

THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR LABOUR (SHRI ABID ALI) : The Conference desired that in addition to examining methods of dealing with the problem of surplus labour in tea plantations, the question of surplus itself and also the allied matter of conversion of foodgrain concessions into cash should be discussed by a tripartite committee. It was agreed that the members of the Standing Plantations Committee from Bengal and Assam, should meet at Shillong for this purpose on the 27th and 28th February 1953. A special meeting of the Committee was accordingly held at Shillong on the 27th February 1953.

DECISIONS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANTATIONS

*392. SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: Will the Minister for LABOUR be pleased to state the decisions which were taken at the meeting of the Standing Committee on Plantations held at Shillong on the 27th and 28th February 1953?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR LABOUR (SHRI ABID ALI) : There was general agreement at the meeting on the principle of conversion of food-grain concessions into cash payments. But no agreement could be reached on the exact quantum of compensation to be paid in lieu of the concessions. However, the difference between industry and labour was considerably narrowed down as a result of the discussions.

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SHRI ABID ALI: Sir. Questions Nos. 391 and 392 pertain to the same subject and may be taken up together.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: If there was agreement on principle, may I know why there could not be agreement as regards the quantum of compensation?

SHRI ABID ALI: The principle was accepted that workers were entitled to conversion compensation.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: Full?

SHRI ABID ALI: The quantum was in dispute.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: If there was agreement about full compensation, where does the question of quantum come in?

SHRI ABID ALI: I said that it was not agreed that compensation should be in full. The principle of giving compensation was agreed to. The difference was with regard to the quantum.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: What attitude did the representative of the Central Government take up?

SHRI V. V. GIRL: The workers' demand was 10 annas, whereas the employers were prepared to pay up to 71 annas. I put forward the proposition that they should accept 9 annas. The whole matter is still being pursued.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: Is it not a fact that the official team which was appointed for conducting an inquiry into the condition of the tea industry recommended full compensation?

SHRI V. V. GIRL: I stated the position actually as it is. That is being pursued, and we are trying to see if any agreement can be reached.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: Was there any discussion about the setting up of a high-powered committee to inquire into all the aspects of the tea industry?

SHRI V. V. GIRL: That is a matter which is before the Commerce and Industry Ministry.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: But I understood from a reply given on a previous occasion by my hon. friend the Deputy Minister for Labour that this aspect would also be considered in the Shillong Conference.

SHRI ABID ALI: That arose out of the proceedings of the Calcutta Conference.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: As regards relief of unemployed labour, steps were considered. What steps were decided upon?

SHRI ABID ALI: Unemployed labour is a subject which is dealt with primarily by State Governments. The ■ Governments of West Bengal and Assam were doing all that they could in the present circumstances.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: Is the Government aware of the steps that have been taken by the Governments of Assam and West Bengal in this matter?

SHRI ABID ALI: Yes, Sir. This matter was discussed several times, and I have already given the House information as to what they are doing in this matter of unemployed workers, and now, as the hon. Member may be aware, the situation has considerably improved.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: In what sense has the situation considerably improved?

SHRI ABID ALI: In the case of gardens which were being closed, the closure was stopped. Some of the -workers were taken back. The price of tea has also gone up. So, the position in the industry is a little less unfavourable.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: At the expense of labour. Is it not a fact that only 23 out of the 100 gardens which had closed down have been opened recently?

SHRI ABID ALI: We do appreciate the unhappy position of the workers and their difficulties.

SHRI V. V. GIRI: I may, however, say, on the basis of the information which we received from the Assam Government, that 36 out of 83 closed gardens have been reopened on 27th March 1953 and more are likely to be reopened.

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SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: But what is the number of labourers who have been taken back into employment?

SHRI V. V. GIRI: That information is not available with me. I will be glad to get it and supply it to the hon. Member.

PROF. G. RANGA: Is any effort being made to give partial relief at least in regard to the conversion benefit which is still under negotiations, pending the finality of these negotiations?

SHRI ABID ALI: Yes, Sir. Partial relief was given, but Government considered it very unsatisfactory and inadequate. Therefore, we are pursuing the matter further.

SHRI M. P. N. SINHA: What is the number of workers who have been thrown out of employment?

SHRI ABID ALI: At one time it was about 45,000

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: That was only in Assam.

SHRI M. P. N. SINHA: How many have been re-employed?

SHRI ABID ALI: We have not got that figure. But we are told by the Governments of West Bengal and Assam that the situation is easing.

SHRI M. P. N. SINHA: I want to know the number re-employed.

SHRI ABID ALI: I have not got the figure.

SHRI M. P. N. SINHA: What do Government propose to do with regard to those workers who have been thrown out of jobs?

SHRI ABID ALI: AH that is being discussed is about those who have been rendered unemployed.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: Is the Government aware that the West Bengal

Government has employed only a fraction of the workers who were unemployed, and that, too on a nominal wage, and that as a result the workers are facing starvation?

SHRI ABID ALI: I do not know whether the wage is nominal, but the number is not very large.

SHRI S. N. MAZUMDAR: So, the others are facing starvation? -

SHRI ABID ALI: That is what I do not admit.

RAILWAY OVER-BRIDGE AT AGRA FORT STATION

*393. SHRI R. C. GUPTA: Will the Minister for RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) for how long the railway over-bridge at Agra Fort Station, which connects the metre-gauge section with the broad-gauge section of the station has been in existence;

(b) whether it is a fact that recently the use of this bridge has been prohibited; if so, why; and

(c) whether Government are aware that the prohibition of the use of this bridge is causing serious inconvenience to the passengers?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS AND TRANSPORT (SHRI O. V. ALAGESAN) : (a) The bridge has been in existence since about the year 1876.

(b) Certain alterations were carried out recently to restrict the use of the bridge to bonafide Railway passengers alighting from broad-gauge trains and wanting to tranship into metre-gauge trains and *vice versa*.

(c) There is no inconvenience to passengers.

SHRI R. C. GUPTA: Is it not a fact that that is the only bridge which connects the metre-gauge section with the broad-gauge section of the station?

SHRI O. V. ALAGESAN: Yes.

SHRI D. NARAYAN: May I know if demands for such over-bridges came from other cities also?

SHRI O. V. ALAGESAN: This is a foot over-bridge which connects two platforms. It is not a road over-bridge.

SHRI D. NARAYAN: Is there any demand from Bhusaval for such an over-bridge?

SHRI O. V. ALAGESAN: May be.

SHRI B. K. MUKERJEE: As regards the reply to part (c) of the question, may I know what is the source of the information the Government has received? Am I to understand that the hon. Minister himself was on these platforms?

SHRI O. V. ALAGESAN: I cannot be on all platforms.

SHRI B. K. MUKERJEE: How is it said that passengers are not experiencing any inconvenience due to the restrictions imposed on the use of that over-bridge?

SHRI O. V. ALAGESAN: This foot over-bridge was being used in the past by non-passengers as well, and the alterations that have been recently made were to prevent their using this bridge. Otherwise the usual railway passengers have not been put to any inconvenience.

SHRI R. C. GUPTA: Will the hon. Minister issue instructions to the authorities at Agra to see that there is no-prohibition of passengers going from one platform to the other?

SHRI O. V. ALAGESAN: There is absolutely none.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE ON THE RAILWAYS APPROPRIATION ACCOUNTS

47. SHRI P. C. BHANJ DEO: Will the Minister for RAILWAYS be pleased to place on the Table of the Council a