

RAJYA SABHA

*Friday, the 16th January, 1976/the 26th
Pausa, 1897 (Saka)*

The House met at eleven of the clock,
Mr Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

ILO Convention on Rural Workers

*210. SHRI S. W. DHABE : Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state .

(a) whether Government have considered "Rural Workers' Organisation Convention", 1975 passed by ILO in its sixtieth session on 4th June, 1975; and

(b) if so, what steps Government propose to take for improving employment opportunities and general conditions of work and service of rural workers

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY) : (a) and (b) The Convention is presently under consideration of the Government in consultation with the State Governments, Central Organisations of Employers and Workers and other interests concerned. A statement on the action proposed to be taken would be laid on the Table of the House as soon as the Government's view is finalised in the matter.

SHRI S. W. DHABE : Sir, the last Convention on equal remuneration for equal work was passed in 1951 by the ILO, ratified by India in 1958 and the Bill came here after seventeen years. May I know from the Minister how much time it will take? Now, bonded labour has been abolished and we want to organise the rural workers. In order to solve their difficulties this Convention has been passed. How much time will it take to ratify the Convention?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : For organising rural labour, though the Convention may be helpful, the organisation of rural labour is not stopped in the absence of any Convention. In fact, the rural labour federation has been set up and I think it is doing well. The subject "Organisation of Rural Workers and their

role in economic and social development" came up for discussion before the International Labour Conference at its fifty-ninth and sixtieth sessions held in 1974 and 1975 and a double-discussion procedure was adopted. A Convention was adopted and also a recommendation was adopted. Now, Sir, as the hon. Member knows, whenever a recommendation is made or a Convention is adopted, naturally we will have to consult the various interests concerned, viz., the employing Ministries, the Planning Commission, the State Governments and the employers' and employees' organisations. It is not as if for the first time this is being done. This is established procedure. As soon as the consultations are over and after the Government takes a decision, we will be placing a statement on the Table of the House.

SHRI S. W. DHABE : Article 2 of the Convention, to which I have referred, says that, apart from agricultural workers, tenants, small peasants and share-croppers, who are self-employed, can be members of a trade union. Article 5 says and I quote : "... a ratifies this Convention shall adopt and carry out a policy of active encouragement to these organisations, particularly with a view to eliminating obstacles to their establishment, their growth and the pursuit of their lawful activities, as well as such legislative and administrative discrimination against rural workers' organisations and their members as may exist." May I bring it to the notice of the hon. Minister that under the Trade Unions Act the definition of "trade union" does not include small peasants, tenants and share-croppers and, therefore, it would require immediate amendment? Secondly, there is difficulty about payment of subscription. Section 6(e) says unless they pay Rs. 3/- any organisation cannot be registered as a trade union. As soon as we form this organisation, under the Industrial Disputes Act, it does not apply to the rural area. Under section 33 (4), rule 61 of the Industrial Disputes Act the office-bearers are protected workmen. As soon as these organisations are formed, the office-bearers will require some sort of protection.

The Act requires two amendments. One is for reducing the subscription to one rupee per year and the other relates to the defini-

tion of "trade union". Will the Minister take into consideration immediately the hindrances to the formation of rural workers' organisations.

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : The Convention no doubt defines the term "rural workers" as any person engaged in agriculture, handicrafts or a related occupation in a rural area, whether as a wage-earner or who work the land themselves with the help only of their family or with the help of occasional outside labour. It excludes those who employ a substantial number of seasonal workers or have any land cultivated by share-croppers or tenants. As far as the Trade Unions Act is concerned, though the hon. Member may be right in a way, this does not preclude the organisation of these people into a trade union. The essential characteristic of this type of trade union organisation for agricultural labour is, he must essentially be an agricultural labourer and not an employer. This is the distinction that is sought to be made.

SHRI S. W. DHABE : What about self-employed tenants ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : It is my respectful submission that in respect of persons like the rural agricultural workers, even though they may be brought within the purview of the Industrial Disputes Act, the machinery contemplated in the Act may not be as helpful as it is in the case of organised workers.

Therefore, a number of State Governments felt that something in the nature of Agricultural Workers Act which has been passed by the Kerala Assembly would be helpful. In the July session of the Conference of the Labour Ministers, this aspect was discussed. It has been decided that all the State Governments should study the Act passed by the Kerala Assembly and see in what manner they should bring in legislation, if necessary. We have also suggested that we are prepared to help them with a model legislation in this regard.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : Mr. Reddy is very happy with his replies. Is he aware that in our country, for the last 5 or 6 years, the number of landless agricultural labour

and the rural poor is increasing. It means that a large number of persons who had lands are losing their lands. What are the latest figures and what is the percentage of their increase in the various States ? Also, has his attention been drawn to a survey which has been conducted by the West Bengal Government Labour Department which categorically points out that in a large number of districts of West Bengal—Bankura, Birbhum, Purulia, etc.—the wages are as low as Re. 1/- per day ? This report was presented by Dr. Gopal Das Nag. Is it a fact or not that in spite of the Ordinance for equal pay for equal work, the number of women workers is decreasing and none of the plantations, either tea or coffee or others, have yet implemented equal wages for equal work ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, according to the 1971 census figures, 80.1 per cent of the Indian population lives in villages and the rural areas. The agricultural workers in the country are approximately 47.5 million and form 8.6 per cent of the total population. According to the information available in 1970, there were 115 registered trade unions for agricultural labour and farm workers in different parts of the country under the Trade Union Act of 1926. I do not have the figures asked for by the hon. Member in respect of West Bengal. If the hon. Member is interested, we will try to get them from the West Bengal Government.

श्री जगदीश जोशी : अध्यक्ष महोदय, कोई देश बिना फौलाद और गेहूँ दोनों की पैदावार बढ़ाए आगे बढ़ नहीं सकता। फौलाद के मजदूर की मजदूरी और गेहूँ के मजदूर के मजदूरी में आज भी औसतन कौड़ी-मुहर का फर्क है। क्या माननीय श्रम मंत्री पक्षपात की नज़र से देख रहे हैं ? गेहूँ की पैदावार करने वालों और फौलाद की पैदावार करने वालों के बीच कोई समानता और संतुलन लाने की व्यवस्था आप करने जा रहे हैं। अगर करने जा रहे हैं, अगर कोई ऐसी दूरदृष्टि है तो आपकी क्या सापेक्ष योजना है ? उसे क्या आप साफ-गोई से बताने की इनायत फरमायेंगे ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, I would like to hopefully pray for the day when the agricultural workers would also get the same remuneration as the steel workers.

श्री ओईम् प्रकाश त्यागी : क्या मंत्री महोदय यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि

(क) क्या शहरी मजदूरों की भांति ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में भी मजदूरों के हितार्थ आप लेबर-एक्सचेंज की स्थापना करने का विचार रखते हैं, यदि हां तो कब तक स्थापित करेंगे; और

(ख) यदि ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में मजदूरों को अपने मालिकों के खिलाफ कोई शिकायत हो तो वर्तमान अवस्था के अनुसार इस समय आपने क्या व्यवस्था की है कि वे अपनी शिकायतें कहां पेश करें ताकि उनकी कठिनाइयां दूर हो सकें ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : I do not know what the hon. Member has got in his mind. Is it that the rural workers must be provided with employment exchanges for recruitment in the industrial centres or for recruitment in the rural areas ? As it is, the rural areas have developed their own mechanism for the purpose of employment. I do not think there is any necessity immediately to go in for employment exchanges in the rural areas.

श्री ओईम् प्रकाश त्यागी : अध्यक्ष महोदय, मंत्री महोदय ने पूरा उत्तर नहीं दिया। यदि ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों के मजदूरों को शिकायत है अपने मालिकों के खिलाफ तो कहां शिकायत करें ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, this House itself has very recently passed a legislation on bonded labour, a legislation on equal remuneration for women and men. And also there is an enactment by a State Government—the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act, I think, many of the problems that have been raised by the hon. Member can be met by such a legislation.

SHRI N. K. BHATT. Sir, as observed by the hon. Minister, 48 million workers come under the category of rural workers, and he has also stated that there are 115 trade unions looking after the needs of the rural workers. In view of the fact that in our own country, in different parts of the country, there are different ways of looking into the grievances or attending to the grievances of rural labour, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he has any proposal to convene a conference especially to consider the problems of rural workers and set a pattern for the organisation of rural workers trade unions, and if so, would he kindly enlighten the House.

MR. CHAIRMAN : If there is any proposal.

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, I only wish that the trade union leaders would take more interest in the organisation of the agricultural workers.

MR. CHAIRMAN : And send a proposal.

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : No doubt, Sir, the Indian National Rural Labour Federation had been set up under the auspices of the Indian National Trade Union Congress and they are trying to reach certain areas for the purpose of organising the agricultural labour. And if I may say so with great respect, Sir, the Labour Ministry, in its own humble manner, under the auspices of the National Labour Institute had been organising training camps for the purpose of training leadership for the rural agricultural workers. And the camps were conducted in Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar and some other camps also are under contemplation. Therefore, Sir, the suggestion that has been made by the hon. Member would be kept in mind and it would be acted upon at the appropriate time.

श्री सीताराम सिंह : मैं माननीय श्रम मंत्री जी से जानना चाहता हूँ कि 1971 के आंकड़ों के अनुसार इस देश में कितने लैंडलस लेबर थे, आज उनकी संख्या कितनी है, राज्यवार बताएं ? अगर उसमें बढ़ोतरी हुई है तो इसका क्या कारण है ? क्या इसकी छानबीन करायेंगे ; और क्या इसकी रोकथाम के लिए सरकार के पास कोई योजना है ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, I had given the figures. The agricultural workers in the country constitute 47.5 million and form 8.6 per cent of the total population, according to 1971 figures. I do not have further classification, Sir. If the hon. Member desires and if it is possible for me to get the information, we can supply it.

MR. CHAIRMAN : He will put a separate question.

श्री सीताराम सिंह : श्रीमन्, हमारे सवाल का उत्तर नहीं आया। हमने पूछा कि अगर मजदूरों की संख्या में बढ़ोतरी हो रही है तो उसके क्या कारण हैं और उसकी रोकथाम के लिए क्या कोई योजना है ?

MR. CHAIRMAN : He wants to know the reason for the increase.

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, the reasons why a person becomes an agricultural labourer belong to the realm of economics. The hon. Member knows better than I do.

SHRI MANUBHAI SHAH : Sir, the hon. Minister must be aware that the morcha Government in Gujarat has announced a 60 point programme as compared to the Centre's 20-point programme. They promised that the agricultural labourer will get a minimum wage of Rs. 6.50. Is the Minister aware that they hardly get between Re. 1 and Rs. 1.50, and if so, what is he going to do so that the Gujarat Government implements the promise given to the people ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, if the State Government does not implement it, I can only appeal to the State Government and the State Labour Minister to do so and further steps my friend can take.

SHRI MANUBHAI SHAH : Is he aware that they are paying only one rupee or one and a half rupees and that they ought to get something more ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Yes, I am aware of it.

श्री भोलाप्रसाद : अध्यक्ष महोदय, ग्रामीण मजदूरों की जो मुसीबत है और उसका जो खासतौर पर पिछड़ापन है उसका एक बहुत बड़ा कारण ग्रामीण खेत मजदूरों का अपनी यूनियनों में संगठित न होना है। संगठित न होने के कारण के साथ एक बड़ा कारण यह भी है कि जो ट्रेड यूनियन एक्ट और उसके रूलज हैं जो औद्योगिक मजदूरों के लिये यूनियनों में संगठित करने के लिये हैं वही एक्ट और रूलज ग्रामीण खेत मजदूरों के संबंध में भी हैं लेकिन दोनों के काम करने में जमीन और आसमान का फर्क है। उस बात को देखते हुए कि ग्रामीण मजदूर और औद्योगिक मजदूर के जीवन में, उसके रहन-सहन में और काम करने की स्थिति में जो फर्क है उसको देखते हुए ट्रेड यूनियन एक्ट में ऐसा सुधार किया जाए जिसमें कि ग्रामीण मजदूरों को यूनियनों में संगठित होने में जो कठिनाई है वह दूर हो सके। मसलन, एक मजदूर को ट्रेड यूनियन का मेम्बर बनने के लिये कम से कम तीन रुपये मेम्बर फीस देनी पड़ती है जब कि यह खेत मजदूर के लिये संभव नहीं है और अगर वह ऐसा नहीं करता तो उसकी यूनियन रजिस्टर नहीं हो सकती। इस तरह की बहुत सी कठिनाइयाँ हैं। मैं जानना चाहता हूँ कि क्या सरकार इन कठिनाइयों को दूर करने का प्रयास कर रही है जिसमें ग्रामीण खेत मजदूरों की यूनियने संगठित हो सके ?

SHRI K. V. RAGHUNATHA REDDY : Sir, I have already submitted that there is a distinction between the worker who is engaged in industrial activity and the worker who is working in rural areas. That is why, Sir, I suggested to the State Labour Ministers and the State Governments to examine the Act passed by the Kerala Assembly, which is called the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act, and see whether such a model can be adopted by the other States. It is more or less some kind of a comprehensive legislation which deals with agricultural workers' problems. If the hon. Members so desire, I am prepared to sit and discuss with them and see whether there is any necessity of amending the Trade

Unions Act for helping agricultural labour organisations.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Next question, Shri Sisodia

Foreign Press Tirade Against India

211 SHRI SAWAISINGH SISODIA :
SHRIMATI LAKSHMI KUMARI
CHUNDAWAT :
SHRI MAHENDRA BAHADUR
SINGH :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some foreign news agencies and broadcasting media are carrying out distorted and factually wrong reports and comments on the current political situation in India;

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard; and

(c) what action Government are taking in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI Y. B. CHAVAN) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Sections of Western publicity media have tried to weaken and denigrate the country and our Institutions through slander and misrepresentation.

(c) Appropriate and effective action to speedily counter this propaganda and to project a correct picture of India in countries abroad continues to be taken by the government and by our Missions abroad through interviews, speaking engagements, letters and articles for publication, and briefings to suitable persons.

SHRI SAWAI SINGH SISODIA : Sir, economically, socially and politically India is growing stronger day by day and is marching towards the goal of democratic socialism. There is all round progress and achievements in the economic field after the proclamation of emergency and the 20-

point economic programme. Even then the news agencies of some western countries especially the U.K. and the U.S.A. are painting false pictures of India's progress, political situation and foreign policy. Is there any plan under the consideration of the External Affairs Ministry to make more strong and powerful the External Publicity Division and for projecting the real balanced and objective image of India abroad?

SHRI Y. B. CHAVAN : As I explained, Sir, we are making efforts in different directions. The Missions in these areas are making organised efforts so as to project proper image of India by giving them factual position about the political situation in India and the economic progress in India and also by giving T.V. interviews and holding discussions and establishing contacts with people who influence the public opinion or are in a position to create public opinion. In that direction also efforts are being made. The other direction is by allowing some of the important press media representatives to come and meet our leaders in this country. Prime Minister had occasion to give many interviews to different media representatives and that is a much more authoritative presentation of India's image and of what is happening here. Certainly it has its own effect. Our missions also are publishing literature and very useful brochures have been published and I must say that those who are open to conviction by this propaganda material—I would not say propaganda but this factual information—should convince themselves about it provided they have their mind open to such conviction. That is another thing. The third thing that we found useful was the visits from abroad of many important persons, Members of Parliaments, members of the Governments. For example at the time of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, many people came here and they had the opportunity of seeing what is happening in India, what is the public opinion in India, what is the reaction of the people of India and when these people go back, they certainly have their own presentation. And we have got a very pleasant experience. Recently in the U.K. when certain comments were made against India, some of the Members of Parliament there wrote letters to the paper contradicting or

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Sawaisingh Sisodia.