

Cooperation of Labour Leaders in Boosting production and Checking rise in Prices

5499. SHRI S. M. KRISHNA: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have sought co-operation of labour leaders to help the country to get out of the low production and high prices trap; and

(b) if so, the facts thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI T. ANJIAH): (a) and (b). The Prime Minister met leading representatives of labour on the 1st of July, 1980. A text of her address is attached.

The Trade Union Leaders assured full cooperation. There were a number of constructive suggestions particularly on Labour Management Relations. One suggestion was to set up Tripartite Task Forces in specific industries to go into the factors impeding production and productivity. Others were in regard to matters such as consultation with representatives of labour on a continuing basis in the formulation of National Plan, revival of the Tripartite consultative machinery and changes in Labour Laws. Action for implementation of these suggestions has been initiated.

Statement

TEXT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT A MEETING WITH LABOUR LEADERS IN NEW DELHI ON JULY 1, 1980

This meeting has been called to enable Government and Central Unions and their leaders to exchange views on the economic situation which is cause for grave concern. I should like to outline the background in which we are meeting and the main issues before us.

We must get the country out of the 'low production-high prices' trap as quickly as possible. This is not an easy task and needs concerted action by different segments of society. The role of workers, who are the key element in production processes, is crucial. It is gratifying that by and large Indian workers are alive to their responsibilities and have kept the economy going in the face of many adversities, some of which are not of their making.

But it is clear that the effort so far made is not enough. I shall mention a few facts which, although well known, will enable you to appreciate the gravity of the situation and also our real potential which we have failed to realise in full. I state these facts not for any political points-scoring but to remind you that the country and its problems are our mutual concern. In a situation where all people are subject to hardship, we must do much better than we have so far done, whatever the reasons for earlier slackness and whatever difficulties now facing.

Take a few key sectors of the economy. The production of coal has stagnated just over 100 million tonnes for 3 years. Between 1974 and 1977 the production increased by 28.1 per cent while it increased by only 1.4 per cent between 1976-77 and 1979-80. Another sinew of the economy, steel, registered a similar trend. Its production increased by 65.8 per cent in 1974-77 and the rate of increase between 1977-80 declined to 18 per cent. In the same period the rates of increase of production of fertilisers, so essential to augment agricultural production, decreased from 73 per cent to 25 per cent.

We are only too familiar with the slowing down of activity in other infrastructural sectors like Railways, Power, Shipping etc. It is heartening that there are some signs of revival in our ports, coal mines etc., but the leeway to be made up in an important sector like railways is enormous, if

industrial production has to register positive rates of growth. The originating revenue-earning traffic on railways was 212.6 million tonnes in 1976-77 and slumped by 8.7 per cent to 194 million tonnes in 1979-80. This is truly distressing for the railways are at the hub of our transportation and commerce. They should have supported a much higher level of activity generated in the movement of foodgrains, petroleum products, coal and other important industrial goods.

It is no wonder that such a fall in performance and productivity was accompanied by deterioration in industrial relations situation. The number of mandays lost due to strikes and lock-outs has increased from 12.75 million in 1976 and 25.32 million in 1977 to 43.9 million in 1979.

If this situation continues, we shall only sink deeper into the morass. However, there are signs that our large mass of silent and industrious working and managerial force, and our technical and scientific talent would like to end this drift. They and the energetic rural labour force sustain our economy and seek constructive guidelines. It is the duty of leaders of labour and industry to bring about an understanding of national problems among workers and employers, and encourage them to jointly work to raise levels of production and efficiency.

We have assembled to day to discuss how best to re-establish high standards of productivity and industrial harmony. In a democratic society, it is understandable that trade unions should compete with each other in winning workers over to their organisations. But the system will work only if the ground rules and conventions of civilised behaviour are not violated and indiscipline and violence are avoided.

The tendency to strike work on the part of workers manning important services like cranes in ports, locomotives on railways, pumping stations in water works, and generating

plants in power system is deplorable particularly when the strike is called by a small group only to take advantage of the vulnerability of the situation. No Government, especially in our present economic situation can afford to be cowed by such anti-social demonstrations of irresponsibility by a few. I appeal to the trade union leaders to reflect calmly on the great damage caused to the economy by anti-social elements who infiltrate into trade unions. In fact, I expect you will give the lead in helping us to check this.

The endemic nature of the poor industrial relations situation in our eastern coal belt cannot be viewed with equanimity. Those who trigger off these situations should realise that their gains will be shortlived if as a result of their actions the nation as a whole loses.

Public sector enterprises present a strange spectacle of the labour fighting its own image, as it were. These enterprises are national property without any exploitative ownership. Yet even in those enterprises the labour whose physical and financial performance is poor, are fighting for higher benefits without a corresponding willingness to talk about norms of productivity.

I mention some of these problems to stress the need for constructive and farsighted leadership. Wherever leadership has played a constructive role, there has been high productivity and performance. Such leadership has been pre-occupied with the redressing of the genuine grievances of workers by an effective dialogue with management, and peaceful demonstrations of solidarity when the situation so warranted. Only too well are we aware of the intransigence unimaginativeness that often plagues many managements. Fortunately, we have several remedies available within the ambit of the law and of social and political relationships. I shall also talk to some

leading industrialists regarding this matter and to put before them your own constructive suggestions on labour-management relations.

The industrial working class has played a notable role in our freedom movement. Labour leaders, like Shri V. V. Giri, have occupied positions of honour in our national life. Workers have an enormous and vital contribution to make in the economic reconstruction of our nation. I want them to fight not only for their own rights, but for the rights of those who have fewer advantages. The working class must look after the interests of the non-working class as well, those who, for no fault of theirs, cannot secure employment. I am anxious that the reasonable basic needs of industrial workers are met—their articles of daily use, health, education, etc. The recent budget provides several reliefs to them. I am against the attitude which pits workers against peasants and town against villages. I assure you that the interests of the industrial working class are close to my heart.

Your views on the industrial relations laws, the bonus law and the evolution of tripartite machinery will be given sympathetic consideration by the Government. However, at this meeting I hope you will concentrate on increase in productivity and production so that we can absorb more persons in gainful employment. I should like you to place your views before us on this aspect more than any other matter.

How can differences be removed or at least patched over to increase productivity and production and to help alleviate urban and rural unemployment, under-employment and poverty. The Ministry of Labour and other Ministries will take careful note of what you have to say on various aspects of industrial relations in different sectors. Your suggestions will be sympathetically followed up by the Government.

Ring Railway in Srinagar

5500. DR. FAROOQ ABDULLA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal under consideration of Government to set up a ring railway in Srinagar city;

(b) if so, whether any scheme has been prepared for this;

(c) if so, when the final decision is likely to be taken;

(d) the total cost of expenditure involved; and

(e) whether any survey has been conducted?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MALLIKARJUN): (a) to (e) A preliminary engineering survey for a Joy Ride Railway (N.G.) at Srinagar in Kashmir was carried out during 1976 at the cost of the State Government of Jammu and Kashmir, which revealed that the proposed 2 ft. gauge link between Nehru Park and Shalimarbagh via Chasma Shahi and Nishatbagh along the Dal Lake (10.657 kms.) would cost 1.93 crores (excluding cost of rolling stock) at 1976-77 cost price. The present-day construction cost will be much higher. A copy of the survey report was sent to the State Government of Jammu and Kashmir with the request to convey their concurrence to take up this project in the same manner as for other metropolitan cities links. However, the State Government of Jammu and Kashmir had dropped this scheme in January, 1979. Since then no further consideration has been given to this project.

Introduction of an Express Train from Purulia to Howrah

5501. SHRI BASUDEB ACHARYA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal to introduce an express train from