

17-31 hrs.

(English)

AGRICULTURAL WORKERS (MINIMUM WAGES AND WELFARE) BILL

MR. CHAIRMAN : Now, we will take up further consideration of the following motion moved by Shri Chandubhai Deshmukh on the 12th March, 1993 namely:

"That the Bill to provide for the payment of Minimum wages and for welfare of agricultural workers, be taken into consideration."

Last time Shri K. M. Mathew was on his feet. Now, he is not here. Shri K.D. Sultanpuri.

[Translation]

SHRI KRISHAN DUTT SULTANPUTI (Shimla): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I rise to support the Agricultural Workers (Minimum Wages and Welfare) Bill, brought forward by Shri Chandubhai Deshmukh.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, so far as the question of agricultural Workers of the country is concerned, you will find that such workers engaged in different States are not getting any benefit because neither they get their wages in time nor anybody shows sympathy towards them. There are landlords in different parts of the country who force them to lead a life of slavery. There are big landlords in U.P., Bihar, Punjab and even in Haryana, who virtually treat agricultural labourers as slaves. We should give it a thought that why these agricultural laborer have not been given the ownership of the land which they have been tilling for several decades? We should amend this law, by taking these States in to confidence.

I am happy that in many States of the country like Himachal Pradesh land reform laws have been enacted. Agricultural labourers have been given the ownership of the land but so

far as those States, are concerned where agricultural labourers have not been given the land, it is very necessary to consider this aspect. In many such States, the big landlords have managed to get the land registered in the names of their children. This way, they have managed to own a vast area of land which is a sheer injustice with the agricultural labourers. Today, the Agricultural labourers contribute a lot in the agriculture, hence they need our attention. I would speak the hon. Minister of Agriculture, who himself is a farmer, that he should certainly take some steps to improve the condition of as they have been suffering for centuries together. Most of such agricultural labourers are part time workers in factories and public undertakings. Other workers become permanent, but they are not made permanent. I feel that in order to give them maximum benefit, their wages in agricultural works should be fixed. They even differentiate between male and female workers. Women workers get less wages than that of men. Therefore, the government should give owners' right to the workers engaged in agriculture. During the tenure of Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi farmers were given land on lease basis and they were made owner of the land. But in many States possession of land was not given to the farmers. as the successive Governments did not implement orders in this regard. As a result of that the workers and their families are still compelled to live in a hand to mouth condition, I want the Government to take effective steps in this regard so that they can become owner of their land and give them facilities to bring them in the main stream in order to make them work for the betterment of the country. As far as I know, a number of steps have been taken by the Government of India for the welfare of the workers but so far as the State Governments are concerned they have not taken adequate steps in this regard. In my constituency people especially from Nepal and Bihar come to work in the potato fields. They come there because they do not get employment at their native places. Unless we do not provide more facilities to the workers the nation cannot progress. I would like to state that—

[Sh. Krishan Dutta Sultanpuri]

"Resham Ke Gaecheon Far In BJP Ke Logon Ke Bete Sote Hain, Jinki Badaul at Sab Kuch Hai, Woh Raat KO Bai the Rote Hain, Ye Khajne Bharte Hain Kanoon Hifazat Karta Hai Jo khet Mazoor Hai Woh Ro—Ro Taqdeer Ke Syahi Hai.

DR. MAHHADEEPAK SINGH SHAKYA (Etah) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I rise to support the Agricultural Workers' Bill brought forward by Shri Deshmukh, because this bill seeks to provide the rights and facilities to the agricultural workers. Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to have your attention that broadly we can divide the population of our country in four categories. First category is of Traders and Industrialists, the second one consists of workers, the third is of government employees and the fourth category is of frames. So far as the Government is concerned, it has provided many facilities to the farmers, the taxes on the traders have been reduced, for Government employees facilities like accommodation, Dearness Allowance have been given and for labourers a separate Ministry has been set up but as far as the question of agricultural Labourers is concerned the Government has done nothing. I would like to tell you one thing that seeds, fertilisers and water are required for a good yield but these are all useless if there are no labourers to work in the fields. We cannot get a good yield without their participation and as you know for food the other three categories solely depend on them. As you know that 80 per cent of our population is engaged in agriculture and agriculture depends on these labourers. If these labourers do not prosper, the country cannot make a progress. Therefore, an agriculture labourers depends the programs and develop present of the country. If you want progress of the country then you should know it that the process of development starts from the grass root level. So in order to construct the building of development, you will have to strengthen its base. I would like to tell you the utility of the Bill. We have three seasons in our country, namely summer winter and rainy sea-

son. Without bothering for the scorching heat waves, the shivering cold and soaked in the rain water agriculture labourer worked hard in the field. But the Government never bothers about him. This worker, belonging to the lower class is the backbone of our nation. We should think about his contribution in the development of the nation, but you never considered its. He has always been neglected. This is the reason for which we have not made progress upto the desired extent during this period of 45-46 years.

Therefore, I want to submit that the Bill brought by our hon. Colleague Shri Deshmukh is really praiseworthy. He has included all those provisions in this Bill which should have been done by the Government but have not been initiated till date. Now, he has presented this Bill and has drawn the attention towards workers' problem, which should be accented by the Government. Agricultural Labourers include both women and men workers. Today, from an ordinary peon to an I.A.S. Officer everyday has been given his respective grade. A peon gets Rs. 1500 per month as his salary and this amount successively increases in the case of higher officers. But the Government never bothered to fix wages in case of workers who tirelessly work during all seasons viz. Summer, winter and rainy season.

What the Governments done for them? The wages given to agricultural labourers differ from one place to another ranging from Rs. 5 to Rs. 15 or Rs. 20 at the most but with such a meager amount he cannot even purchase poison to end his own life. The Government has done nothing for them with a view to keep up the dignity of a human life. The Government should adopt the same yardstick fixing their wages as is being done in case of the other workers if any worker wants to end his life by consuming poison he cannot even purchase it by Rs. 20.

Who is responsible for that? Our Government is responsible for that. The Government never thinks about them. After a long interval an hon. Member has brought such a Bill in the House, so we welcome it. If the Government

goes through the provisions of this Bill, it will find that there are several important and useful provisions in the Bill. The Government should accept it immediately.

The Government has formulated a scheme under which the other workers and educated unemployed have get their names registered but has the Government ever thought of registering the names of agricultural labourers? In many organisations, you have started welfare fund schemes from deceased worker. The Government gives several other facilities to those workers, but has the Government ever thought that such facilities are also necessary for the agricultural labourers?

The Government has constituted the Commission for Women, SC/ST Commission, Backward classes Commission and many such other Commission but the Government has never realised the need for constituting such a Commission for agricultural labourers. Had a commission been constituted for them, it would have protected their interests to some extent. After studying their problems, the commission and some facilities would have been given to them also but the Government has not paid any attention towards them.

When the Government failed to pay attention toward it, this Bill in the form of a private member Bill has been brought in the House. Just now one of our Congress colleagues was speaking on the Bill but I would like to say that it is not a question of any party but it is a question of entire nation. Our national development is possible only when we keep aside the party politics in Lok Sabha and accept the truth. The problems of the labourers are complicated as shown in this Bill, So I think we should unanimously pass this Bill so that welfare of the labourers could be safeguarded.

The Agricultural labourers are unable to manage three times meal a day. They do not have poor clothes to wear. no medical facility is available to their families. When such ameni-

ties are necessary for all other citizens why the same cannot be provided to the agricultural labourers? After the death of any labourer, his family members do not get any Insurance amount and no one is prepared to give work to his dependent on compassionate ground.

What the Government has done for them till now? Has the Government ever their problems? When the Government has not studied their problems, they should accept this Bill because all necessary provisions are therein the Bill. I do not want to go into the details of those provisions but I have explained them in brief. Now it is the Government which has to make such arrangement for them. When such arrangement has not so far been made for them, the Government should support this Bill and formulate the policy for the development of our country and also for protecting the interests of our agricultural labourers who are backbone of our development. In this regard I would like to say one thing very categorically that the development of this country is not possible so long as we do not protect the rights and interests of our agricultural labourers.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I support the Bill and request other members of all other political parties to pass it unanimously because it is, in fact, meant for the welfare of the agricultural labourers.

[English]

SHRI SIVAGI PATNAIK (Bhubaneswar): I rise to support the Bill. It is an irony that there is no central legislation for this biggest section of the workers. this section engages the largest number of workers but still there is no legislation for it, although there are legislations for various other sections of workers.

It is not for nothing that this was so. I would say that during these years there was no political will for it. Otherwise, the conditions in which they

[Sh. Savage Patnaik]

live are miserable. They live in sub-human condition. Starvation is a part of their illife. The day an agriculture labourer does not get any work, the condition of his family cannot be imagined. In spite of it, nothing has been done, yet. In fact, they get work for only three to four months in an year, because most of our land is rain-fed. It is non-irrigated and for the rest of the months of the year they do not know how to live.

In Orissa they go as m grant labour to various other states, only to return with nothing or to return with memories of torture. Again they go next year as migrant labour and against only to suffer.

Legislation on minimum wage is there in various states but actually they do not get it. For instances, a minimum wage of RSV. 25 is fixed in Orissa. But nobody gets it. No agricultural labourer is getting that wage.

That is because they do not have the power to assert for it. It is not because that they do not have any land. They take loans during the operational season. That is their condition. So, they almost work like bonded labour.

The answer to this problem, as something has been suggested, lies in land reforms. Distribution of land of these landfalls labourers is important. That would provide some bargaining power or authority, so that they can assert their rights; because when he has nothing to fall back, he cannot assert. Wherever any such thing has been done as in West Bengal, when land reform sar implemented the operations workers get some right, or some land to fall back. Along with other things, or some land to fall back. Along with other things, like the Panchayat work he gets some land to fall back. but without that he has no power to assert. Unless some land is given, he cannot assert. So, what is required is the political will; along with this, land records also should be properly maintained. That will also help him to get some rights.

Along with that, land reform and other things

are required. There should also be some schemes for health care; free supply of medicines; a sort of extension of ESI benefits; housing and pension. Literacy drive is also required.

There were many speeches in this House on this subject. While this Bill is being discussed, every Member has supported it and mentioned shri that the prevailing condition of the agricultural labour and said that something concrete has to be done in this regard. Of course, some suggestions have been made here.

I hope that the Government will bring a comprehensive legislation and it will cover all these along with the provision for health care; gratuity and compensation. At the time of work, sometimes they lost their lives john. Their working condition is such that they even lose their lives and they fall ill. For these things, some compensation should be granted to them.

For the days when they are unemployed, some scheme to give some relief should be there. For that, a sort of grant can be given so that they can go to the nearest authorities and get either some relief or some work. This must be guaranteed.

I hope that a comprehensive legislation on these basis will be brought by the Government.

I congratulate the move of this Bill because it has given us an opportunity to discuss. Every Member who spoke on this Bill has supported this Bill.

There must be a comprehensive legislation. A total legislation must be there. I hope that the Government will bring in such a legislation.

With these words, I conclude.

SHRI GOPI NATH GAJAPATHI (Berhampur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Bill brought by my esteemed colleague, Shri Chandubhai Deshmukh is a legislation national importance

The Bill *inter alia* suggests that a you minimum of Rs. 700 per month or Rs. 30 per day should be paid to an agricultural worker. even though this amount is less in the present times, it is said that these workers are also not getting this amount even Every year, a large number of agricultural workers move from one place to another in search of basic livelihood. In the state of Orissa, to which I belong, there is large scale migration of labour. Since they are in the unorganised sector, the landlords in particular practically exploit them. If one of them dies, his family has no other option but to come to the streets. Therefore, the insurance cover suggested in the Bill *vide* Section 19 is a welcome measure. Further, like other medical benefits available to these hapless workers as well. However, as the subject matter happens to be the main concern of the state Governments, I would suggest that the Central Government should take into confidence of all the State Governments and have a dialogue on the subject at the national level.

The Central Government should prevail upon the different states to bring out a suitable legislation on the subject.

The spirit of the Bill should be welcomed and I would request the central Government to ensure that agricultural workers, who can be said to be the backbone of our economy, are not subjected to exploitation by the landlords, etc.

With these views, I support the spirit of the Bill and request the central Government to give serious thought to the problems of the agricultural workers for improving their lot in the future, side by side helping to generate more employment and indirectly improve the economy of the country.

[Translation]

SHRI MANJAY LAL (Samastipur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, first of all I would like to thank shri

Deshmukhji who has brought such a good Bill in the House. Ours is an agricultural country and agricultural labourers are backbone of our economy. The workers working in factories are organised because they live together. So they can force the authorities to fulfill their demands but our agricultural labourers are in a 5 lakhs and 70 thousands of villages of our country. They are unable to fulfill their demands. The number of agricultural labourers is increasing. Due to the division of land small farmers are also becoming agricultural labourers. But no attention is being paid towards their problems.

We have been raising slogans since independence that bread, cloth and house would be provided to every one but we could not provide these even after 45 years of our independence.

In the Bill, which has been introduced by Shri Deshmukh, has provisions for the pension, registration and education of the children of agricultural labourers. If this Bill is passed, their all demands would be fulfilled. Not to talk of the balanced diet, they are not even able to get two times meal a day they would and India is their mother. Therefore, I support this Bill and I would like to request other hon. Members to rise above the party politics, and support it and pass it unanimously on the humanitarian ground.

SHRI VIRENDRA SINGH (Mirzapur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, India is an agricultural country and the problems of our farmers and agricultural labourers are definitely very serious. Just before me one of our friends from Bihar was speaking.... (Interruptions)

[English]

SHRI SYED MASUDAL HOSSAIN (Murshidabad): The time may be extended.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The time is not extended.

(Interruptions)

18.00 hrs.

[English]

SHRI VIRENDRA SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, there is difference between the problems of farmers and the problems of agricultural labourers and we have been expressing concern on their problems in the House. We have been discussing about the matter of giving industry status to agriculture and by doing so we will be able to solve the problems of the farmers and when they will get remunerative prices of their produce, the problems of agricultural workers will also be solved. If you will think about the problems of agricultural workers only and keep aside the other problems of agriculture sector....

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Virendra Singh, you can continue next time.

Now, the House stands adjourned to meet again on Monday, the 10th May, 1993, at 11.00 a.m.

18.01 hrs.

*The Lok Sabha then Adjourned till  
Eleven of the Clock*

*on Monday, May 10, 1993/Vaisakha 20  
1915 (Saka).*