

(*Sh: i S. C. Mukherjee then withdrew*)

MR. SPEAKER : Now the matter will be closed.

SHRI TENNETI VISWANATHAM (Visakhapatnam) : May I know whether the fact that he was reprimanded will be entered in the Service Register of the officer or not ?

SHRI RANDHIR SINGH (Rohtak) : That should be registered.

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND HEAVY ENGINEERING (SHRI B. R. BHAGAT) : We will do it, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER : Next item—Call Attention.

12.07 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER  
 OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

REPORTED STRIKE BY JUTE WORKERS  
 IN WEST BENGAL

SHRI H. N. MUKERJEE (Calcutta North East) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Labour, Employment and Rehabilitation to the following matter of urgent public importance and I request that he may make a statement thereon :

"The reported strike by Jute workers in West Bengal."

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR, EMPLOYMENT AND REHABILITATION (SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD) : I regret to say that the workers in the jute mills in West Bengal have gone on a strike from the 7th December, 1970. As this House is aware, the Industry employs more than 2,25,000 workers and it is one of our major foreign exchange earners. The strike has been sponsored jointly by trade unions affiliated to various Central Organisations. The strike notice contains a number of demands but the principal issues relate to the payment of bonus, introduction of a gratuity scheme

and payment of maintenance allowance to Badli workers when they are not given work.

Efforts were made by the officers of the State Labour Department and the Principal Adviser to the Governor of West Bengal to bring the parties together and to evolve a mutually acceptable solution so that there was no work stoppage. Unfortunately, these efforts did not succeed. In response to the suggestions made by the parties, I requested them to come to Delhi so that some agreement might be evolved and the strike averted. Discussion for this purpose were held in Delhi on the 4th and 5th December, 1970. The representatives of Indian Jute Mills Association and workers unions participated in these discussions. There was a free and frank exchange of views. Differences were narrowed down to some extent. I am, however, sorry to say that a final agreement acceptable to both parties could not be reached.

The Minister of Foreign Trade also held discussions with both the parties yesterday but no agreement could be reached.

I sincerely believe the parties are fully conscious of the hardships and hazards that a strike in this major industry involves. I hope that they would strive to come to an agreement even at this stage.

SHRI H. N. MUKERJEE : Sir, I find it rather strange—perhaps, I should say, slightly amusing—that a spokesman of a Government professing concern for the deprived section which is the overwhelming proportion of our population, appears to blame the workers rather than the employers for a strike which is due entirely to the rapacious profit lust and obstinacy of big money operating in the Indian Jute Mills Association. The Minister must know the magnificence of the unusually united strike of nearly 2, 50,000 people not only from West Bengal, but from Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, U. P. and so many other States. They were all united as far as the strike was concerned. In August, 1969, they compelled the employers to agree to a settlement. But the employers' calculated recalcitrance has prevented proper implementation of settlement and that is why as late as 27th October, 1970, the Government had

[Shri H. N. Mukerjee]

to appoint a wage revision committee. Taking advantage of the United Front Government not playing fair, and with the un concealed connivance—and I charge the Government in regard to it—of President's rule officials who are hand in glove with the IJMA tycoons, the employers have increased the workload, reduced the earnings of piece-rate workers and refused to accede to the demand for 8 per cent bonus.

The hon. Minister has also said something about the badli workers. He should know that for years together, for decades together, these badli workers get nothing at all, nothing in the shape of a very modest maintenance allowance when they are just thrown off to the scrap-heap.

In these circumstances, when the country is losing Rs. 1 crore a day, two-thirds of it in export earnings for India, I would like to know in view of the fact that the jute industry is enjoying, specially in 1969-70, abnormally profitable conditions, what it is that prevents Government which has just sanctioned a sum of Rs. 48 crores as loans to the industry for modernisation—it is not a joke that Rs. 48 crores is being handed on a silver platter to these jute barons—from insisting that the millowners must meet the very reasonable demands of the workers.

May I also know what special steps are being taken particularly in regard to the badli workers who come from Bihar or UP or Andhra Pradesh and are thrown off to the scrap-heap from time to time?

I would also like to know thirdly, now that both the Labour Minister and the Foreign Trade Minister have failed to bring about a settlement, what the next step which is being contemplated is. I am rather astonished that the Prime Minister was here till a few minutes ago, and she popped away for God knows what reason. Here is an industry which affects the whole country, and it is really a national-scale problem, and she goes away. Her Minister of Labour and her Minister of Foreign Trade have failed. Now that they have failed, what next steps are in contempla-

tion? Is the Government in a position to say that they will not listen to the demands of the employers who insist as a pre-condition to giving the workers any kind of concession, further relief in the shape of excise and export duties being changed in their favour?

I would also like to know whether in view of this kind of happening taking place from time to time, and jeopardising our economic interest, Government would seriously consider the question of nationalisation. I would not like it, if the hon. Minister says that it is beyond his ken or that is beyond his jurisdiction. They are part of the same Government, and the Prime Minister should have been here. It was very unseemly on her part to have left the House just when a question relative to the economic condition not only of West Bengal but of the entire country was coming up, a question which goes to the very root of our national economic interests. I would like the hon. Minister to answer. He may say that he does not share Cabinet responsibility. But there are some Cabinet Ministers lolling about in this place at the present moment, and I would like to have an answer to my questions.

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD : I would reply first to the first question, and say that we have never blamed the workers for the failure of the talks or otherwise. What we have done is that when the parties failed among themselves at the State level, then they were called at Delhi under the law of the land, and myself and my colleague tried to bring about an agreement between them but we could not succeed...

SHRI H. N. MUKERJEE : He regrets that the workers are on strike, but he has not a word of regret about the recalcitrant attitude of the employers for months and months together.

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD : When I say we regret, that regret is for the strike in which both the employers and the employees are involved. It is very simple. I did not say regret for the workers. The regret is for the strike, because it harms the jute industry in this country, which is a foreign-exchange earner.

That is the meaning of the term. My hon. friend Shri H. N. Mukerjee may say that my English is wrong. But that was what I meant. So, I would say that we never blamed the workers. It was in August, on the 8th or 9th of August that the strike was started ; on 4th August, 1969, that agreement was reached.

It is true we had hoped that it would be possible for the parties as per the agreement to come to some agreement about the composition, terms of reference and time-limit agreed upon by both parties in regard to a wage machinery to which it could be referred. But it could not be done. It is rather a long delay of 16 months ; it should have been done earlier.

As regards what the hon. member said about the employers taking advantage of the ULF Government going out of the picture, I would humbly remind him that the ULF Government was in office for some months after this agreement was signed. So it could have been possible for them to see that this was referred to a wage machinery. But it could not be done by them also.

About *badli* workers, it was decided in the last agreement of Aug. 1969 that a reference would be made to the wage machinery where the complement of permanent staff would also be considered. I find a reference has been made. But in the meeting, the workers' representatives raised the point that after that there might be persons who would still continue to be *badli*. Therefore, I tried to find out if this could also be referred to the wage machinery with the priority that a report on this should come first. Therefore, on *badli* we have taken this stand.

**SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU (Diamond Harbour)** : In the meantime, they continue to starve :

**SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD** : On the question of nationalisation, it is a very wider issue not to be considered in the context of the present situation. What we are trying is that the two parties should be brought together on some agreement, and this should be possible. After all, nationalisation is not the panacea for everything. I

cannot say authoritatively what actually should be the position concerning nationalisation of this industry, after considering the balance sheets, the economy and all that. What I say is that we in Government are trying to see that the parties should be thought to some agreement. That shall continue to be our endeavour in future too.

**SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU** : The jute growers and the jute industry workers have earned tonnes of wealth for the capitalists. Shri C. L. Bajoria, a jute magnate, very recently confessed that it had never been so good after the Korean war—it was really a boom. It is a disgrace for the country and for all of us if we see how a jute mill worker lives. He lives in a very sub-human condition. At the moment his total earning, taking into account the rise in the cost of living during the last 8 months under socialist rule of 40 per cent, is no more than Rs. 170 per month. Since the historic strike of Aug. 1969, excepting certain petty interim relief, nothing has been done to settle the long-standing issues. Even during the 16 months, the promised wage committee had not been set up. Certainly Government owe an explanation in this regard.

The 4 per cent bonus is obligatory. Last year, Rs. 30 was given as a plus worked out at that time at 2 per cent. This year if you calculate at 2 per cent, it comes to Rs. 50. Even that the owners are not willing to give. As we all agree, there is a terrific rise in the cost of living.

The workers have an 8-point demand : gratuity, minimum annual bonus of 8 per cent, reopening of closed mills, removal of grievances in the operation of the ESI scheme, adequate maintenance allowance for *badli* workers for the period of 'no work', house allowance, increase of leave and holidays, payment of wages for the strike period of August 1969 and ST leave.

Acceptance in principle of gratuity by Government and employers means no concession at all. It should be related to the total earning. About *badli* workers, they are getting rid of them every year at the rate of 15,000 heads. We wanted for them a survival allowance of Re. 1 per head per

[Shri Bhagwat Jha Azad]

day. I know that the average Indian gets no more than 36 paise per day to live in this country after 23 years of Congress rule. The employers are not willing to give even the retention allowance of one rupee per badli worker. I will tell you how the employers have made the whole situation complicated. The Government are playing into the hands of the employers, particularly this IJMA president, Shri R. P. Goenka, who is very close to the ruling party, we know his relations, and also Shri Wahid, one of the executives of the IJMA. On Saturday the Labour Minister had held a conference. What happened was that on Monday those trade union leaders had to be summoned for a conference again? Is it because the employers had pressurised the Government and told them that their interests had not been looked after and that the labour leaders should be called again? They could have easily continued the meeting with the Labour Minister and the Minister of Foreign Trade both being present. It shows how utterly callous and inefficient the Government is, and that they are completely in the hands of the employers. What do they propose to do immediately to meet the very legitimate minimum demands of the workers that have been enumerated just now? If the employers do not agree, what measures do they want to take to enforce it on them?

SHRI S.M. BANERJEE (Kanpur) : Take over the jute mills.

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD : To say that the agreement of 8th and 9th August, 1969, is just tinkering with the problem is not correct. The agreement was no mean achievement for the workers because they got a bonus plus Rs. 30 *ad hoc* increase plus another Rs. 30 as also the understanding that the matters left out would be referred to a wage negotiating committee.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU : You will judge for yourself. The workers are starving for 16 months.

MR. SPEAKER : If you exercise some patience, I will be so grateful.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU : For 16 months we have been patient.

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD : In the the agreement of 8th and 9th August, 1969 it was said that the wage structure of the industry would be referred to a suitable machinery to be set up with such composition, terms of reference and time limit as may be agreed upon by both the parties. So, we do not come into the picture in this. When the two parties agreed about the composition, terms of reference etc., it was referred, and unfortunately for 16 months they could not come to an agreement. Therefore, this time was taken.

It is true that there are eight demands, but in our talks previously and yesterday, they concentrated, on three main demands, viz., gratuity which was accepted in principle, bonus for last year at 4 per cent plus an *ad hoc* amount of Rs/- 50 and maintenance allowance for *badli* workers. I would strongly deny his allegation, rather I need not deny it, because that is how the hon. Member speaks in the House, that the Government plays into the hands of the employers. I may submit that I do not know the employers individually. Government deal with them as an industry and as employers, and we discuss the demands around the table on merits. Therefore, please do not say that the Government plays into the hands of the employers.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU : You are playing.

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD : This is a very strange question why the labour leaders were called again yesterday after discussing with them on Saturday. If we called them for discussions, what is wrong about it. Prof. Mukerjee asked what we were doing. I am surprised that when we do not act, they say we are not acting, and when we act they ask why we are acting.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU : Why did you not continue on Saturday?

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD : I think it was a good thing they were called again. If necessary, we shall call them again and

again. Under the law of the land we are working ; we are trying to bring the parties together and try to find a solution.

**SHRIMATI ILA PALCHOUDHURI** (Krishnagar) : There are two or three clarifications, that I want to ask for. About the grant of gratuity, we are in full sympathy with the workers because the prices of things have gone up and they are within their rights to ask something more to make both ends meet. I find that the Minister has stated that there had been agreement on principle of gratuity but the demand is actually that it should be paid from August 1, 1969 and the employers are not perhaps willing to do exactly like that. What progress has been made in narrowing down that difference ?

Secondly, is it not a fact that productivity has gone down ? If so to what extent has it gone down ? This is a commodity which earns us foreign exchange and we lose one crore everyday. Even before the strike because of low productivity we had lost much of foreign exchange.

Thirdly, I want to ask the hon. Minister if the employers would be able to give bonus and gratuity and also give maintenance demands for the badli worker with which we have full sympathy. What is going to be done about reducing electricity charges, making provision for spare parts, etc. These are some of the things which the Government will have to go into so that the employers can also meet some demands. Fourthly, the West Bengal Government have thought of running some of these mills at a Government level. Then the first thing that they will have to do is to do some thinking on how they could be run without a loss. The hon. Minister says that nationalisation is not the panacea for everything. In that case, have they gone into the question as to how many of these mills need renovation ? Past experience has shown that most of the units, if they are to be taken over must have some indispensable technical improvement. What is the Government's thinking on this matter ? Is there going to be facilitation of improvements which would enable employers to produce more and also pay the workers what they are demanding, if they are fair

and if the industry can afford to pay ? Otherwise it will result in losing foreign exchange and closing down the industry. Lack of improvement is a vital point in West Bengal's industry and it cannot be allowed to be left unattended.

**SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD** : Gratuity has been agreed to in principle. There were other demands about the date of implementation. But the vital point stressed by the workers is that it should be on total wage which could not be agreed to. About low production and loss of foreign exchange, at the present moment we are not concerned with that. I am told that there has been a good jute crop. Therefore, why should we blame the employers or employees that production has gone down ? In respect of *badli*, I have detailed the efforts that were made. Reference has been made to the negotiating committee and all the rest of it. Perhaps that point also may be referred to this committee. As a result of the strike no mills have closed down and it is under contemplation of the West Bengal Government for taking over anything.

**SHRI S. K. TAPURIAH** (Pali) : As I was silently and quietly listening to hon. Members Shri Mukerjee and Shri Jyotirmoy Basu, I was wondering whether it was really the question of welfare of the workers or other political reasons that led to this strike ... (Interruptions). With reference to Shri Mukerjee's suggestion, I confess that I shall myself be a convert and become a pro-nationalisationwala if it leads to better relations between employees and employers and also to increased production. But when I turn round everywhere and see the relations between workers and employers in the nationalised, public sector undertakings, what do I see ? For example, take the HMT, and the Indian Airlines which was discussed the day before yesterday and also Durgapur steel plant and IDPL and a whole host of others ; I become more and more convinced that their minds are full of cheap political gibes and their eyes are not on the welfare of the workers but elsewhere. probably on the elections to come.

**SHRI S. M. BANERJEE** : What a great messiah ?

**SHRI S. K. TAPURIAH :** May I know from the Minister, especially in the light of what Shri Mukerjee has said that the Industry, the country is losing crores of rupees every day in terms of foreign exchange while the strike goes on, whether it is not a fact that the demands placed by the unions have been changing from time to time? Can he tell us, or can he lay on the Table of the House the original demands placed by the unions even before the strike notice was given and the latest demands that have been placed? It is not a fact that the original demands have been conceded by the millowners from time to time and that when every time a concession was given, new demands came up?

Secondly, may I know from the Minister, since the Bonus Act already exists, and since the Government itself had brought in the measure that a minimum is to be paid during losses and a maximum is to be paid when there is increase in profits, when it has been prescribed, how was it that a dispute on that can also arise, and was it not proper to have brought another amendment to the Bonus Act here than to create that sort of dispute?

Then, may I also know whether it is not a fact that the solution envisaged by the hon. Minister, Shri Bhagwat Jha Azad, was agreeable to the millowners, the IJMA—that solution of the formula—and that it was not acceptable to the trade union who were bent on strike in the jute mills as a prelude to further strikes in the coming months in the engineering and other industries in West Bengal?

Finally since the two parties in question, the workers and the employers, have not been able to come to a settlement, is it not high time that the Government, as a third party, itself stepped in with a firm mind and resolution, to solve this dispute, coming out with a formula itself, and then find out whether it is the employers or the employees who are not accepting the formula that the Government gives out? That will prove the *bona fides* whether the millowners want the work to go on or whether it is those people who have some political views in their minds and not the welfare of the

workers. Is the Government prepared to intervene right now and announce a formula of its own?

**SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD :** The hon. Member has prefaced his question with an indictment, saying that everything regarding the industrial relations in the public sector is bad as if everything in the private sector is good. I might say that the industrial relations between the private entrepreneur, labour and the management are also not always good in the private sector.

**SHRI S. K. TAPURIAH :** I have not made any indictment.

**SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD :** There are public sectors in this country wherein the industrial relations are good. Now, so far as the change in the demand is concerned, the hon. Member wants to know whether there was not a change in demand. The change in demand comes according to time. For example, the union had made a demand last year,—and this is the reply I give in connection with the next question, about bonus also—and last year, the employers, the IJMA, agreed to four per cent bonus plus Rs. 30. Now, this year, the union say that the price index has gone up; between August, 1969 and this year, it is 100 points. Therefore, they have a right to demand more, because the DA has been frozen. Had there been the DA open to it under the agreement, they would have definitely got more than what they are getting today. Therefore, to say that there is change in the demand is not correct. It should be looked into by the employers and understood by them. That is what I am trying to place before the House.

Now, the hon. Member referred to the Bonus Act. I know there is a private Member's Bill in the Rajya Sabha, in connection with the Bonus Act, and I don't know whether the hon. Member will advise us to support it if at all the Government wants. Now, I do not give any solution or agreement. It is for the parties to propose. The hon. Member said that the employers agreed to the agreement and the workers did not agree. I do not know what he means. I can tell him the hard and

plain truth. He has asked me about it. They wanted to higggle on certain questions with me. Therefore, there was no agreement or solution by me to which they agreed and the labour did not agree. My job was to bring the parties together and I found quite a stiff opposition from the employers.

**SHRI S. K. TAPURIAH :** Are you prepared to intervene now ?

**SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD :** We are intervening every day ; even yesterday we intervened.

**SHRI S. K. TAPURIAH :** What is your formula for a settlement ?

**SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD :** Will he assure me that if we give our formula, he will be able to persuade the employers to agree to it.

**SHRI S. K. TAPURIAH :** Why should he link the two ? The House has every right to know whether the Central Government has made up its mind or not.

**SHRI DHIRESWAR KALITA (Gauhati):** Sir, we give our thanks to the minister, Mr. Bhagwat Jha Azad, for his efforts so far to bring about a settlement and also for giving the correct reply to Mr. Tapuriah. Now it has become clear from the statement of the minister that the employers are on the wrong side and because of them a settlement has not been reached yet. Regarding the demands of the workers, there are 60,000 *badli* workers in jute industry on the rolls permanently. This union is demanding one rupee per day as maintenance allowance. Is this a just demand or not. Do the millowners want to agree to this demand or not ? The second point is about retirement gratuity. Since independence about 1 lakh workers had been retrenched in the name of modernisation and surplus up till now. Employment is shrinking. Government has announced that Rs. 48 crores will be given as loan for modernisation of mills. So, there will be more shrinkage of employment. Therefore, wor-

kers are demanding retirement benefit. Therefore, Government should act immediately to compel the employers to agree to these minimum demands, viz., retirement gratuity, one rupee per day maintenance allowance and also bonus. Government should not sit helplessly if the employers do not agree to these just demands. Government should come with the necessary measures and if necessary use the West Bengal (Maintenance of Public Order) Act enacted by the President to force the employers to come to terms on these minimum demands.

**SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD :** The hon. Member has referred to *badli* gratuity and bonus. In regard two all the three, I have made the position sufficiently clear. We will continue to make efforts to bring about an agreement between the two sides. It shall be our endeavour to see that the industry, which is a foreign exchange earner, does not suffer. In future too we shall do our best.

**SHRI PRABODH CHANDRA (Gurdaspur) :** Sir, I had given a calling attention notice.

**MR. SPEAKAR :** That is not raised in the House.

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12.40 hrs.

#### PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

ANNUAL REPORTS OF CARDAMOM AND RUBBER BOARDS AND EXPORTS (*Control.*)

#### NINTH AMENDMENT ORDER

बैद्यगिक व्यापार मंत्रालय में उप-मंत्री (चौधरी राम सेवक) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, मैं सभा-पटल पर निम्नलिखित पत्र रखता हूँ :

- (1) इलायची बोर्ड के वर्ष 1969-70 के कार्य संबंधी वार्षिक प्रतिवेदन की एक प्रति। [*Placed in Library. See No. LT-4511/70.*]