

Meeting of Health State Secretaries

2978. SHRI K. BALADHANDAYUTHAM : Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING be pleased to state :

(a) whether a meeting of the Health State Secretaries and administrative medical Officers was held recently in Delhi;

(b) whether that meeting discussed proposals for providing better rural health services; and

(c) if so, the main features thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING AND IN THE MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING (PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA) : (a) Yes.

(b) Yes.

(c) A statement is laid on the Table of the House [Placed in Library. See No. LT—3464/72]

Gujranwala House Building Co-operative Society, Delhi

2979. SHRI DHAN SHAN PRADHAN: Will the Minister of WORKS AND HOUSING be pleased to state :

(a) whether any complaints have been received against the Gujranwala House Building Co-operative Society, Delhi in the matter of allotment of plots, revision of lay-out plan, handling of funds particularly the so called 'development fund' and refund of excess amount to those members of the Society who had paid for large plots but have been allotted smaller plots;

(b) if so, the nature of those complaints and the action taken in the matter or proposed to be taken;

(c) whether any enquiry has been ordered in the matter; and

(d) if so, the result thereof and if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING AND IN THE MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING (PROF. D. P. CHATTOPADHYAYA) : (a) and (b) . Certain complaints were made by the members of this society that they were not being allotted plots according to the category for which they were enrolled. Subsequently they withdrew the complaints and the society allotted plots to the members in the various categories strictly according to their seniority in each category.

(c) and (d). In view of the position explained above, these questions do not arise.

12.05 hrs.

RE : MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT

SOME HON. MEMBERS rose—

MR. SPEAKER : I will take up the adjournment motion after the call-attention.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU (Diamond Harbour) : According to Rule 60. . .

MR. SPEAKER : I am going according to the rules and directions. (Interruption)

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU : According to Rule 60, the adjournment motion is to be taken up immediately after questions and before the list of business is taken up. But if you want to modify it by your direction...

MR. SPEAKER : But, after we had gone through the Calling Attention. This is the procedure we have followed for many years. There is nothing new.

12.06 hrs.

**CALLING ATTENTION TO
MATTER OF URGENT
PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**REPORTED DEMAND OF CEMENT
WORKERS FOR INTERIM
RELIEF**

SHRI SHYAM SUNDER MOHAPATRA (Balsore) : I call the attention of

the Minister of Labour and Rehabilitation to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon :

'The reported demand of cement workers for interim relief and Government's reaction thereto.'

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND REHABILITATION (SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR) : Wages of cement workers have been revised on two occasions in the past on an industry-wise basis, through the agency of tripartite Wage Boards. The first Wage Board was set up in 1958. At that time there was no uniformity in the wages paid to cement workers at various places. The system of dearness allowance also differed from place to place. As a result of the recommendations of the First Wage Board, a standardised wage structure came into existence. This meant a substantial increase over the then prevailing wages and in some cases it exceeded Rs. 25/- per month. Moreover, payment of dearness allowance was linked to the cost of living index.

A Second Wage Board for the Cement Industry was set up in September, 1964. Unfortunately, its report was not unanimous. After discussions with the representatives of employers and workers, Government decided to accept the recommendations subject to some modifications. It was also decided that the recommendations of the Wage Board, as accepted by Government, should remain in operation for a period of 5 years. As a result of the Second Wage Board's recommendations, the workers were to get a guaranteed increase ranging from Rs. 10/- to Rs. 32.50 per month for different categories of workers.

Though the present wage structure, based on the recommendations of the Second Wage Board is to be operative upto the 12th February, 1973, the cement workers started making demands from March, 1972 for a further wage revision and payment of interim relief. The workers' demand was that their wages be raised to the same level as that of the steel workers who got

a minimum wage of Rs. 240/- p.m. from 1st September, 1970 as a result of the bilateral negotiations with the employers. The employers' contention is that any increase in wages must be accompanied by an increase in the retention price of cement. In this connection, I would like to mention that on 28th April, 1972, Government has made a reference to the Tariff Commission for a comprehensive review of the cement industry, including the question of fair ex-works price payable to the producers. The question of wage-increase was discussed between the parties and in this process they were assisted by the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central). No agreement could however be reached and a notice of a strike from 12th July 1972 was served by the Unions. I intervened at this stage and on my assurance that a meeting would be held with the representatives of employers and workers to discuss the issues involved, the strike was postponed.

At the meeting which I held with the representatives of the workers and employers on 11th July, 1972 in New Delhi, it was agreed to set up a Joint Wage Negotiating Committee consisting of the representatives of employers and workers, to consider the question of interim relief as well as the final wage structure for the Industry. The Wage Negotiating Committee met in Bombay on 27th July, 1972 but unfortunately, the negotiations did not succeed because of the divergent stands taken by the employers and workers. The various workers' organisations represented on the Negotiating Committee thereupon decided to go ahead with the general strike in the industry with effect from 17th August, 1972. I, therefore, requested the President, Cement Manufacturers' Association and the President, Indian National Cement and Allied Workers Federation to meet me on the 16th August 1972 so that some way may be found out to settle the dispute. After a day-long discussion and in consultation with the Minister of Industrial Development, I proposed that an interim relief of Rs. 20/- might be paid to the workers from 1st July, 1972 and that a five-year wage settlement may be signed on the basis of a total wage of Rs. 230/- per month payable from the 1st February, 1973. I also proposed that matters like annual increments, rate of neutralisation from 1st February, 1973 etc,

could be discussed and settled later. Despite this the strike in the cement industry commenced on 17th August, 1972. I have, however, not given up my efforts to find a solution and have called the representatives of both employers and workers to meet me again on the 21st August, that is, today. I hope that a mutually acceptable solution will be found and that the strike will be called off soon.

SHRISHYAM SUNDER MOHAPATRA :

After the statement of the hon. Minister, that he has called the union leaders today on the 21st of August, 1972, for talks. I must consider myself to be really very fortunate that what we discuss today will certainly impress him to the extent that he will agree to the demands of the workers.

Sir, out of 54 cement industries in our country, workers in 52 industries are on strike. It is one of the basic industries in the country like steel.

The production of cement every day in the country is 40,000 tonnes. The earning is Rs. one crore per day.

With this strike of 5 days, you can well imagine, we have lost Rs. 5 crores.

Sir, it is a very serious situation. I call the attention of the hon. Minister to the fact that not one union alone has called a strike. But there are as many as 7 large unions which are involved in this strike. All these 7 unions have given the call for a strike. Even the CITU which is an organ of the CPM is one of the co-sponsors of the strike. Thus, we cannot certainly say that workers have gone on strike without considering the pros and cons.

When all the unions are involved in this manner, the Minister is expected to probe into the matter and see as to why the workers went into the strike, particularly, at this juncture when the country is passing through a transition.

We find from the newspapers that there is strike in one industry or the other every day.

Already in Bombay there is the civic workers' strike. There is already a rumbl-

ing in the Food Corporation of India. The strike in Khetri mines lasted more than a month. Throughout the country agitations are taking place on the bonus issue. Mr. Khadilkar has given an assurance that the minimum bonus of 8.33 per cent should be paid to all the workers. If this is not agreed to by the employers there will be country wide agitation in the entire sub-continent.

Sir, the industrialists in the cement industry have earned a lot, depriving the workers of their legitimate dues. The minimum wage in the steel industry is Rs. 240. The Cement workers have demanded that their wages should be brought on par with the steel workers. There is nothing wrong in it. The steel prices were twice revised giving the industry a price rise of over Rs 100 per tonne. Out of this Rs. 30 was meant for wage increase only. Now, here, in the case of Cement industry, the Government is prepared to give to the Cement industry only Rs. 2 per tonne against the price increase of Rs. 4 per tonne, needed for paying the increased wage. If Rs. 240 was considered for the steel workers, I do not understand why in the cement industry the workers should not get the minimum of Rs. 230.

The cement Workers had deferred the strike by one month on the request of the hon. Minister. When they could defer the strike by one month on the request of the hon. Minister, what stood in the way of the hon. Minister in persuading them to defer it by another one month so that he could discuss and settle the matter? The hon. Minister is very optimistic. He says in the last paragraph of his statement that :

"I have, however, not given up my efforts to find a solution and have called representatives of both the employers and workers to meet me again on the 21st. I hope that a mutually acceptable solution will be found out."

If he is so much optimistic, we offer our thanks to him. But why has he not been able to impress on the workers so that the country could have been saved of at least Rs. 5 crores till this moment?

The position is very critical now, because the workers are demanding an

interim relief. Whether the interim relief should be Rs. 70 or it should be Rs. 20 is a question which can be considered bilaterally. But the question definitely is very important. My question to the hon. Minister is this. May I know whether he will be in touch immediately with the union leaders to settle the dispute to the satisfaction of both the parties, and whether he will see to it that there is no victimisation of the workers and that the workers will get their wages during the strike period, which is very important.

SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR : As I have already stated in the concluding part of my statement, I had invited the representatives of the employers and the workers, and I have met them since nine o' clock in the morning, and the differences are considerably narrowed down. I hope that we shall be able to reach a settlement by this evening. But important considerations are involved in this strike. For, if every industry were to ask for a linkage with steel, it will be a sort of wage inflation, which is not justified in the present context of the situation. Cement industry is a village-based industry. That aspect also must be kept in mind. Keeping these things in mind, we are considering the interim and the final relief, and how to link it up with the index so that some sort of . . .

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA (Alipore) :
It is a village-based industry ?

SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR : Almost all the cement factories are in the villages. This makes a lot of difference.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA (Begusarai) : So are the steel factories in the villages.

SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR : I must say that these three points are there, namely what should be the interim relief, how it should be linked up and to which index and what should be the rate of neutralisation. I hope that the difficulties will be overcome.

But one thing I am insisting, so far as the interim relief is concerned, is that the industry should find the interim relief from their own resources instead of taxing the consumer.

THRI S. M. BANERJEE (Kanpur) : At the very outset, I should congratulate the 75,000 cement workers who have gone on strike against the arrogant attitude of the millowners who have earned fabulous profits during the last fifteen or twenty years. It is really very hearening that the hon. Labour Minister has taken pains to meet the union representatives in order to arrive at a negotiated settlement. But this is not the first time that this kind of thing has happened. Those who are Controlling the cement industry are a Powerful bloc, and they have always linked up the price of cement with the increase in wages. This time also, before they agree to pay the interim relief, whether it be Rs. 20 according to the hon. Minister or a higher interim relief as demanded by all the unions, they are trying to persuade or rather pressurise the Government to increase the price of cement. The hon. Minister has said that the linking of interim relief or any wage increase with steel will result in more inflation. Wage increase is not the whole cause of inflation. As the House and the country knows, Government are also responsible for this inflation because of their deficit financing.

That has been agreed here. So the workers should not be held responsible for the inflation in the country because they are asking for more wages. Every worker in every industry is asking for a wage increase because this Government has miserably failed to hold the price line and reduce the prices to a reasonable level. Even after all the assurances given in this House 15 or 20 days ago, you will agree with me that the prices have not decreased in any commodity. The prices of all essential commodities have gone up and the Government remains a silent spectator of its own sorrow and shame.

When recently the textile workers in Kanpur refused a one rupee increase, the employers ultimately agreed to give an interim relief of Rs. 30 at the instance of the Chief Minister and because a strike took place on the 17th of last month in which 40,000 employees took part. In this case, a peltury sum of Rs. 20 is being given to them. It is said here that this is a five-year agreement and this Rs. 20 will be linked up to Rs. 230 per month. In these

five years, the cement manufacturers will have earned crores of rupees but the workers' wage will remain at Rs. 230 for five years.

I would like to know what is the demand of the workers now and what have they demanded in today's meeting. Is it a fact that they do not agree to Rs. 20 and are not prepared to sign an agreement for five years unless this is linked up with steel wages, not arising out of the Wage Board recommendations but arising out of the tripartite arrangement which my hon. friend, the Minister of Steel, arrived at by discussions across the table?

In case the employers do not agree to the proposals given by the hon. Minister, what further steps will be taken against them? The DIR and MISA and other obnoxious and pernicious pieces of legislation are being used against employees, but what will be done to the employers if they employers if they do not agree? If it is left to the employees and employers, the employees will be able to fight it out and extract Rs. 50 or Rs. 60 as interim relief, if police are not sent in aid of the employees.

My question is whether the price increase already agreed to will be in the interest of the consumer. It will be wrong to agree to this increase in price. What is Government's proposal after hearing the employees' representatives at the meeting at 9 A.M. today? Will Government assure us that the five-year agreement will not be forced upon them but it should be for not more than two years because prices are going up every day due to Government's miserable failure to hold the price line?

SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR : As I have made it clear in my statement, the question of the ex-factory price is before the Tariff Commission. So there is no increase in the ex-factory price and it does not figure in these negotiations.

So far as the five year period is concerned, when wage is linked with the index, I think it is a reasonable proposition to keep peace in industry so that automatically when prices rise neutralisation takes place. So nobody should object to that.

So far as their demands are concerned, this is a matter which the Ministry of Industrial Development will have to consider because we cannot on our own take any decision. Whatever offer is made is made after full consultation with the Ministry of Industrial Development. Here also I am trying my best to narrow down the differences and see that some settlement is reached.

I would like to inform the House that one good thing has taken place. When we formed the National Council of Trade Unions, they had come to some agreement that even if there is a strike, essential services and critical sectors will be kept out of it. I am glad to say that the INTUC and AITUC have informed their constituents in the factories to keep essential services running, and do not allow certain critical parts of the factories entirely to be closed. That is a good development. (*Interruption*)

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE : What was the demand made by the employees? Seven representatives are here. What was the demand placed by them today, and in the case the employers do not agree, what will the Government do?

SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR : This is just anticipating failure. As I said earlier, the demand and offer have narrowed down and if I say just now anything, that will give rise to a further debate. (*Interruption*)

MR. SPEAKER : Mr. Banerjee has repeated his question again: the question is, what was their demand.

SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR : Their demand was, to be very plain, rather fantastic, because, they wanted linkage in every respect with steel. This is one thing. So far as the interim relief is concerned, from Rs. 30, they want Rs. 70 from the 1st of January, 1972. Therefore, I used that word 'fantastic'. Now, they have come round to a reasonable frame of mind. Therefore, I do not want to say anything at this juncture.

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE : Don't you think that by this time the profits of the employers have also gone up? (*Interruption*)

MR. SPEAKER : Shri Henry Austin absent. Shri Raja Kulkarni.

SRRI RAJA KULKARNI (Bombay—North-East) : The nation wide strike in the cement industry from the 17th August is most justified and a proper action has been taken by the workers as a last resort. Now, in the statement that was just now read out and in the offer given by the Labour Minister in his statement, he has not stated the attitude of the employers. My hon friends in this House have stated that this strike has been due to the negative and unhelpful attitude adopted by the cement employers in the country. Therefore, if there is any loss of production in cement in the country, the responsibility is squarely on the shoulders of the cement employers and on the incapacity of the Government's machinery to settle the dispute immediately.

The workers have responded to the meetings that were called by the Labour Minister. Even today, this morning also, they met the Minister. I am told he has again called them this evening. They are prepared to meet. What is the demand? I am surprised at the Labour Minister's statement that the demands were fantastic. The demands were never fantastic. I was also surprised at the Labour Ministers' characterisation of the service conditions in the cement industry when compared to the steel industry. He said that this being a village-based industry, there has to be a big gap between the service conditions and the emoluments in the cement industry and those in the steel industry.

I would like to inform the House that prior to the wage increase in the steel industry, the minimum wage and the total emoluments in the cement industry were higher than those in the steel industry. If the Government is now going to tell the cement workers that "you were getting more than the steel workers and you should now get much less," what will happen? What have the cement workers demanded? The cement workers have demanded parity. In fact, the cement workers are getting Rs. 60 to 70 less than what the steel workers are getting. The minimum wage in the steel industry was Rs. 240 at the index of 183. At this moment, the minimum wage in the steel industry is about Rs. 259 or Rs. 260. What

is the minimum wage today in the cement industry? It is Rs. 189. There is a big gap. What they are asking is, 'formerly, we were getting more than those in the steel industry, and at least bring us on parity with them.' What is the demand? Now they wanted an interim relief. Even in the interim this gap was to be filled. They were prepared. Are the employers agreeable to Rs. 20? He has not said anything. He is urging on the trade union leaders to accept Rs. 20. They cannot accept Rs. 20. They had come round, as he has said, with at least an interim relief of Rs. 30. The whole gap has to be filled at least because in the steel industry when joint settlement took place the interim relief was Rs. 33. Cement workers are prepared to settle on an interim relief of Rs. 30 instead of Rs. 33 which was given there. In the final settlement the steel workers got Rs. 67 increase. They want between Rs. 60 and 67 as the final thing. I think that the demand is most reasonable. The rate of dearness allowance, neutralisation rate also it is on parity they are working with the steel workers. The offer which has been made is less. The Labour Minister should revise his proposals and bring round the employers which will be in the interest of the nation instead of putting any blame on the trade union leaders.

SHRI R. K. KHADILKAR : There is no question of putting any blame or apportioning it. The contention of the hon Member is right in this sense that if the cement manufactures had taken up the workers' demand seriously they could have settled it very early because they placed the demand in last March and they revived it again. Naturally they expected that whatever the increase it must be borne by the consumer and Government should come to their help by increasing the prices and give them a price-rise. Therefore they were all the time postponing the final conclusion.

We are clinching the issue. As I have said earlier, whatever the Government or the tariff board decides, I have nothing to do. But my efforts will be that this burden as far as possible should not be passed on to the consumer and if it is to be passed on, it must be the minimum. Therefore I would assure the House and the hon. Member that I shall see that a just settlement is worked out, which will give some sort of satisfaction to the workers.