

*** Department of Labour**
(Demand for Supplementary Grant in respect of)

The Honourable Sir Jeremy Raisman : Sir, I move :

“That a supplementary sum not exceeding Rs. 2,40,000 be granted to the Governor General in Council to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of March, 1945 in respect of ‘Department of Labour’.”

Mr. Chairman (Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang): Motion Moved :

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The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (Labour Member): As my friend Prof. Ranga probably knows, last year the Government of India imposed a cess on coal, called the Coal Mines Welfare Cess which is levied at the rate of 4 annas per ton on coal produced. It was with regard to the administration of this coal fund that the Coal Mines Welfare Officer was appointed. The Coal Mines Welfare Fund is administered by a committee. The committee is constituted of equal representatives of employers, equal representatives of workers in coal mines, representatives of the Provincial governments, namely, of Bihar and Bengal and is presided over by the Secretary of the Labour Department, as the Chairman. The Committee is more or less an autonomous body. It has its own budget which is prepared by the Coal Commissioner. It is submitted to the Committee and the Coal Mines Welfare Commissioner is the executive authority over this expenditure. All questions of welfare, for instance, such as malaria, water supply, medicine and other matters relating to coal welfare are considered by this Committee.

Pandit Lakshmi Kanta Maitra : Do you exercise any control over it in any way ?

* Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. III, 27th March 1945, pp. 2138-41.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Oh, yes. I exercise control, because the secretary of the Labour Department is the Chairman. The budget comes to us for purposes of consideration. When it is passed, it is sent back and referred to the committee for further amendment.

With regard to the question of the Labour Commissioner, I think my friend Professor Ranga will know that all Provincial Governments have got Labour Commissioners. Under them, they have their own conciliation officers and other officers looking after labour. It was felt in the Government of India that as the Government of India has also got certain undertakings for which it is responsible, it was desirable that the Government of India should also have a similar organisation under its control to look after the welfare of workers engaged in these Central undertakings and consequently quite recently we have established this organisation. At the head of the organisation is an officer called the Chief Labour Commissioner with the Government of India. The rest of India is divided into three different areas and for each area there will be one Deputy Labour Commissioner. Prof. Ranga, I think, would like to know that we have taken advantage of this new organisation in order to amalgamate the work of Central undertakings along with the work which was originally done separately by the Conciliation Officer (Railways) and the Supervisor of Railway labour. All this has now been amalgamated and centralised. The Labour Welfare Officers who were working individually in different areas and were reporting directly to the Government of India will now be under these different Labour Commissioners. Similarly, the Railway Inspectors who were also working separately under the Railway Conciliation Officer and doing the work of checking up the Payment of Wages Act and the hours of labour are also now being brought under the new scheme and we have made a consolidated scheme.

With regard to the point relating to the Labour Investigation Committee, I think it will be recalled that last year or rather the year before that in 1943, the Tripartite Labour Conference passed a resolution that the Government of India should undertake social security measures on the lines of the Beveridge report. It was then felt that before any such scheme could be formulated, it would be necessary to have a fact finding committee which would investigate all questions, such as housing, wages, sanitary conditions

and other data affecting the welfare of the workers, and that after the facts were found by the Committee, the Government of India should have another Committee in order to formulate such social security measures as can be based upon the data that were found by this Investigation Committee. This Investigation committee has now been working for nearly six or seven months and its report is promised sometime in June or July next. After the report is received, measures will be taken to constitute the second part of the enquiry and these facts will be placed before them according to the decision of the Tripartite Conference. The second counter-part of this Investigation Committee would be a committee represented by 'employers, employees and members of Provincial Governments'.

With regard to the other question, namely, unskilled labour supply, the position is this. It was found out that various contractors were competing among themselves and paying much higher wages than what the market rate permitted in order to snatch away labour to their own contracts and to leave other contractors high and dry. The result was that while there was a superfluity of labour in some parts, there was great scarcity of labour in other parts where military works found it extremely difficult to find the necessary amount of labour. Consequently the Government of India decided that it was necessary to ration man-power and therefore the first step that they took was to appoint this committee which is known as Unskilled Labour Supply Committee. To this Committee, every contractor has to make an application, if he wants to take away labour from an area where he is not working and it is only on the certificate given by the Supply Committee that he can go to some other area to tap labour from that area. There are various stations where these labour depots are kept. At the head is a contractor who manages this scheme. I cannot at this stage give my Honourable friend all the details under the scheme. But if he is more interested in the matter, he can put down a short notice question which I am prepared to accept and give information on this subject.

Shrimati K. Radha Bai Subbarayan (Madura and Ramnad *cum* Tinnevely : Non-Muhammadan Rural): Sir, I should like first to thank my Honourable friend for the long statement he has made and the information he has supplied to Prof. Ranga and his colleagues. But I think he has missed one essential question and that is whether the

Coal Commissioner will consider the question of reimposing the ban on employment of women underground.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I am sure that is not his function.

Shrimati K. Radha Bai Subbarayan : I should like to know whether the Coal Commissioner or the Committee will consider whether under labour conditions prevailing now in mines, women should be permitted to continue to work underground any longer and whether it is not injurious to the health of women to do such work in mines.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : That will not be a matter within their purview.

Mr. Abdul Qaiyum : Then, what is the use of having them ?

Mr. N.M. Joshi (Nominated Non-official): As I envisage, the function of this committee, when it was appointed, was to find out facts and certainly the Committee will find out facts regarding the question of employing women underground, and every question.....

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I understood Shrimati Radhabai Subbarayan to refer to the Coal Commissioner and his work.

Shrimati K. Radhabai Subbarayan : And also to the committee to which my Honourable friend referred.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Yes, they might.

Mr. N.M. Joshi : That is the view I take that the Committee will consider every question.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : I thought she was referring only to the Coal Commissioner.

Mr. N.M. Joshi : Including the removal of the ban on the employment of women and all questions concerning labour in all fields. I therefore feel that this money should be voted.

Mr. Chairman (Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang): The question is:

“That a supplementary sum not exceeding Rs. 2,40,000 be granted to the Governor General in Council to defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of March, 1945 in respect of ‘Department of Labour ’”.

The motion was adopted.