

* Post-War Employment of Skilled Workers

“No plan for the future development of the country can be deemed to be complete which does not provide for technical and scientific training. This is the age of Machine and it is only those countries in which technical and scientific training has risen to the highest pitch that will survive in the struggle that will commence when the war is over, for maintaining decent standards of living for their people. The Government of India is not oblivious to these considerations and would like to see the Technical Training Scheme not only maintained but extended all over the country and become a permanent part of the country’s educational system.” Thus observed the Hon’ble Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Labour Member, Government of India, addressing the Technical Training Scheme Advisory Committee in Calcutta on August 24.

The committee, which was appointed by the Central Government to consider the adjustment of the Technical Training Scheme to the needs of civil industry, consists of representatives of engineering associations, the All-India Organisation of Industrial Employers, the Employers’ Federation of India, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, the Supply Department, the Railway Board and the Institute of Engineering. The meeting lasted three days.

Labour Member’s Speech

Here is the full text of the Labour member’s speech :

Gentlemen : In welcoming you here, today, I should like to express to each one of you my appreciation and thanks for the trouble you have taken to attend this meeting. In these days, we are all so fully preoccupied with our normal duties, that any additon to them must involve

* Indian Information, September 15, 1944, pp. 274-77.

a heavy strain. I am all the more grateful to you for undertaking this task of helping Government to re-mould their Technical Training Scheme to meet the changing needs of the country.

I need hardly say how great is the importance I attach to the work of this Committee. The fact that, notwithstanding a last moment hitch, I decided to come down to Calcutta to meet you and to wish you good luck and full success in your labours, is evidence—if there is need for any—of the sincerity of what I am saying.

You have assembled here today to consider the future of our Technical Training Scheme, which was introduced as an emergency measure to cater to the technical needs of the Army and has resulted in providing India with semi-skilled man-power to an extent unheard of before.

Just to give you an idea of the magnitude of the work done in the field of technical training, I might refer briefly to the history of the Technical Training Scheme from its early stages. It was started 3½ Years ago to overcome one serious obstacle—the lack of technical personnel for the requirements of the Army. We started with a target for training about 3,000 men at a time, but within two years we had to raise this figure to 48,000 which required setting up 394 training centres. By the end of 1942, we had already supplied 54,000 trained personnel to the Army. By June, 1944, we had turned out 75,000 trainees of whom 63,000 joined the technical branches of the Defence Services and 3,000 went to the ordnance factories. I am sure you will agree that this is no mean achievement having regard to the period within which it has been accomplished.

As I said this Technical Training Scheme was started to meet the needs of the Army which had arisen out of the war. The war, as everybody can see, is coming to a close, and the demand for technical training which came for the Army will abate.

In view of the situation that will arise at the end of the war there are two questions that arise for consideration. The first is : What are we to do for those who have already been trained, and who have been serving the Army, but who will soon be discharged from the Army and would be waiting for employment ? The second question is : What are we going to do with this Technical Training Scheme ?

Some people have formed the conclusion that Government have decided to liquidate the Technical Training Scheme. This is altogether untrue. It is true that Government has closed some of the training centres. We have now 170 training centres with a capacity to train about 32,000 trainees, in place of 400 training centres with a capacity to train 45,000 trainees which we had in 1942. This is due to various causes, foremost among which are two. One is the decreased intake of the Army. The other is the heavy cost of maintaining small centres.

Government's Intention

These steps only show that what Government has done is to make necessary adjustments called for by the exigencies of the situation. They do not indicate any intention on the part of the Government to liquidate the Technical Training Scheme. If such was the intention of the Government, the Government need not have constituted this Committee. No plan for the future development of the country can be deemed to be complete which does not provide for technical and scientific training. This is the age of Machine and it is only those countries in which technical and scientific training has risen to the highest pitch that will survive in the struggle that will commence when the war is over, for maintaining decent standards of living for their people. The Government of India is not oblivious to these considerations and would like to see the Technical Training Scheme not only maintained but extended all over the country and become a permanent part of the country's educational system.

Industry Should Absorb Trainees

While this is the objective of the Government, the success of the Scheme must depend upon the possibilities of the trainees getting employment. If the trainees, after they are trained, fail to get employment, then the Technical Training Scheme is doomed to failure. The answer to this question must entirely depend upon the attitude of the Industry to the trainees coming out from the training centres. The whole fate of the Scheme depends upon it. If the Industry refuses to employ the trainees it is obvious that nobody is going to bother about technical training, and the training centres will have to be closed down. This unfortunate consequence can be averted only if civil industries were to show eagerness to absorb our trainees.

Out of the 6,000 surplus trainees, civil industry has only taken 3,000. Indeed, they prefer to employ untrained workmen in the expectation that they will acquire the necessary skill and training in the course of employment or as apprentices. This reluctance to employ the trainees from our technical training centres may be due to various causes. I have heard of complaints that our training is inadequate. Civil industry insists on their technical personnel possessing a higher degree of skill than can be provided by our Scheme, in which we attempted—no doubt under the pressure of war—to give technical training in 8 months which before the war took 5 years.

I am, however, satisfied that it is not at all necessary that a training scheme should run the full length of a five-year course in order to satisfy the requirements of civil industry. Experience gained by wartime technical training schemes in other countries shows that with intensive training semi-skilled men can be quickly trained for most industries.

Industry's Responsibility

If, therefore, the training imparted under the Technical Training Scheme is supplemented by further 'biased' training, the final product should be acceptable to civil industry. I am, however, prepared to admit that there are faults in our Training Scheme. I am also prepared to accept any reasonable changes that may be suggested to make our trainees passable to Industry. But unless Industry agrees to absorb our trainees, there is no hope of a technical training scheme being made a success in this country. Industry therefore should note that a very heavy responsibility lies on its shoulders.

You, gentlemen, know the needs of industry better than I do. All I can say is, that if the Scheme is to succeed it must have the cooperation of employers and workers in determining its future. We have no time to lose or else we may find that we have only won the war, but done nothing for the peace.

As I have already said we have two questions to deal with : (1) To find employment for trainees who will be discharged from the Army after the war is over and for trainees who are completing the prescribed courses of training, (2) To revise the scheme for technical training as a part of the Post-War Plan of Industrial Reconstruction. These are two distinct questions and we propose to tackle them separately. That is

why we have thought it desirable to proceed by two stages. Relevant to the second stage is the question : What changes can be made in our Technical Training Scheme to make it serve fully and completely the present-day needs of civil industry. It involves the consideration of the long-term policy, of providing trained technical personnel for the postwar industrial development of the country.

Employment of Skilled Workers

On the other hand the problem we have to consider as relevant to the first stage is to find ways and means for the rehabilitation of the thousands of our skilled workers, turned out by our training centres, now serving in the Army but who will be soon thrown out of employment at the close of the war. Our expectation is that Industry should not find it difficult to take over these men, especially, as we hope that there will be a post-war expansion of civil industry and a consequent increase in the demand for men technically trained.

The immediate problem before us is : How to fit them to our peacetime industrial structure, we want to examine the difficulties connected with it and to plan to meet them well in advance. To accomplish success in this we have to see what further training and what additions and modifications in our training syllabuses, or introduction of subsidiary courses are necessary in order to make our trainees more acceptable to existing industries. The results of your deliberations will determine what future progress we can make in the next stage. The two stages are closely connected and the second is no less important than the first.

I do not wish to take more of your time as I know you have a heavy agenda. But before I close I should like to say how important it is that we should have an adequate supply of skilled personnel if we are to plan a brighter future for our country. It is only by tripartite cooperation between Government, employers and workers that we can hope to develop a technical training scheme on sound lines. I would here make a special appeal to employers and industrialists. Their specialised knowledge and experience is invaluable but no less is their future co-operation in maintaining any technical training scheme that may be set up by Government.

One word more and I will close. Is unemployment to be the fate of the trainees who have gone to the Army and who will before long be returning to civil life? Is that to be reward of the services they have rendered and the risks they have taken? I am sure we shall not fail them. If we neglect them, they will constitute a powerful centre of discontent in industry. Suitably accommodated in civil life after the war, they will help to give stability to industry. They will bring to civil industry the sense of discipline which they have acquired in the Army. It is for you to say what measures Government must take to re-condition them for civil employment. I can assure you Government will not only be grateful to you for your advice but will do its best to give effect to such measures as may be found reasonable and practicable.

Committee's Discussions

Later the Committee discussed *various* problems relating to technical training and emphasised the importance of improving educational standards of technical trainees. Mr. S. Lall, Joint Secretary, Labour Department, presided.

*

*

*

***Visit To Employment Exchange**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who arrived in Calcutta on August 23, inspected the Calcutta Employment Exchange, accompanied by Mr. S. Lall, Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Labour, and formerly Deputy High Commissioner for India in London.

The Labour Member discussed various matters relating to the operation of the Employment Exchange Scheme in Calcutta and the working of the National Service (Technical Personnel) Ordinance with Mr. A. Hughes, Labour Commissioner with the Government of Bengal. There was also a discussion on Government of India's policy to close down technical training centres as far as it affected Bengal.

Dr. Ambedkar saw a large number of workmen who had come to the Exchange for registration. Mr. Hughes and Mr. Bennett (Manager of the Exchange) explained the process of registration and the card index system.

*Indian Information, September 15, 1944, p. 278.

Rise In Employment Figures

The Labour member noted that there was a progressive rise in the figures of men registered *for and placed* in employment through the Exchange. He was informed that according to the latest available figures 1,029 ex-trainees of the Technical Training Scheme had been registered at the Employment Exchange and out of this number 388 were placed in employment. The total number of technical personnel registered at the Exchange from January, 1944, to July 31, 1944, was 2,264 and the number of those placed in employment in the same period was 537.

Dr. Ambedkar and party were also shown a chart giving up-to-date information about the progress of Technical Training Scheme in Bengal. He was informed that there were 24 centres with a training capacity of 4,164 in addition to 15 civil centres with a training capacity of 2,270. Seventeen of these centres were technical institutes and two belonged to industrial undertakings. Up to July 31, 1944, 2,540 trainees who had passed out of these training centres were posted to civil industry. The Labour Member also visited the Government of India press and the central stationery office.

Later in the day he addressed members of the trade Union Advisory Committee set up by the Government of Bengal and discussed the working of orders recently issued by the National Service Labour Tribunal.

●●