

Indian Mines (Amendment) Bill

*** The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar** (Labour Member):
Sir, I move.

“That the Bill further to amend the Indian Mines Act, 1923.
be taken into consideration.”

This Bill is a very simple measure.

[(At this stage, Mr. President vacated the Chair which was then occupied by Mr. Deputy President (Sir Mohammad Yamin Khan).]

The purport of the Bill is to impose an obligation upon the mine owners to provide pit-head baths “equipped with shower baths and locker rooms for the use of men employed in mines and of similar and separate places and rooms for the use of women in mines where women are employed and for prescribing either generally or with particular reference to, the numbers of men and women ordinarily employed in a mine, the number and standards of such places and rooms.” I do not think there can be any dispute as regards the necessity of providing pit-head baths. It is bound to improve the self-respect of the miner and I am sure about it that it is very desirable that he should return home a clean person, if possible with clean clothes. This measure has been considered by the Coal Mines Advisory Committee which has been appointed by Government in order to administer the Coal Mines Welfare Fund. The Committee has unanimously accepted the proposal that pit-head baths should be an obligation of the colliery owners. In order to give effect to it, the Bill provides that under the rule-making power which is given to the Government of India under section 30 of the Mines Act, the Government shall have the power to make a rule prescribing pit-head bath. That is the main purpose of the Bill.

The second clause of the Bill does nothing more than exempt Government from following the usual procedure in the matter of making rules under the Coal Mines Act which are prescribed by Section 31. Section 31 says that any rules made under the Act shall be first

* Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. I-No. 13, 8th February 1946, p. 716.

published and then passed. We wish to exempt the rules that we propose to make under the provisions of this Bill from the provision of previous publication prescribed under Section 31. The reason for providing such exemption is that we are very anxious that this liability not only should be imposed, but should be earned out immediately, we wish to avoid delay. In fact, I might tell the House that the Government are so anxious to have this system of pit-head baths introduced in all coal mines immediately that Government themselves have made a provision by which they are prepared to offer ten per cent of the capital cost of the baths to colliery owners if they undertake to provide such baths within twelve months. In order that this may be done, we do not propose to have these rules subjected to the provision of Section 31. The Bill is so essential and so simple and so non-controversial, that the House will accept it without much ado—Sir, I move.

Mr. Deputy President : Motion moved.

“That the Bill further to amend the Indian Mines Act, 1923, be taken into consideration.”

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The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : We want to hasten this thing and that is why we offer this kind of encouragement, that if a mine owner does construct these baths within twelve months from a given date he will get this concession. Otherwise, he will not get it and he will have to do it at his own cost.

Pandit Govind Malaviya : Will not that purpose be served if it were laid down that the mine owners shall get those baths ready within twelve months

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : We must give some time.

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* **The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar :** Sir, I did not think that my Honourable friend Mr. Siddiqui, would be so much perturbed,— he is not here in the House just now—by the shower baths. But I would like to tell the House that the question whether there should be shower baths or not is not an idiosyncrasy on the part of the Government or their own innovation. There is, as I told the House, an Advisory Committee, representative of coal miners, coal owners, representative of the Bengal Government and Bihar Government, which advise Government in the matter of the administration of what is called the Coal Miners' Welfare Fund. This question of the sort of baths that

* Legislative Assembly Debates (Central), Vol. I-No. 13, 8th February 1946, pp. 719-20.

should be provided was put before the Committee and I would like to tell the House that in this Committee there are not only representatives of trade unions, but there are representatives actually of workmen and workwomen. There is one representative of actual coal miners and there is one representative of women miners and it is with their unanimous assent that Government decided to have shower baths.

So far as I am able to see, I should have thought that a shower bath would be far more effective in the matter of cleaning the person of a worker in coal mines than immersion in water or holding oneself under a running tap. I may also further add that this decision of having shower baths was taken by Government as a result of the experience of Messrs. Tata Iron and Steel Co. Ltd., at their colliery in Digboi. These shower baths have been in existence for a considerable time there and to our great satisfaction we found that the workers were making very good use of the shower baths and that they had no sort of objection at all. With regard to the question of soap, I can give the assurance to the House that we do intend to provide soap to every miner under certain regulations, and I think the House need have no anxiety on that account.

I hope this will satisfy Honourable Members. An Honourable Member said that this is merely a declaration and that there is no penalty. If the Honourable Member concerned were to refer to section 39, he will find that that is a general penalty clause which imposes penalties.

Prof. N. G. Ranga : There is only one little difficulty in regard to women. They do not want their hair also to be washed with mere water ; they may require oil or something.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: They may be provided with caps.

Mr. Deputy President: The question is

“That the Bill further to amend the Indian Mines Act 1923, be taken into consideration.”

The motion was adopted.

Clause 2 and 3 were added to the Bill.

Clause 1 was added to the Bill.

The Title and the Preamble were added to the Bill.

The Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar : Sir, I move.

“That the Bill be passed.”

The motion was adopted.