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Title: Need to form Wage Board for Tea Plantation Industry.

SHRI MAHENDRA KUMAR ROY (JALPAIGURI): I would like to raise a matter regarding the pathetic financial condition of tea plantation labourers. Tea industry is a very profitable industry of our country. This industry earns a vast quantity of foreign exchange for our country. Day-by-day the tea plantation owners have become richer to the richest, but the employees of tea gardens have become poorer to the poorest. They are getting only a minimum wage of Rs. 69 to Rs. 90 per day, though in MGNREGS the labourers are getting Rs. 136 and the agricultural labourers are getting Rs. 152 to Rs. 200 per day. So, these tea plantation labourers are getting very negligible rate of wages.

The Union Government is thinking of declaring tea as national drink of our country. I congratulate the Government for this step. But I want to bring to the notice of this Government the hardships being faced by the workers who are engaged in this industry. More than half a century has passed since the formation of the last Central Wage Board for tea plantation industry. Till date a lot of changes has taken place in tea plantation industry. More than two million workers are engaged in this very important sector of the economy of India, which is continuously growing over the years.

As you know, in absence of any consistent, uniform and resolute approach and intervention on the part of the Government, the structure as well as the rates of wages of these workmen of this industry have failed to evolve a fair standard on all counts keeping pace with the developing economy of the country. As a result, presently the wages of the workmen in this industry is the lowest in comparison to any other organised sector. It varies to a great extent in various regions and even within regions too.

The stand and intention on the part of employers could succeed in frustrating and negating the declared motto of the last Central Wage Board from evolving a fair structure of wages. Having no proper and dynamic link with the rising Consumer Price Index, the real wages of these workmen of this industry have significantly been eroded over the last fifty years, leading to growing distress, malnutrition, backwardness, migration and unrest.

Besides all this, there is no Minimum Support Price or Minimum Retail Price for tea and the price of tea is always decided by auction. In the absence of any effective policy the tea garden owners gave the excuse of huge losses in the name of auction and other unrelated things.

Through this august House, I would request the hon. Minister to intervene in the matter as he deems appropriate and to fix a MSP or Minimum Retail Price for tea and also to form a Central Wage Board for tea plantation industry at the earliest.