should be utilised as the executive authority for expenditure of grants from the Fund. It was pointed out that use might be made of existing bodies in coal-fields for carrying out welfare and other schemes for which the Fund had been created. The Committee approved the suggestion put forth by the Chairman that the question whether grants should be made to local bodies or not should be decided by the Advisory Committee in each case individually. The Committee also considered expenditure needs which should be taken up at once and for which the cost should be met from the Welfare Fund. Among the items which were suggested for this purpose were : expenditure on welfare staff, expenditure on secretariat staff to be appointed and expenditure on the anti-malaria scheme at present in progress in certain coal-fields in the Central Provinces and Berar and to be sanctioned for Bengal-Bihar. The Committee also discussed the rate of cess to be levied under the Ordinance.