



No. 8(16)/68-NCL(C)
Government of India
National Commission on Labour
D-27, South Extension, Part II
New Delhi

.....

Dated the 16th November, 1968.

To

The Chairman and Members of the
National Commission on Labour.

Subject:- Member Secretary's observation visits to
Kulu and Manali (Himachal Pradesh) and Alwar
(Rajasthan) - Record of observation visits.

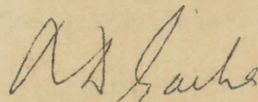
.....

Sir,

I am directed to forward a copy each of the
following papers:-

1. Record of observation visit of Member Secretary
to Kulu and Manali (Himachal Pradesh) from
12th to 14th October, 1968.
2. Tour notes of Member Secretary's observation
visit to District Alwar (Rajasthan) on
4th November, 1968.

Yours faithfully,


(P.D. Gaiha)
Deputy Secretary

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR

Record of observation visit to Kulu & Manali
from 12th to 14th October, 1968.

PALAMPUR
12.10.68

On our way to Kulu we met the following representatives of Kangra Tea Association:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Shri Gurput Singh | 5. Shri H.C. Kansal |
| 2. Shri Meher Chand | 6. Shri Bishamber Dass |
| 3. Shri Ravender Singh | 7. Shri K.K. Sud |
| 4. Shri Chaina Ram | 8. Shri Bhag Singh |

The Association submitted a memorandum (copy already circulated) enlisting the brief history of the tea industry in H.P. as also the latest developments in the field. They reiterated the points mentioned in their Memorandum.

1. The tea estates in the region did not employ regular labour force. The labour which worked on estates belonged to agricultural families in the nearby villages. As such the estates felt acute shortage of labour specially during the harvesting time. This saves to the estates moneys required to be spent on items like housing, creches for the permanent labour as in Assam.
2. Working on the estates was uneconomical. An hectare of land in Kangra region gave a gross earnings of Rs. 800 as against Rs. 6500 for the whole of India. Earning from tea plantation are reported to be lower than even cereal cultivation. Tea bushes in this area are old and there is no replantation envisaged.
3. They had been experimenting with development of horticulture. But hailstorm, parrots and monkeys do not allow the fruits trees to yield a return. Hailstorm is the main problem which occurs right at the time of blossoming.
4. Another big problem for the area is soil erosion. The tea bushes and tea plantations are serving the region by holding the soil. This is one consideration for allowing the tea bushes to stay in an uneconomic state.
5. The tea produced in the region is of common quality which fetches a low price. The internal demand for the Kangra tea is very low. Formerly it was being exported to Afghanistan

Contd...

but after the 1965 conflict with Pakistan exports through that country had completely stopped. A relief in the excise on tea produced in the region, for which they had approached the Government of India, could help the industry from natural decay.

6. Tea plantation in this area is on a very small scale. We saw two bigger gardens but their upkeep was poorer than even the forest gardens in Assam. The manager of one of the gardens had come from Assam. He corroborated the difficulties pointed out to us by the Association. We could not meet workers. There was no picking on the gardens. As underemployment relief work on gardens can be an occupation but not permanent employment. Most of the tea produced looks dry. It has neither flavour nor colour. It is quite popular with local labour and also with labour from Tibet.

II

Forest Labour

About 40,000 workers are employed on various jobs in the forests. The main work in forests is of two types - (i) felling the tree, cutting it into proper size and (ii) transporting logs through the river. (ii) is a specialised job. Work is confined to a section of people who have been traditionally handling such work. Over the years wage rates have improved but simultaneously there is difficulty of non-payment of wages. According to the procedure in such cases the main contractor is given the contract; he in turn entrusts the job to petty contractors. Labour works under the petty contractors. The Labour Department approaches the main contractor to settle the disputes of non-payment of wages. The only reply the contractor gives is that he (main contractor) was not concerned as he had given the amount to petty contractors and it was their responsibility to clear the bills. When the petty contractor is approached, the story he gives is exactly the opposite. It is likely that both of them may be in league to defraud labour. There is however, one safeguard. Such shirking of responsibility cannot go on for long if the contractor or his petty junior has to attract labour from year to year in a labour shortage area. There is no unionisation amongst forest workers and they depend exclusively on the Labour Department. The Labour Department has become very popular with them in the last 4-5 years.

For an equally large employment - road construction through contractors by the Public Works Departments there were similar difficulties with contractors some time back. Labour Department was able to tackle the problem of non-payment of wages effectively by introducing a Fair Wage Clause in the Agreement and seeking the Cooperation of P.W.D. in its enforcement. Under the system if the Labour Department received a complaint against a contractor about non-payment, the PWD in turn withheld the payments to the contractor until the matter is settled. This

Contd.....

has proved the quickest remedy; instances of non-payment of wages to contract labour have been reduced to the minimum. Conditions could improve if a similar provision was made in the case of forest workers, irrespective of the fact whether the main contractor or the petty contractor was responsible for non-payment.

III

Manali : 13.10.1968

Road construction workers.

On way to Manali, we had a short discussion with the workers engaged in road construction. It was a regular P.W.D. gang. It had a mate as the head for supervision. He maintained the muster roll wherein to mark attendance. The workers understood the entire made in the roll. Some of them were interviewed; they were casual workers who had been working for more than three to four years but were still casual. They were entitled to wages for Sundays & other holidays except where attendance fell short of six days in a week. Almost every worker in this category had land of his own he came for work in lean months to supplement family income. In most cases some members of the family stayed on the farm. A casual worker was paid Rs. 3.25 paise per day. A regular mate was paid Rs. 146/- p.m.

2. A few boys were also seen working. They are paid at the rate of Rs. 2.25 per day. One of the boys had studied upto fifth class. Financial difficulty was mentioned as the reason for discontinuation of further education.

3. A few years back Tibetan labour was paid higher wages as compared to local labour. But now uniform rates are the rule.

4. The workers change their jobs according to availability of work either on road construction or felling of trees in forests. Transportation through river is a job which they do not try because of the skill involved. Formerly wage rates in forests were attractive; now wages offered by P.W.D. are equally attractive.

5. Though wages have doubled the rise in prices has been causing them hardship. Their needs are few though they need warm clothing. As they all have some land the price difficulties are not acute, though life can be quite harsh to them.

Contd...

6. Increment due to the staff was not being paid to regular workers since 1964.

7. The workers on road construction were not given winter uniform though this facility was available to the office staff in P.W.D. The problem can be of costs but workers would need this facility more than office staff.

IV

At a place called 'Vasistha' about 8 miles from Manali we could see how the bargaining power of local artisan has increased. He had some wares to show us but he was not prepared to bargain. This possibly is the case with all places of tourist attraction. The artisan can slam his door on the purchaser. Some Tibetan shop-keepers in Manali also exhibited the same tendency i.e. their lack of concern for trade. A possibility could be that they engage themselves in more profitable smuggling trade.

V

On our way back from Manali we saw some ladies working on a small farm. They were non-communicative. There was no difficulty about language but they feared consequences of disclosing information. They looked were affluent them one expected agriculture labour to be; ultimately it was revealed to us that they were not paid workers. Work on farms is in many cases done on exchange basis according to the needs of each household. Farms themselves are small and such mutual family aid avoids paid labour being used. If however, it has to be paid the rate is about Rs. 3 per day. In peak periods some thing has to be paid in kind also.

VI

Herdsmen were seen all along the way from Manali to Kulu. They appeared to be rich shepherds and were unwilling to disclose any of the tricks of their trade. Their usual story was that the whole sheep & goats did not belong to them individually; each one had about 20 to 30 of them. When we asked them how they distinguished their sheep from those of others, they obliged us by showing the markings. These markings could give us an idea of how low their claim was of having not more than 30 sheep. In a herd of 300 to 400 one could discern hardly two or three different markings they/ conceded that raw wool rates /fairly had gone up substantially in the last 4-5 years, so had price of sheep. The usual routine they follow is to come down to plains from areas like Lahaul and Spiti in winter and go back to their normal place of stay in summer. Usually they trek about twenty five miles a day. When they camp at

Contd....

night the sheep will be resting on some farm and for this privilege the farmer even pays the shepherd; of he gets sheep manure in the bargain. Most of the nomads appeared well clothed & well equipped for such long treks. They were reported to be quite affluent.

VII

The Sutlej-Beas project employing 20,000 workers was also seen on way back to Delhi. The project consists of a digging a tunnel of over 25 miles in high mountain ranges and utilising of a thousand foot(drop in level)to generate a large block of power. After generating power the waters of Beas are fed into the Sutlej to reenforce the Bhakra waters. Construction work on these major projects has given a stable source of income to the labour over the last few years. It has created labour shortages in an area which even normally depends upon outside labour.

Tour notes of Member-Secretary's observation
visit to district Alwar, Rajasthan on 4.11.1968

The following officers were present at the time
of discussions by the Member-Secretary in district Alwar.

1. Shri T.C. Jain, Joint Labour Commissioner,
Rajasthan, Jaipur.
2. Shri R.N. Mathur, District Agriculture Officer,
Alwar.
3. Shri Kuldip Parikh, Labour Inspector and
Conciliation Officer, Jaipur.
4. Shri Ravindra Pushpad, Labour Inspector and
Conciliation Officer, Alwar.
5. Shri R.S. Sharma, Labour Welfare Officer,
P.W.D., Jaipur.

VILLAGE : RAHADURPUR

It is about 12 miles from Alwar. There is a farm of about 25 acres belonging to Shri Hans Raj Gulhati. The main crops in the village are onion, gram, rapeseed, mustard and bajra. The cultivators are growing onion on a large scale for the last ten years. Last year due to excessive rains there was a loss of about rupees ten Lakhs in the cultivation of onion alone. This upset the farmers more than anything else; complaints against authorities correspondingly went up. The village is inhabited mostly by refugees from West Pakistan, besides there are some houses of Malis, Vankars, and Meos. The agricultural employment is available in the village for eight months in a year. Wages for agriculture labour vary from Rs.2.00 to Rs.5.00 per day. At the time of harvesting the wages are near the higher of the range.. This is the time when outside labour has also to be engaged. There is in addition a fair amount of mutual exchange of labour and self help; relatives of the local cultivators are called in and engaged for the purpose. Most of the labour coming during the peak season is so related. This solves the housing problem of them,

There are seven or eight tractors in the village. There is more demand for them but tractors are in short supply. The small number of tractors working in the village makes it difficult to provide repair services in the village itself. Mechanics for repairing the tractors have to be called from Alwar. Farmers

Contd.....2/-

are using pumping-sets; seed drills; threshers and ploughs though their use is not common. The potential for mechanised farming exists in the village. The village is electrified.

There are cooperative societies and a Panchayat Samiti. Between them they control the distribution of improved seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and credit. This has resulted in such inputs in agriculture going to the more affluent in the villages. Landless-cultivators as well as small cultivators do not wield any influence in these elected bodies or in the co-operatives. Since all agricultural inputs have to be purchased on cash terms one has to depend on loans; for small holders loans are hard to come by. If such cultivators want a loan from a local money-lender, he gets it at the rate of 18 to 24 per cent interest per annum. On occasions the rate of interest has gone up to about 30%.

There is another practice common to the village. Landless-cultivator or small cultivators are provided land by the bigger farmer or absentee landlord. The owner of the land provides for all inputs except the seed, the expenditure on which is shared; also at that on fertilisers. All physical labour will be provided by landless-cultivator, who gets 50 per cent or whatever is agreed of the final produce. This arrangement has worked well in the sense that the person who has to provide only labour has a chance of earning more by putting in more work required for scientific agriculture.

The general condition of the village was reported to be much better than what it was prior to Independence. It was stated that bicycle is owned by almost every family of the village; it is a common mode of conveyance. There are also some who possess a Scooter. Every fifth family has a radio or transistor set. Programmes for villagers - weather forecasts are listened to with great interest. There is a Middle School in the village with about 600 students on its rolls. Before Independence the number of students was hardly 250. Education is in demand from all sections of the community. Health Services are improving; local superstitions are on the decline.

There are about 50 Harijan families but no untouchability was practiced in the village. In the gathering which we met all had mixed together and the discussion on the subject was free. The Harijan members themselves said that they could fetch water from any well without being objected to by others. Their children could go to school and they do so as equals. If the progress of literacy is not according to their expectation it was because of the bad economic conditions. Boys normally read upto Vith or VIth class and thereafter they gave up studies to be more useful to their parents in their agricultural/chores. No

Harijan-girl, however, could avail herself of the educational facility. Apart from social customs which inhibit them there is also the economic strains; girls of the age of 8-10 years are engaged in looking after the younger ones in the house, so that their parents can work in the fields. These girls are paid at the rate of 25 paise per day for the job if they are engaged for such work in other families. If some facility for looking after young ones was provided in the village, many parents would even pay for such services. This shows that the village is ripe for an industrial way of life.

A house of Meo was inspected. Its appearance was what was expected of a rural household. It was katcha. There were a few cots but a number of metal utensils. The sanitation was poor. The house was not electrified. Meos are muslims. Some of them left the area and migrated to Pakistan but many returned to their native place. Their return has made no difference to the manner in which they were received in the Community. But on the whole the Meos appeared subdued in their responses.

As an instance of rising aspirations could be quoted what the young people - more real among them - felt about the inequity in elections where votes go by cast, community, local groupings and the like. As displaced persons who have worked so hard to rehabilitate themselves, and none of the displaced persons would beg for a living or accept charity, they feel they have no stake in political life or in shaping the decisions which the community will make for its benefit.

VILLAGE : MOHUND

The village is about 25 miles from Alwar. It was about a mile off the main road. Mr. Suryadeva whom we met is himself a progressive farmer. His house showed all the attributes of such farmers. The main crops in the village are bajra, maize, wheat, gram and mustard; it appeared to be a prosperous village community. There are number of seed-farms in the village. It was said that a seed farm of an acre earns a profit of Rs.2000/- per year. Seeds which come out from an acre of a seed-farm is sufficient for 400 acres of land for sowing.

The normal rate of wages is Rs.2.00 per day and employment is available over large parts of the year. There are tractors, seed drills, threshers etc., in the village and these are all in active use. The village is electrified. There is a co-operative society in the village where improved variety of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides are available. Here too it was observed that landless cultivators are not benefited by these facilities, because seeds etc., are available through societies on cash terms or on credit, if one owns a

a sufficient land. The loan is available through money-lenders on usual 18 per cent interest. But, what is more, all this was said in the presence of the Pradhan of the village Panchayat and the Pramukh both of whom were big farmers who have been able to retain their large holding within the legal interpretations of provisions on land ceilings by some national subdivisions. In this village there are about 25 houses in all. Out of these about 12 houses belong to landless cultivators. This percentage appeared to be heavy but when questioned further a fair number of these twelve landless families had lands though small patches of it. Big land-holders lend their land to landless cultivators. The practice is the same as was observed in Bahadurpur with some variations to suit local conditions. Seed and fertiliser are supplied by the owner of the land. The landless-cultivator gets 1/6th of the final produce as labour charges at the end of the season. For a normal family, it was said, that 5 bighas of irrigated or 12 bighas of unirrigated land is sufficient for living-hood. It was noticed that the incidence in this village of landless cultivators not in possession of a watch cycle or transistor sets was higher than in Bahadurpur, but it was also mentioned that local conditions are not favourable for cycling; the same however could not be said about other personal effects. There is a school in the village upto Vth class standard. An interesting point made by the Pradhan was that labour was now extremely conscious of time. It would, within the work availabilities, try to make minimum use of time and utilise the balance for individual pursuits.

There are 10 Harijan houses. One Harijan boy has passed High School and at present is Secretary of the Gram-Panchayat. The group of Harijans whom we met stated that they had no special difficulties because of untouchability either in schools or other places of common usage. No Harijan girl could afford to go to school due to the economic plight of the family though social taboos do exist. In leisure hours the Harijan ladies do spinning work. Some of them manufacture 'Sirki' (for roofing the village huts). Some of Harijan families own cattle, sell milk and that has led to improvement in the attitude to untouchability. They take meals thrice a day; bajra soup is their main dish. Meat is a luxury which could be had only on festive occasions. Food is bare; spices are not much in use but butter milk is more common. Those who do not possess cattle, get milk or milk products which are likely to go waste from others.

There was a general discussion about the causes of frustration in the community. The 'Pradhan' of the Panchayat who was quite alive to the situation main-

tained that there have been considerable improvements in the rural area as indeed in the country as a whole. These were not visible because of the country's failure on the population front but even more so because there were many persons who are not politically in sympathy with those who have been responsible for the changes which have taken place. Our aspirations have increased but the corresponding productive effort to match them is not forthcoming: A constant decrying of country's achievement is also responsible for frustration. He was however convinced that the heart of the rural community, to the extent he could judge it, in his limited experience, was sound. He also felt that part of the worries that exist at present are inherent in our situation of shortages which provide easy targets for attack. We have since Independence acquired some thing, including political rights, which we have not been able to digest and some more are coming even when the experience of the earlier is not fully assimilated. But this is certainly a passing phase.

VILLAGE : NOWGAWAN

This village is about 22 miles away from Alwar. There is a Government farm of 175 acres; but the cultivable land in this farm is about 160 acres, the rest 15 acres is covered by buildings and roads etc. The manager of the farm, Sri Ram Charan Singh was present at the time of visit. The following permanent staff is employed in this farm.

Category of Staff	No.	Pay
1. Tractor Driver	2	Rs.105 + D.A. +20(Hard duty allowance)
2. Pump Driver	1	Rs. 75 + D.A.
3. Labourers	8	Rs.110/- (Consolidated)
4. Fieldman	1 (Vacant)	Rs. 60 + D.A.
5. L.D.C+cum Store-keeper	1 (Vacant)	Rs. 60 + D.A.

Besides there are about 400 casual workers engaged from time to time all round the year. Normally, at a time about 20 to 25 labourers work on the farm, but during the harvest they have to engage about 60 labourers. For casual labour the wages per day are Rs.2.31 P per day for men and Rs.1.50 to Rs.2.00 per day for women. During the peak harvesting season wages

go up to 3.50 to Rs.4.50 per day; at times labour has to be called from Ramgarh (a village 6 miles away) and that too by providing free transport. In this farm there are 2 tractors, 2 threshers, and 1 seed grader, and seeds are multiplied and distributed to cultivators through the Gram Panchayat. The rates of improved variety of seed are fixed by the Director of Agriculture, Rajasthan. Last year the wheat 's-227' was sold at the rate of Rs.2.50 per kilo. There is no electricity on the farm or in the village. Out of about 300 cultivators in the village about 15 are without land. The landless cultivators get 50 per cent of the crop as labour and other charges. Only 50 per cent of the cost of the seed is borne by the owner of land. In this village cycle was a common conveyance; 75% of houses owned a cycle. Some houses had Radio sets or transistors. There is a High School in the village. The education of girls is not popular in this village too.

The senior among the villagers who met us recognised that changes were coming to the village community albeit slowly. There is no sharp distinction between communities. Some of the benefits which have reached rural areas are even tangible though they are not as numerous as the rural communities have been aspiring for. They appear to feel that given sustained effort over a period and given some relief in terms of population pressure there could be even greater progress. The qualitative changes which have come up are even more substantial. The fact that persons with not much of education can say this and can analyse in their own way the situation in the country seems to be important.