

LOK SABHA

Wednesday, September 9, 1964 | Bhadra
18, 1886 (Saka)

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the
Clock

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Strike in Sindri Fertilizers
Factory

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- *61. { Dr. Ranen Sen:
Shri Dinesh Battacharya:
Shri Vishram Prasad:
Shri P. B. Chakraverti:
Shri Hem Raj:
Shri P. C. Borooah:
Shri Solanki:
Shri Yashpal Singh:
Shri Narasimha Reddy:
Shri A. N. Vidyalkar:
Shri Bagri:
Shri Balmiki:
Shri Basappa:
Shri P. K. Deo:
Shri Chhuti Mishra:
Shri Hukam Chand
Kachhavaia:
Shri Bade:
Shri Prakash Vir Shastri:
Shri Mohammad Elias:
Shri Vishwa Nath Pandey:
Shri Ram Harkh Yadav:
Shri Kajrolkar:

Will the Minister of Petroleum
and Chemicals be pleased to state:

(a) what led to the strike in July,
1964 in Sindri Fertilizers Factory;

(b) the total loss in production due
to the strike; and

(c) the number of strikes in the
same factory during 1962-63?

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The Minister of State in the Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals (Shri Alagesan): (a) to (c). A statement is placed on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) The circumstances which led to the strike in July 1964 in the Sindri Fertiliser Factory and which compelled the Sindri Management to declare a lock-out with effect from the morning of 22nd July 1964 are as follows:—

2. Three issues between the Management and the Sindri Workers' Union were referred by the State Government in September 1962 to the Bihar Industrial Tribunal for adjudication. These three issues related to appropriate revision of pay scales and removal of alleged discrimination and disparity in pay and allowances of different categories of workmen; fixation of dearness allowance on a rational basis; and finally the introduction of a retiring gratuity scheme.

3. The Bihar Industrial Tribunal gave its award on the above issues on the 28th April 1964 which became enforceable from the 3rd July 1964. In regard to the first issue referred to in paragraph 2 above, the Tribunal decided that keeping in view the revision already allowed by the Corporation in the case of technical supervisory staff, the minimum basic wages and the maximum basic wages of the employees covered by the reference be increased by 20 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. It also decided that the span of the incremental scale of the lowest category of unskilled workmen be extended to ten years and that of others to 15 years. The Tribunal stipulated that the revised scales shall come into force from 1st April 1963, and that the revision shall not apply to certain categories of non-

supervisory staff specified in the award unless in any case the revised scales were more favourable to them in which event they would be entitled to opt for the scales allowed by the award. The total number of workmen who are covered by the revision awarded by the Tribunal's award is 3611 and those who did not benefit by the award is about 3500.

On the second issue, namely, fixation of Dearness Allowance on a rational basis, the Tribunal decided that the Dearness Allowance should be regulated in future by linking it with the all-India Consumers Price Index Number.

As regards the third issue, of the introduction of a retiring gratuity scheme, the Tribunal directed that the management should introduce a scheme of gratuity on the lines stipulated in the award.

4. The Fertilizer Factory Workers' Union at Sindri has for the last 3 or 4 years been divided into factions, one of which had been agitating for some time to force recognition from the Management as the accredited spokesmen of the union. The implications of the Award had been clearly explained by the Management to both the groups and it was also decided to waive any recoveries that may become due on account of the re-fixation of pay and incremental scales retrospectively from 1-4-1963.

5. On 15-7-1964 the arrear payments due to the workmen covered by the revision of the wage structure under the Award, were disbursed. Those of the workmen who had not derived any benefit from this revision were instigated by a faction of the Union to resort to a strike through speeches delivered at a mass meeting held on that day. The first result of this propaganda was notified in a slow-down in the Transportation Department when the engine drivers, tindals and other workers slowed down placement of empty wagons for ash discharge in the gas plant in the night

shift of 15th July 1964. On 16th July, the sit-down and slow-down strike spread to other plants as well.

6. During the discussions with the Union and the INTUC authorities, it was revealed that certain categories of Sindri workmen wanted much more than what was admissible to them in terms of the Award. In the Tripartite Conference sponsored by the Bihar Labour Commissioner, the minimum expectations of the Sindri workers were put forward on 21st July, 1964, the main point being a demand for a flat increase of 20 per cent over present wages being allowed to all employees without affecting their incremental scales as well as the spans of the scales. This demand was clearly an illegal one because, it challenged the very basis of the Tribunal's decision on the revision of pay scales. It was possible for the Union or the affected workmen to prefer an appeal against the Tribunal's decision but they had not done so. The strike was declared illegal by the Bihar State Government on 18th July, 1964, and the sponsors of the strike were advised by that Government to withdraw it at once. This advice was not heeded.

7. The strikers inside the factory had started indulging in mischief and a number of incidents were reported from 18th July to 21st July, 1964. A serious act of sabotage was committed on 21st July, 1964 when the holding-down clamp bolts and the main bearing bolts in one of the Primary Air-blowers in the Gas Plant were loosened resulting in damage to the motor and complete shut-down of the Gas Plant. As a result of these acts and in order to ensure the safety of the Plant, the Management was compelled to declare a lock-out in the factory from 6 a.m. on 22nd July, 1964.

8. However, the lock-out was partially lifted from 1st August and factory operations resumed on a restricted scale. It was finally lifted on the morning of 5th August by which

time the vast majority of workers who had shown anxiety to come back to work, were permitted to do so after due verification of their antecedents, and on their giving an undertaking to work peacefully and to abide by all lawful orders of the Management.

9. Certain Departments and services such as administration, water services, hospitals, fire protection, telephones and supervisors in the factory continued to operate throughout the lock-out with about 2700 men in all.

(b) The total loss in production due to the strike and 14 days lock-out is estimated to be Rs. 68,77,000 in value while the quantitative loss in fertilizers was:—

	Tonnes
Ammonium Sulphate	16,950
Double Salt	1,700
Urea	1,172

(c) There was no strike in 1962-63. There was, however, a strike in the factory from the 23rd September to the 26th September, 1963.

Dr. Ranen Sen: From the statement I find that this trouble was brewing in the Sindri Fertilisers for more than two years, and that at a certain time in 1964, there was a tripartite conference sponsored by the Bihar Labour Commissioner. Before that, there was a tribunal. Since this plant was under the Central Government, may I know what actually the Ministry of Labour here did directly in order to see that the workers' difficulties as well as the difficulties of the management, if there were any, were solved before any such thing took place?

Shri Alagesan: The Bihar Labour Department was certainly co-operating with us in sorting out troubles as and when they arose. It was more due to unfortunate rivalries in the union itself that this was aggravated and it led to the illegal strike in the month of July last. So, there was no want of cooperation or help from the Bihar Labour Department; they were actively assisting us and trying to sort out troubles whenever they arose.

Dr. Ranen Sen: The answer given by the hon. Minister is that the main cause of the trouble was the factional fight between the unions. The question put by me has been more or less answered like that. Since there has always been trouble inside the State undertakings, whether it be in Bhopal or in the Sindri fertilisers, have the Government of India taken any direct steps or do they propose to take any direct steps to see that these troubles or disturbances or lock-outs are reduced to the minimum?

Shri Alagesan: We are all very anxious that there should be industrial peace and production should not be affected. Whenever demands are made by the workers, the matter is dealt with properly. For instance, in the case of Sindri, as late as August, 1962, fifteen demands were made on behalf of the workers, of which 12 demands were referred to conciliation. There were three other demands which were referred to the industrial tribunal of Bihar for adjudication. It was on the award of the tribunal which was given in April and which was enforced and which became enforceable from July, that this trouble arose. So, whenever there was a legitimate demand, and whenever there were representations made on behalf of the workers, we were quite alive and quick to either settle the matter or to refer it to adjudication.

Shri Dinen Bhattacharya: May I know whether it is a fact that the immediate reason for the trouble in Sindri was the Government's refusal to give a flat increase in dearness allowance by Rs. 7, as was given to the other employees of the Central Government?

Shri Alagesan: We have placed a very long and comprehensive statement on the Table of the House, and all these details are mentioned in that statement.

Shri Dinen Bhattacharya: Nothing is mentioned in the statement regarding the flat increase of dearness allow-

ance to the Sindri workers on the lines on which it was given to the employees of the HEL and other corporations.

Shri Alagesan: When the whole matter was referred to the tribunal and the tribunal had given an award, it was not for us to change the award in an one-sided manner, nor was anybody entitled to change it; and could be changed only by going on appeal.

श्री विश्वाम प्रसाद : मैं यह जानना चाहता हूँ कि क्या वह स्ट्राइक किसी पोलिटिकल पार्टी की वजह से हुआ था, यदि हाँ, तो वह कौन सी पोलिटिकल पार्टी थी ।

The Minister of Petroleum and Chemicals (Shri Humayun Kabir): There is no question of any political party as such; there were differences within the union on labour questions.

Shri P. R. Chakraverti: Is it not a fact that on the 21st night when discussions were continued, the Labour Commissioner of Bihar suggested that the matter might be referred to the Labour Minister, Govt. of India and the Deputy Labour Minister, and it was accepted by the Labour Union, and if so, how did it happen that the lock-out was declared on the next morning?

Shri Alagesan: That is mentioned in the statement. Many hon. Members might not be having the copies of the statement in their hands.

Mr. Speaker: If it is mentioned in the statement, the hon. Minister need not answer it.

श्री यशपाल सिंह : क्या मैं यह जान सकता हूँ कि इस हड़ताल की वजह से प्रोडक्शन में कितनी कमी आई है और इस की वजह से क्या हमें विदेशों से फर्टीलाइजर मंगाना पड़ रहा है ।

Shri Humayun Kabir: It is all mentioned in the statement.

श्री यशपाल सिंह : यह साफ नहीं हुआ कि कितना फर्टीलाइजर इस की वजह से विदेशों से मंगाना पड़ रहा है ।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : शायद इस की वजह मंगाना पड़ा हो या कोई और फैक्टर्स हो सकते हैं ।

श्री यशपाल सिंह : यह साफ नहीं हुआ कि कितना मंगाना पड़ रहा है ।

Shri S. M. Banerjee: In view of the fact that the main demand of the Sindri workers was for the grant of the same benefits, same wages and other allowances like other Central Government employees, why is it that the Central Government pay scales and dearness allowance scales revised from time to time, have not been implemented in the case of the Sindri workers?

Shri Alagesan: The demands that were referred to adjudication were as follows: (1) increase in dearness linking it to the cost of living index ..

Shri S. M. Banerjee: He is referring to one portion of it . . .

Mr. Speaker: I shall try to explain what he said and then if he is not satisfied, he may ask the question. He takes his stand on the plea that because it was referred to a tribunal and award was given by the tribunal, we were bound by the award. Now no question arises whether other facilities enjoyed by other employees should be applied in this case. They were not relevant in this case because this particular case had been referred to the tribunal and the award has been given.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: I have followed the answer. My point is that the Central Government employees' dearness allowance was raised from time to time; whether it is HEL or HEC or other undertakings, a uniform rate applied. My question is: is there any bar on Central Government employees in an undertaking enjoy-

ing these same benefits despite the fact that a dispute in that undertaking has been referred to arbitration?

Shri Alagesan: All these questions would have been relevant if the matter had not been referred to the tribunal. You have pointed that out. Whatever issues were taken to the tribunal, they were decided upon. For instance, I may say that the tribunal granted a retiring gratuity scheme for all the workers which is not available elsewhere (*Interruptions*.) As a result of the award, the workers have benefited to the tune of Rs. 13 lakhs.

Mr. Speaker: That is a different thing altogether.

श्री हुक्म चन्व कछुवाय : मैं यह जानना चाहता हूँ कि इन मजदूर संगठनों की कितनी मांगें थीं। उन में से कितनी मंजूर हुई और कितनी मंजूर नहीं हुई।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : यह सब स्टेटमेंट में आया हुआ है।

श्री प्रकाशबीर शास्त्री : जैसा इस विवरण में दिया हुआ है सिदरी कारखाने में हड़ताल होने से कई लाख रुपयों का नुकसान कारखाने को और सरकार को हुआ। इसी प्रकार की हड़तालें और बड़े कारखानों में भी हो रही हैं। मैं जानना चाहता हूँ कि आज कल के संकट काल में इस प्रकार की हड़तालों को रोकने के लिये क्या केन्द्रीय सरकार कोई व्यवस्था करने जा रही है।

Mr. Speaker: That is too general a question.

Shri Mohammad Elias: Is there any works committee or consultative committee functioning there through which disputes can be discussed and settled?

Shri Alagesan: There was a Union with which the management was all along dealing . . .

Shri Mohammad Elias: I am not asking about the Union. Under the

Industrial Disputes Act or the Factories Act, every factory must have a works committee consisting of elected representatives of workers with the management also represented. Is such a committee functioning there? If not, why not?

Shri Alagesan: The difficulty is that this Union has been functioning without regular elections of office-bearers having been held for years. We were following the advice of the State labour department . . .

Mr. Speaker: The question is very simple. Is a works committee functioning there or not?

Shri Alagesan: I am not able to say off-hand.

Shri A. P. Sharma: Is it not a fact that against the advice of the Labour department of the Government of Bihar, the chairman and the management precipitated the strike and lock-out? If so, is Government prepared to order an inquiry into the whole affair of Sindri?

Shri Alagesan: Yes, Sir. Against all advice of the Bihar Labour Department, this strike was precipitated. It was very unfortunate. I do not think there is any need to order a special enquiry.

Shri Venkatasubbalah: According to the statement, a serious act of sabotage has been committed resulting in great damage and also shut down of the gas plant. If that is so, may I know whether any responsibility has been fixed, and what action Government has taken?

Shri Alagesan: A number of people were suspended, and when the lock out was lifted—and it was lifted as a result of a widespread desire on the part of workers that they should return to work—after some verification, many of them have been taken back. There are about 20 or so workers against whom enquiries are pending.