

COOLIE:

The Story of Labour
and Capital in India

BY

D. CHAMAN LALL

VOLUME I.

ERRATA

- On page 5 line 5, instead of " a immensely " read " an immensely "
- " " 9 " 28, Rs. "32-15-7" " Rs. "21-13-10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
- " " 12 " 16, " 22,000 " " 2,20,000
- " " 35 " 37, "month" " "week"
- " " 44 last line opperession " "oppression"
- " " 66 second table, first line, instead of " Mear " read " Year "
- " " 68 line 33, instead of " 1934, " read " 1924 "
- " " 86 second marginal headline instead of " works, " read " work "
- " " 89 line 10, instead of "latter," read "later"
- " " 92 for the first set of figures substitute the following:—
1,4401,600 — 81,40,762 — 2,70,07,139.
- " " 118 line 16, instead of "living" read "a living"
- " " " last but third line instead of "take" read " I take "

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VOLUME I.

ORIENTAL PUBLISHING HOUSE, LAHORE.

FOREWORD

The word "Coolie" is derived from the original Tamil Kuli meaning "hire". Dictionaries describe the word as "the European's name for a hired native labourer in the East". For over a decade I have seen the grim spectacle of unrecounted misery in the hovels and factories of India where the "hired native labourer" is confronted with conditions bordering upon semi-slavery. This monograph is an attempt to share with the reader the truth about the working classes in India.

The Peasant and The Worker.

ON the eve of the Russian revolution of 1905, resolutions of various political groups ended with a quotation from Chekhov "Tak Zhit' Nielzie"—one cannot, one must not live such a life!

Recently in the northern Himalayas I was approached by a delegation of two hundred peasants who asserted, in bitter speech, that village after village was being deserted because they were unable to pay the heavy fines levied from them by the forest authorities for minor infractions of the forest laws. If a peasant was seen carrying a bundle of dry leaves to serve as fuel, he was fined. If his cattle penned up in a half acre plot on the hill-side, strayed towards the nearest boundary tree, he was fined. And it was not necessary that these infractions should, in fact, be detected. The evidence of a Forest Guard, demanding a bribe and being refused it, was sufficient to convict a peasant who, in one case, was hauled up before the Court for twenty such offences. On that very day there were four thousand cases pending before one magistrate alone in this small Himalayan town!

The court room was a wooden shed with a roof of corrugated iron. In one corner were the clerks scribbling away at the files. The old magistrate, a red-faced, bald-headed Englishman, did not conceal the fact that he, as Vice-Chairman of the Municipality, within whose jurisdiction these fines were being inflicted, should not be asked to deal with the cases of these peasants as it was the Municipality which stood to benefit at the expense of the peasantry. The Municipality was thus the prosecutor and the judge and its paid servants were the sole witnesses. "Let me give you a picture of the peasantry of these hills" said the magistrate, turning to me. "Most of them do not possess sufficient land upon which they and their families can even starve in decency. During the last twenty years the population has gone on increasing steadily but hardly an inch has been added to the land available for cultivation. I have told the authorities time and again, 'If you want the population, destroy the forest; if you want the forest, kill the people.' But nobody listens to me. What is the peasant to do? Either his small plot of land will just keep him or keep his cattle. He cannot do without his cattle. In a small way he supplies milk to the visitors and thinks he makes a profit. In reality he will borrow a hundred rupees to purchase a cow with from the money-lender and receive, in actual cash only seventy-five. And this at forty per cent. interest. Usually the money-lender stipulates that the peasant shall sell milk to him for

next to nothing until the debt is cleared. As a matter of fact, the debt seldom gets paid. For fodder the peasant steals grass from the forest. For fuel he gathers dry leaves or dead branches also from the forest. And when he is caught, he is fined. Where is he to get the money from with which to pay the fine? He would be prepared to pledge his wife, if he could raise the money. Cases of this nature have been known. But he can raise no more from the money-lender and as he can raise no more either he becomes a highway robber or disappears leaving no trace behind. Many of your industrial workers are thus fugitives from the villages and the law-courts."

And bit by bit the industrial population grows knocking at the factory gates, a population stricken with hunger, a population reckless and fugitive to whom life is the greatest ordeal and death a welcome release. The gates open upon these miserable hordes prepared to accept the lowest possible wage scourged by the lash of constant starvation and with fear of unremitting indebtedness.

The peasant and his ancestors have lived, through centuries of oppression hunger and disease, fear and nakedness. The heart of the peasant is full of distilled drops of bitterness. In his eyes, at the four corners of his small plot of land, stand: the Revenue official, the Landlord, the Money-lender and the Policeman; and these are the Four Horsemen who drag an emaciated carcass to the mortuaries which are the industrial towns of India.

The peasants presented me with a pitiful appeal. I give it in its own quaint language:—

Sir.

"With due request and humble submission we beg to lay the following few lines before you.

We have given an application regarding the troubles, which we are getting from the Municipal Committee Forester but up till now we have not received a reply.

Your humble petitioners are in great trouble because the Guards are always reporting against us. If we request the Higher authorities for justice they never take any favourable view of our requests.

Kindly have pity upon us and get justice done to us. If we offer evidence through reliable witnesses they still do not believe us and fine us without any fault. We are in great distress."

In the petition the peasants added that they were being "destroyed with fines" and asked me whether they should leave their villages and desert their homes.

Then followed sixty-one names giving the total number of 310 cases that had been filed against sixty-one peasants.

The delegation of peasants brought with them a Magistrate's order of conviction and presented me with an appellate judgement in order to prove their case.

"This is an appeal from an order convicting all the three accused under Section 42 of the Cattle Trespass Act, and sentencing them to a fine of Rs. 50 each.

"The story for the prosecution is that the *Daroga*, the Head guard, of Municipal Forests with four Forest Guards, on the 11th of September caught 21 head of cattle in a reserved forest, that he proceeded to drive them off when six were rescued by the three accused. The matter was reported at the police station the same day. The evidence consists in that of the *Daroga* and to the Forest Guards, all of whom tell the same story.

On appeal counsel asks me to find that the story is impossible because he would have me believe that three youths could not rescue animals from five big men.

"This argument has no weight when the character of the countryside is remembered. The difficulty of keeping together a mixed herd of cattle on the hill side and the vulnerability of such a procession to attack by stones which would separate the animals is evident. There is nothing even improbable in the story: All the witnesses have sworn to the identity of the culprits and their names were given in the First Information Report. Their defence has broken down and their counsel himself is unable to lay stress on the alleged alibi. There can be no question but that the conviction must stand. There remains the question and sentence. Yusaf and Dulla are both juvenile offenders being between 14 and 16 years of age. Dadu is over sixteen years of age. In the case of Dadu I reduce the fine to one of Rs. 20/- which is adequate and a severe fine where the holdings are small and the men are poor Yusaf and Dulla I order to be whipped as juvenile each to receive ten strokes this being a punishment less severe than a fine of fifty rupees.

Order pronounced.
District Magistrate."

27th June 1929.

About the same time Mahtma Gandhi published in his journal* a few typical cases to shew to the world what is happening in India to the peasant and the agricultural labourer. I record here four such cases in each of which the peasant speaks for himself.

"On 30-5-1929 I went to work in my field, leaving my house locked. During my absence the Circle Inspector and the Talati put their own lock on it. Since then up till now (3-6-29) I, my womenfolk and my children have been forced to wander homelessly and have been hard put to it to find the wherewithal to subsist. I have paid the first instalment of the levy due for the current. I have four and a half *Bighas* of

*Young India. 25th July 1929.

land (2 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres) but has not yielded any crop. I complained before the revenue officials at the *Chora* (village square) and begged them to remove the lock from our house but in vain. I have not even sufficient provision of grain with me. I have to feed my bullocks with bitter *Neem* leaves. I managed to eke out eight rupees doing hard labour and selling firewood to pay the second instalment of revenue. But it was diverted by the revenue officials to recover the *Tagari* due while the revenue due was still kept in arrears."

II.

"My brother has a holding of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ *bighas* in his name. To recover the balance of one rupee that was shown as due from him, his wife, who had hardly yet risen from her recent confinement, was turned out of doors while he was away from the village and their house put under lock. For the last three days since these events happened the poor woman has been depending even for food on the charity of her neighbours since she cannot have access to her own house."

III

"On 2-6-29 the Circle Inspector and the Talati visited the house of and found it locked. On being asked I told them that he had gone to Manipur. Thereupon, they got an axe from me and with it forced the lock of the house and effected entry into it. At first I had refused to supply them the axe for which they abused me and called me names. In the end they walked away with the broken lock leaving the house open."

IV

"While we were away from our houses the Circle Inspector and the Talati paid a surprise visit to our houses and demanded the payment of revenue from our womenfolk. The latter replied that the revenue would be paid when the men returned. But their expostulations went unheeded and they were turned out in the *Chora* where after being treated to threats and abuse they were ordered to remain. We returned at noon. On getting news of what had happened we managed to scrape together four rupees to pay up the revenue due and thus secured the discharge of our womenfolk."

It was John Bright who said. "If a country be found possessing a most fertile soil and capable of bearing every variety of production, yet notwithstanding, the people are in a state of extreme destitution, and suffering, the chances are there is some fundamental error in the Government of that country." What is this fundamental error? Each man must give an answer according to his own light, but no man should ignore the facts upon which a sound judgment can be based regarding evils which infest a society of 360 million people.

Where do the peasants and workers in India stand in the Indian social structure? It is no exaggeration to assert that generally they are born in debt, live in debt, and die in debt. When they have need of a loan they will obtain it on the security of a few silver ornaments possessed by their wives which they readily pledge with the money-lender. They pay an immensely high rate of interest. When the loan has to be paid back on the security of their crops it is common knowledge that unduly large proportions of the crop have to be handed over to the money-lender, who, in a period of two years, obtains generally produce worth three to four times the value of the original loan. It is poverty which is the cause of their indebtedness, and when the average cultivator, steeped in poverty, proceeds to obtain a loan his credit is small.

Mr. L. P. Jack, in an investigation in the district of Faridpur, found from his enquiries that the percentage of cultivators seriously involved in debt was the largest in the two intermediate classes of cultivators; those who lived neither in comfort nor in actual want. Naturally those who live in comfort will not remain in that blissful state for long: they are bound to gravitate down to the level of the peasant in want, but while the going is good, their credit is unimpaired. The peasant in want has no credit, except the credit that attaches to his able-bodied labour. What does he do with it? He pledges his body to the landlord until his real or assumed debt has been paid back, and in many cases it never is. A very large part of the agrarian debt in India is not capital borrowed but interest accumulated. The rate, according to one investigator, Panandikar,* varies from 24% to 75% and the highest known by this particular writer is 150%. When the peasantry is living from hand to mouth, when the holdings, as they are rapidly becoming, are uneconomical and when the income is insufficient from the land to support the family, there are but two things for the peasantry to do: migrate to the towns or borrow some more. In fact it may be taken as a general statement of fact throughout India that peasant families with an income of Rs.75/- per annum or less, which may be taken to be the average family income in India, are in debt. A survey of figures prepared by Mr. Brij Narain, the economist, for Gujrat, Konkan, Deccan, Karnatak and Sind, makes this particular fact abundantly clear. In the Deccan, a survey of the income of 103 families in a particular village gave the total income of Rs. 21,450 giving a family income of Rs. 218/- per annum. According to the census of this village the family unit consisted of 4.95. Nearly 5 members of a family divided the income of Rs. 218/- between them and had to feed and clothe and house themselves on an income per capita of about Rs. 40/- or roughly £3/- a year. And what do these families feed on? Coarse grain, a little wheat, pulses as substitute for vegetables, chillies, oil and spices, that is all. Food for man, wife and children of a family of 5 on this basis is reckoned at Rs.142-8 per annum, clothing for the family for the year is reckoned at Rs. 40-8- and incidental expenses at Rs/- 10. Other expenses for the whole year for a family of 5 may be taken as Rs. 19-8. And to all this must be added expenditure on social

*Wealth & Welfare of the Bengal Delta.

ceremonies, medicines etc. leaving a margin of Rs. 5-8 for a family of five for the the whole year. No wonder that almost everybody in India is living on the money-lender. We have it on good authority that the industrial worker, the recruit from the village who comes to the big industrial towns, is given food which is a famine ration and indeed less than the diet prescribed for the Bombay prisoners by the Gaol-Manual. One report says: "and the general conclusion is that the industrial workers consume the maximum of cereals allowed by the Famine Code and less than the diet prescribed by the Bombay Gaol Manual.*" The Gaol allowance is better and very much healthier than the allowance that is available even for an industrial worker in Bombay, who in his turn may be better off than the agricultural population in the villages.

Allied with this problem of the misery of the agricultural masses is the question of the present system of land tenure and the heavy incidence of taxation. I make this statement without fear of challenge that the average peasant in the villages is not different in his position, as it is today, to the ancient bondsman who was attached, according to the old Latin tag, to the land.

Let us take a typical example of a Deccan village and see how landlordism operates. Rent, according to an investigation held in this village, is paid in produce under what is known as the Barga system. The landlord gets far more in produce than he could otherwise get in cash. Let the author, Mr. Panandikar, *speak for himself:-

"The system is the result of the acquisition of landed property by tradesmen and money-lenders either by regular purchase or by foreclosures of mortgages, on the security of which loans have been advanced, the new occupants resettling the holdings at a high produce rent with the former occupants, who become dhakidars or bargadars without any occupancy rights and liable to ejection at will. In some cases a fixed amount of produce of these holdings has to be paid as rent; in other cases a fixed proportion of the produce. The former method is more pernicious than the latter, because a season of insufficient rainfall or of overflowing is sure to lead either to the immediate ruin of those cultivators, who have to pay a fixed amount of produce, or to their overwhelming indebtedness and ultimate ruin. According to the latter method, the landlords usually receive half of the produce, when jute is grown they take only 1/3 on account of the higher cost of producing jute, but they take 3/4 in the case of grass lands. However, in these cases also, the landlords have discovered a method of keeping the bargadars in their clutches. At the outset the latter are compelled to take loans from the landlords ostensibly for the purchase of cattle, implements and seeds, but really to make them remain on the land until the loans are repaid. The loans can be seldom

*Legislative Assembly Debates, P. 2125, 19th March 1929.

*Wealth & Welfare of the Bengal Delta.

repaid; the interest on them is paid to the landlords in the shape of an additional share of the produce, while the capital remains as a weapon in their hands to be used for keeping the bargadars permanently under subjugation. Another method of achieving the same object is to force the bargadars to deposit sums of money with the landlords, which are forfeited if the bargadars give up the land. On the whole, the bargadars do not form a distinct class. It is true that there are a few places in which they are largely landless labourers cultivating barga land only; but in the vast majority of cases they also cultivate land with regard to which they possess occupancy rights."

But this is not all. The rapacity of the landlord knows no limits. The landlord will charge levies from the tenants in addition to the rent. Numerous kinds of such levies are in existence in many parts of India. One of these consists of a premium on the transfer of a holding or on the creation of a new tenancy. For instance, when a holding is transferred, the landlord will take 15 to 33 per cent. of the purchase price of his holding as a premium. At the same time, it often happens that the landlord requires a condition to be laid down of service when a holding is transferred. Again, annual levies of various sorts are charged by the landlords. There is a levy for collecting the rent due to him, there is a levy for the upkeep of the landlord's agents. Such levies are known by various names; e. g. Tahori, Rashami, Mamuli, Rariaua, Tahsiliana, Sahana, Pyadgan, Rajdhuti. Frequently some two or three of these are imposed on the same plot of land, and the majority of them are assessed on the rent varying between one anna and four annas in the rupee; the others being assessed on the holdings. These are what are known as general levies. But lest the poor peasant should escape with some portion of the produce for his own benefit over and above the general levies, there are a series of special levies, most iniquitous in character, which are imposed upon the tenant. If a tenant wants a receipt for the payment of his rent, he must first pay a levy which is known as the Dakhila Kharach. Then there is a sort of a head-tax, Punya and Nazrana, at the rate of a rupee or more, per tenant, which the latter is forced to pay to the landlord. If the tenant is foolish enough to possess an allotment of his own in which he grows garden and farm produce, then the landlord extracts from him such produce by way of a special levy known as Bhet.

Forced labour is common, under which the tenants, for a certain number of days in the year, are forced to work for the estate of the landlord free of charge. These tenants must clear the jungle on the landlord's estate; they must plough his arable land; they must work in his orchards; they must excavate his tanks, dig his ditches, construct his temporary buildings; they must fetch and carry the material for permanent works, and one writer adds laconically that it is against this abominable system that the peasants complain most bitterly.

This is not the end of the toll. There are the ceremonial levies, which are exactions made by the landlord, it may be in money, commodity or

labour, from the tenants on certain occasions. The father of every bridegroom and of every bride has to pay to the landlord a marriage tax known as Sadiana and the rates differ from estate to estate or tenant to tenant, different classes being levied differently. Even in the so-called prosperous Province of the Punjab, when a survey was made of a village known as Kot Kapura, it was discovered that one-twentieth of the cultivable land in that village had been mortgaged, because the peasants could not get the wherewithal from it on which to live. Indeed holdings are becoming uneconomic generally.

In the month of August 1921 a gentleman in charge of the famine relief fund in the Kangra Valley wrote as follows of the peasantry of that part:—

“They take a seer or two of wheat or maize, mix it with about the same quantity of mango-stones and husk of rice and get the three powdered together and eat. Cholera, which is the natural concomitant of famine has reappeared. The power of resistance has gone, and the people have been obliged to live on leaves of various vegetables mixed with some sort of grain”.

This gentleman adds that one difficulty has been that the youngmen of those parts who died in the Great War left thousands of widows behind of good birth, who are being paid for having saved the British Empire, the handsome pension of three to four rupees a month. Recently, the soldiers of the Punjab organized themselves and marched in a body to the city of Lahore. In dealing with their case, I discovered that these ex-soldiers who had fought in the Great War and had lost a limb or two were, no doubt, generously provided with artificial limbs by the Army Department, but that they were given by that department pensions of five to six rupees a month. This was considered by the Army officials as fit subsistence allowance for the working classes of India. In the Report that I have just referred to of the famine stricken area of the Kangra valley, there was discovered the case of one aged Rajput who was supporting 15 widows in his family, widows of war heroes—on a total pension for all of Rs. 40/- a month. These were the widows of sons and nephews who were made cannon-fodder in the Great War and they said: “We cannot get more than 2 seers of rice per rupee in places.”

In 1917 a few philanthropic gentlemen gathered together to investigate the condition of the working classes of Madras under the able guidance of the late Rev. D.G.M. Leith. Rev. Leith arrived at the result that the cost of food for an adult male prisoner doing hard labour was Rs. 5-2-6 in a month of 30 days, and according to him the cost of feeding and keeping one man, his wife and two children for a month came to Rs. 23-10-3. Rev. Leith confessed that he was trying to discover not what a man needs in order to be comfortable, but what a man needs for the barest minimum in the city of Madras to maintain himself in physical efficiency so that from a purely physical point of view, he may be able to discharge his duty to the community “*without that starved, furtive look we so often see in the eyes of the Madras labourer today.*” I personally consider his

estimate to be very low because it is based on a standard of starvation versus subsistence. It is not necessary for me to point out that food, clothing, and fuel cost much more outside the prison, which buys in bulk, and that these items cost still more when the worker is in the hands of the unscrupulous money-lender, or of a shopkeeper who adds his 25 to 50 per cent. for the benefit of supplying goods on credit.

And how many of the working classes in India today are getting this minimum starvation wage? A note prepared on the Standard of Living of the Factory—workers in the Punjab, under the supervision of the Chief Inspector of Factories, states:—

“The inquiry shows that the lot of the industrial worker sadly needs improving, little or no provision being made for sickness and unemployment, whilst the average debt..... of Rs. 114/- per family, i. e. equal to 3.4 months’ full working pay, shows an unhealthy state of affairs.”

The average family unit is 4.18 according to these investigations. The average monthly expenditure comes to Rs. ~~21-3-10~~. More than half the income is spent on food. The majority of family budgets to which these figures relate are credited with incomes of less than Rs. 30/- a month.

Take the case of the Oil and Flour-Milling industry. The Oil Pressing industry is chiefly confined to the cotton seed bearing tracts where a market can be found for refined oil and seed cakes. The methods of extraction are primitive, but where this cottage industry has ceased to exist, machine presses worked by steam engines or oil, have been brought into use. The industry is perennial.

Flour-milling is usually carried on at the premises adjoining the oil extracting plants except in the larger factories. An investigation in Lyallpur showed that the average total monthly income of workers in oil and flour mills came to Rs. ~~11-7-1~~ and the following were the items of expenditure:—

21-13-15 ¹ / ₂	Food	Rs. 14- 5- 9
	Clothing	„ 2-10- 3
	Rent	„ 3- 0- 9
	Fuel and lighting	„ 1-12-11
	Household requisites	„ 0- 6- 1
	Tobacco, pan and drinks	„ 0-12- 0
	Feasts, festivals and religious observations	„ 0- 9- 6
	Education	„ 0- 1- 6
	Medicine	„ 0- 1-11
	Miscellaneous	„ 0-12- 7
	Total	Rs. 24- 9- 3

These are the averages. How vitiated some of these statements are in revealing the complete picture of the utter misery of the working classes is shown from the report on the Carpet Making Industry in the Punjab. This centres round Amritsar and in normal times operates 800 looms providing employment for 700 adult weavers and 1600 child workers i. e. boys under 15 years of age. Apart from Amritsar, carpet weaving in the Punjab finds employment for 200 adult workers and 600 child weavers. The wage figures that are used by the investigators are not taken of the child workers who are the principal employees but of the weavers who are more in the position of jobbers and purchasers of the child-slaves than actual workers. I use the word "child-slaves" deliberately. Presently I shall deal with their conditions of life and labour. We know from personal investigation that far from the average income, as has been reported, being as Rs. 31-3-8 per month the child slaves of these factories are earning 5 to 7 annas per working day which sums they do not receive but which are paid to the master weaver. Again information solicited from the Ajmer Marwar tract*, discloses the fact, according to the Chief Commissioner, that in a very large number of family budgets, the monthly expenditure exceeds the monthly wages earned and that the head of the family is indebted to the extent of several hundreds of rupees for which he pays an exorbitant rate of interest.

This is what the Chief Commissioner of Delhi states in a communication to the Royal Commission on Labour;*—

"Broadly speaking the food of the worker is poor and mostly consists of inferior quality of flour, pulses, rice, ghee and oil. He often shows a poor physique and appears content with the low standard of comfort. His clothing is often dirty. The industrial workers are mostly illiterate and have restricted facilities provided for their and their children's education. There is no co-operative organization in industries in this Province. There is neither any suitable provision for provident funds. The industrial worker is generally found in debt to the moneylender, who charges interest at exorbitant rates."

The question is never asked as to why the worker is content with his low standard of life. Is it that he wants it? Is it that he likes it or is it because he is powerless to arrest the machine which drives him down to the abyss?

Look at the weaving Industry of Ludhiana. In a statement prepared by the Director of Industries, Punjab,* it was discovered that the average monthly income of 13 families of weavers in Ludhiana was Rs. 21-5. The minimum monthly expenditure per family came to Rs. 21-10-11. Nine out of 13 workers

* Copy of letter No. 166-C-198-CC-30 from the Chief Commissioner of Ajmer Marwar to the R. C. on Labour.

* Copy of letter No. 10783 Industries, dated the 6th December, '30.

* Statement dated Lahore the 10th October, 1930, No. G. 120.

examined were in debt. Loss of business, unemployment and sickness accounting for 43.5% of the total indebtedness.

The normal monthly income of the coal miners at Dandot in the Punjab is stated in this communication, to be Rs. 19-9-9; and it is interesting to note that unemployment is stated by these workers, who are greatly in debt, to be responsible for 69.5% of the total indebtedness. In the Oil Milling Industry at Lyallpur, the normal monthly income is Rs. 19-8- and the normal monthly expenditure is Rs. 20-9. In the Aluminium Ware making industry at Gujranwala the normal monthly income is Rs. 20/- and the normal monthly expenditure Rs. 23-3-7. In the Flour Milling industry at Lyallpur the normal monthly income is Rs. 25-3-9 and the normal monthly expenditure Rs. 26-2-5. In the Printing Presses in Lahore the normal monthly income is Rs. 33-9-7 as against Rs. 39-11-6, the normal monthly expenditure. 60% of the indebtedness amongst the carpet workers in Amritsar is due to unemployment and sickness. If we take these figures at their face value, we cannot but conclude that they reveal the fact that the majority of the industrial workers in this province, and the tale is equally true of all the provinces in India, are living practically on a starvation diet and that even as it is the family groups whose incomes and expenditure have been quoted, are living beyond their means, although the items upon which they spend money provide for them the barest minimum of food, shelter and clothing.

The Agent, Burma Railway ends his statement to the Secretary, Railway Board, with a note to the following effect:*

"The average workman is continually in debt."

A report prepared by the Agent of the G. I. P. Railway on the standard of living of the workers on that railway states in regard to the workshop employees:—

"The wage earned in the workshops is the only income, and the men unskilled, are unable to earn any money outside on holidays, Sundays etc., and if any is earned it is very meagre. *These men have to remain content with simple food of inferior grain stuff. Milk and other similar things are very rarely purchased and the main items of their food requirements are rice and wheat or bejri (coarse grain)..... The renewal of clothing is not carried out at regular intervals due to want of funds and new clothing is purchased only, when absolutely necessary.* In a number of cases men are unable to pay even the monthly interest (on loans) with the result that after three years the interest in arrears is included in the capital. The interest then amounts to such an extent that the staff have to hand over the whole of their pay, on receipt, in settlement of the interest only and borrow fresh money for usual maintenance. In the case of low paid staff, debts are incurred to keep on with

*No.1C301 dated 8th October, 1931.

the usual expenses of living and in a very few cases debts are incurred for festivals and marriages. Sickness, including confinements, is an item for which debts are generally incurred.

This is the Railway whose administrative head, as we shall learn later, thought that Rs. 15/- a month in his opinion was a living wage!

The Commissioner of Coorg on the 13th of September, 1930, made a report (1) regarding typical working class families on the plantations in Coorg.

Here is the normal monthly family income of 3 men, a woman, a boy and a girl. The men get Rs. 10/- each, the woman Rs. 7-8, the boy Rs. 7/- and the girl, Rs. 2/- These six people divide an income of Rs. 46/8/- among themselves. In regard to this particular enquiry the food that is reckoned as the normal food for this family consists of—it must be noted carefully—rice, salt and pulse—and nothing else. Plantation workers do not know how to live. They know only how to die.

On the South Indian Railway, which is a company managed railway, there are 26,000 men whose income does not exceed Rs. 22,000/- p.m., and these constitute 65% of the total number of the employees. In fact 56% of the employees draw less than Rs. 15/- or else less than Rs. 20/- p.m. It is interesting to note that the average family unit of this class of worker is 5.78 and the report to which I am referring, states that it will be noticed that one wage-earner in the family is the most usual amongst these workers. Taking the case of those regarding whom the enquiry was made with incomes of Rs. 15/- and less a month, the average wage was discovered to be Rs. 13.47 and it was stated that as a rule a workman's family has no other income besides that of the head of the family. One hundred and sixteen families of this type were examined. Their total income was reckoned at Rs 1563/-; their total expenditure was reckoned at Rs. 2154/-. In the case of families earning between Rs. 16/- and Rs. 20/- a month, 73 families were examined. Their total income was found to be Rs. 1289/- and their total expenditure Rs. 1704/-. In the case of families earning Rs. 21/- and over a month, 94 families were examined. Their total income was Rs. 2653/- and their total expenditure Rs. 3008/-. The result was that of the families which earned Rs. 15/- and under, 85.34% of them were in debt. In the next class with incomes of Rs. 16/- to Rs. 20/-, 86.30% were in debt and in the last class with incomes of Rs. 21/- and over, 75.53% of the indebtedness was due to an insufficiency of income. And yet out of all these families of the total number of 283, in spite of the wolf of hunger which prowls round the door of their Bustees, (2) 23.3 rob themselves of food in order not to rob their children of education.

The same tale is discoverable in Bidi making establishments. A Bombay Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories, dated 6th October, 1930 states that these

(1) No. A-1-2767/29.

(2) Huts.

poor workers mostly women employed in 28 premises in Bombay have no fixed days or hours of work. They bring their supply of ready-cut "temburni" leaves and the shopkeeper supplies loose tobacco and thread. (Bidies are an indigenous type of cigarettes.) In ill-lighted, badly ventilated and over-crowded rooms this work is performed on miserably low wages.

Madras and the Central Provinces tell the same tale in regard to Bidi making. In Madras, for instance, the hours in these unregulated factories are 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. Men earn eight annas per day, women earn five annas per day and the children earn three annas per day.

Here too in Madras (1) taking the average income of families which earn less than Rs. 20/- a month, we find that the average income is Rs. 15-7-4 whereas the average expenditure is Rs. 18-5-6. Taking all groups we find 60.71% of the expenditure is laid out on food only, 3.84 on clothing, 8.39 on rent, 7.54 on fuel and lighting, 0.29 on household articles and 19.33 on miscellaneous expenses.

It is a terrible tale of want and misery on the one side and greed and indifference on the other.

Let us turn back to the peasant for a moment. In the large estates the burden of administration is felt by the peasantry until it becomes unbearable.

The author of "Wealth and Welfare of the Bengal Delta" states:—

"In most of the estates, the exactions are made by covert intimidation and there is no physical oppression. But in some of the largest and the most powerful estates overt intimidation is sometimes resorted to and illegal eviction, false criminal prosecutions, fortuitous fines and the destruction of homesteads by means of elephants are the methods employed for this purpose. The most powerful landlords maintain a number of village headmen and peons, whose pay consists of a share of the proceeds of the illegal levies which they help to collect. But besides these, a few of the more unscrupulous landlords have been in the habit of maintaining a body of clubmen called *lathials* and of employing them for crashing, by physical force, any opposition on the part of the tenants. (2)

What is happening in India to-day is that these bonded slaves are providing the industrial population of the big towns, exchanging one slavery for another, carrying their slave traditions with them. Had they been free men, would they not have taken steps to break this chain of economic serfdom;?

This is, in reality, what every official and employer means when it is alleged that "the Indian worker has no desire to improve his standard of life." India is a land of serfs tied to the field or the factory.

I would like here to give the verbatim report of the examination of two women working in the Imperial city of Delhi.

(1) Supplementary Memorandum from the Madras Government.

(2) pp. 192-193.

This is what Para and Kallie, representative women workers of New Delhi, stated before the Royal Commission on Labour:- (1)

"Mr. Clow: What is your name?...My name is Para. My name is Kallie.

"What is your occupation?... (Para) I am a gardener. (Kallie) I am a syce. (2)

"From which district do you come?...Jaipur.

"What wages do you get?...Seven annas a day.

"Does your husband also work?... (Para) My husband is disabled and cannot therefore work. (Kallie) My husband is an old man and does not work. I have four children and get 7 annas a day: I find it difficult to maintain the family.

"Sir Alexander Murray: What is your age?

"Mrs. Chatterjee: She cannot say. Generally they do not know.

"Sir Alexander Murray: What are the ages of your children?...One daughter of 13 and one of 11, a boy of 9 and another of 5.

Do any of them go for work?...No.

"Diwan Chaman Lall: Why not? Does not the girl of 13 go for work?...No, she cannot go to contract work at that age. Even when we do work we are sometimes thrown out.

"How much do you owe to the bania? (3)...I owe Rs 200/-to the bania. All that debt has fallen on my shoulders because my husband is very old and my children are minors.

"What interest do you pay?...Two pice (4) per rupee per month.

"How do you pay the interest?...If any balance is left after meeting the household expenses I pay, otherwise not. To enable me to pay to the bania I have cut down my food. (Para) I also owe Rs 200/-to the bania.

"What did you eat this morning?...One sukki chapati(5)with one green chilli.

"Was it a thick one?...Yes.

"Do you take milk and ghee (6) in your diet?...No.

"Do you take dal?(7)Yes, sometimes, not every day. How can I get dal every day when I am so poor?

"Diwan Chaman Lall: Does anybody other than your family members live in your hut?... No.

"What rent do you pay?...12 annas a month. (Kallie) In my hut also no outsider lives.

"Who built the hut, was it you or the employer?... We ourselves built the hut.

(1) R.C. on Labour Vol. 11, Part 11 P. 158.

(2) Groom.

(3) Money-lender.

(4) $37\frac{1}{2}\%$

(5) Dry unleavened bread.

(6) Clarified butter.

(7) Pulse.

"Do you know that you actually owe Rs200/-to the bania?...No, we maintain no accounts; it depends upon the bania.

"How long have you been working in Delhi?... (Kallie) 3 years. (Para)1½ years.

"Did you work on the same kind of work before you came to Delhi?...Yes.

"Where was it?...In Jaipur.

"What wages were you getting there?...We were getting grain wages.

"Did you make any representation to your employer that you should get more wages?...7annas is the fixed rate and we accepted the fixed rate which was given. Who is going to give us more than 7 annas?"

There are five hundred thousand villages in India and less than forty towns with a population of over a hundred thousand inhabitants. Over ten per cent. of the population lives in urban areas.

Even the Statutory Commission's Report (1) was forced to admit that "the Indian peasant who goes to some busy centre of activity to supplement his income, lives there under conditions which are almost unimaginable to the British working man". For instance, Karachi, a beautiful city, as far as the middle classes go, well administered, clean, sanitary, is typical of the contrast which strikes the eye throughout India between the middle-class and the working-class. Just outside the limits of the Municipal area, in two slum-quarters lives one-fifth of the population of Karachi. Nearly 10,000 families of workers or 50,000 human beings live in these areas. It was the Chairman of the Municipal Corporation, Karachi who asserted that it would be correct to say that in these quarters "there is no housing" (2). Four stakes dug into the ground and connected with bamboo shoots at the top, the entire structure covered with ordinary reed matting—such are the habitations of the working classes. There are quarters, where the workers dig trenches in the ground and live like "rats". Even so are thousands of workers living in the great Imperial city of Delhi; whereas the census of 1921 reported that 7% of the tenements in Bombay were classified as consisting of only one room inhabited on an average by 4.03 persons.

Indeed, the Statutory Report does not exaggerate in this respect. But there is one point to be remembered when emphasis is laid upon the agricultural importance of India and its inhabitants. India is a very important industrial country standing in the comity of nations fifth among the great industrial countries of the world with an industrial population of over (estimated very low) 20 million inhabitants. Even in the agricultural province of the Punjab with a population of 25 millions, if the census figures are carefully examined, it will be discovered that out of 25 million souls there are at least 3 million industrial workers and 3 million persons dependent upon these industrial workers. And if we include in this category also the number of domestic servants and transport workers as "industrial workers", then.

(1) Vol. 1, p. 21.

(2) B. C. on Labour Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 35.

practically half the population of the Province must be reckoned as industrial workers or their dependents. This being true, therefore, of the Punjab, how much more true would it not be of the provinces which are not predominantly agricultural. Although it is correct that 90% of the population of India lives in the villages, it does not necessarily follow that 90% of the population is agricultural. Nearly half the population of India, reckoned on the basis I have taken, lives on industrial enterprise.

Let us now see how the industrial workers thrive in the towns and villages of India.

Slavery is the key-note of industrial life in India. We do not have to look to countries like Liberia or Abyssinia to find forms of child slavery. We have it here in the heart of India. Not long ago a well-known public man, in the days when he was working as a school-master, discovered that, in the house adjoining his own, a large number of children used to be drafted in every day and that sometimes at night he used to hear their pitiful cries, which gave him no rest. He thought that the adjoining house was a school and that it was his duty as a school-master to report to the authorities regarding the cruelties that were being inflicted upon innocent children. When enquiries were made, it was discovered that the adjoining house was a Lace Factory in which little children of tender age were made to work unheard of hours and it was when they were tired and when their heads bent in sleep over their work that the kind-hearted factory owner would come with his whip and wake them up thinking that their cries and their tears were an aid to their industrial education. The name of this public man was the Right Hon'ble Srinivasa Sastri P. C. When Mr. Sastri arrived with the Royal Commission on Labour in the town of Amritsar, he visited, along with the other members of the Commission, the Carpet Weaving Factories owned by Greeks and Anglo-Indians, where some of the most beautiful reproductions of ancient carpets were made with the labour of children whose ages were as low as five years. Mr. Sastri discovered on his rounds a man carrying a ledger under his arm. When the ledger was examined the following entry was discovered:—*

"I, Boota son of Chakli, chowkidar of Amritsar owe Rs. 57/- of which half is Rs. 28/8/- which I have borrowed from Bootee weaver in advance. I agree that my grandsons N and F should be handed over for carpet-weaving, N to get Rs. 9/- and F to get Rs. 7/-. I will take the wages monthly. I will not break the agreement. If I break this agreement, I will return all the money which I have borrowed to the man from whom I have borrowed".

The agreement was dated 2nd October, 1929-

This is what is euphemistically called the pledging of children. Apart from the wages fixed, which are not paid to the children, there is no agreement as to the

* R. C. on Labour Vol. 11, Part 2, p. 92.

number of hours the children are to work, the period for which they are to be sold into the factory, the holidays that they are to get, for the simple reason that the hours of work are unlimited, that there are no holidays given and that the children remain in the factory until death or sudden disappearance offers them release. Suppose the children run away from the factory. The gentle persuasion that is used to bring them back is by means of a cane with which they are beaten. Eventually either the children die in the course of their employment or grow up and when strong enough to take independent action, run away from this slavery.

Mr. Stevens, one of the proprietors of this concern in which such conditions prevailed, admitted that he had lived for six years in the town and yet was unaware of the basis of employment and as to how these boys are recruited(1).

A master-weaver is sent to engage workers. Money is advanced to this master-weaver by the proprietor, out of which again he gives advances to such indigent parents who are unable to support their children and are only too willing to receive a small sum in lieu of pledging their progeny for work in a carpet factory.

The position is this, that the advances are paid to the parents or the grandparents but the child himself has no lien on any wages which might accrue to him in the course of his employment; and when the proprietor was asked whether it would be correct to say that this state of affairs was more or less employment of slave labour, he did not see it in that light at all. In fact he waxed indignant and said that he did not see why he should be taxed with employing slave labour (2). This particular gentleman when taxed with the violence that is employed against these children passed it off lightly saying that he saw no harm in it and that he too was sometimes slapped, when he was a child. He was immediately asked whether, as a child, he was ever sold into the factory as these children were being sold into his factory. He would not admit it and would not reply to the question whether they were free labourers who had joined work in the factory of their own accord. The Chairman of the Royal Commission clinched the argument by saying: "Would it not be fair to call it a mediaeval apprenticeship?" However, Mr. Stevens admitted that he did not know whether the weavers thrashed their boys or not, but that in his factory this did not happen, although he saw no harm in slapping their faces. Such conditions no doubt could be reproduced in the smaller unregulated factories throughout India.

Back again to the peasant.

Overpressure on the soil, unequal distribution of wealth and heavy burdens imposed upon the cultivators are the factors which are dragging the peasant masses towards the precipice of starvation. The total cultivated area in British India amounts to 660 million acres. The total number of cultivators is about 193 million, representing about 35 million families. The average holding per head is 34 acres.

(1) R. C. on Labour Vol. 11, part 11, p. 93.

(2) Addendum Vol. 2 part 2, R.C. on Labour.

An enquiry into agricultural wages in the Bombay Presidency furnished statistics to shew that in that Presidency there were $2\frac{1}{4}$ million holdings, out of which over a million were of less than 5 acres. On the other hand over 3,000 holdings, owned by the wealthier classes, were on an average of more than 500 acres. Prof. K.T. Shah declares in "Wealth and Taxable Capacity of India"* that in the three provinces of Bengal, Bihar & Orissa, and Assam the holdings of the wealthier classes, on an average, amount to 400 acres, although, in Bengal, the average size of a holding of the smaller cultivator is hardly 3 acres. Professor Mukerjee states that one-third of the wealth of India is enjoyed by about one per cent. of the population, another one-third is enjoyed by 33 per cent. of the population, while sixty per cent. of the people of British India enjoy about 30 per cent. of the total wealth produced in the country. This figure of sixty per cent. of the population of India represents the poorer classes of the peasantry. In fact it has been estimated that the agricultural production of British India gives an annual income of Rs80/- to Rs 90/- per head, although for the peasant masses this figure would work out to a great deal less than this. And in this connection it must be remembered that there are at least 25 million persons who are merely agricultural wage-earners, and that out of a total number of 100 million of actual workers in agriculture in India, at least fifty million should be working as wage-earners from four to eight months in the year, as stated by Mr. N.M. Joshi in his pamphlet on the Trade Union Movement. Seventy five million wage-earners in agriculture are living on the verge of starvation. These are the grim facts which are plunging the peasantry into the vortex of discontent and driving hordes of starving workers from the villages into the towns.

To-day we are witnessing great upheavals amongst the agrarian population, in many centres in India—a population which can fall back upon no reserves, which is suffering from pauperization and from the distress caused by parasitic land-ownership, high taxation, rack-renting and usurious exactions, most definitely feudal in character. This upheaval has no doubt been accentuated by the political agitation in the country led by the Indian National Congress. Whatever might be said of individual members of the Congress in close touch with the agrarian situation, it must not be understood that the Congress, as a body, has any desire to propound radical measures for the relief of agrarian distress. In one of the areas recently roused, when the landlords attempted to realise their dues, some of them were attacked and actually murdered by the peasantry. The Indian National Congress organization held a Conference which passed the following resolution:-

"The Conference directs the District Congress Committees.....to approach the landlords and to persuade them to give fair remission in rents, to stop further ejections and to reinstate the ejected tenants on payment of the fair rent. The Congress further directs these Committees to render help to the landlords in realising rent according to the settlement arrived

at with the Congress. This Conference appeals to the landholders not to adopt illegal means for the realization of rents and not to eject tenants as far as possible.

“This Conference advises the tenants that they should not harbour feelings of antagonism and hatred towards the landlords and that in view of the fact that owing to the Gandhi-Irwin settlement, the no-rent campaign has been stopped, they should in spite of difficulties duly pay the rents fixed by the Congress after arriving at an understanding with the landholders.”

Further in a statement issued by one of the leaders, this is what was said:-

“.....it is our sincerest desire to make it possible for the taluqdars (1) to realise the maximum possible rent, but we cannot do the impossible, that is, make the peasant pay a sum which he does not have...we did not, in spite of our greatest effort, succeed in making the peasant pay the full amount even of the reduced demand. But we did, however, succeed in bringing about a more friendly atmosphere to pay as much as they could We challenge the Government to prove that the present tardiness in payment is due to Congress..... The Congress has been trying its best to keep down violence..... On several occasions cases have happened in which being highly provoked by the landlords, the tenants had gathered to retaliate, but the Congress volunteers dispersed them.....The District Congress Committee of Rae Bareilly have issued several hand-bills advising the Kisans (2) to pay”.

The plain significance of these statements is that there is no attempt made to get at the root of the evil which is destroying the peasant masses in India or sapping their vitality. Even the Governor of the United Provinces, Sir Malcolm Hailey, has been forced to admit that the system of landlordism prevailing in his Province has in reality broken down. It cannot, however, be said that there is anything in the programme of the Government or of the Congress which can be of radical assistance to the peasant masses in India. Although it is undoubtedly true that the no-rent campaign was directed against the Government, yet it was not directed against a system under which the peasants eke out their miserable existence in India today.

Not only is action taken by the landlord against tenant, but recent events have shewn that certain officials are in league with the landlords in certain parts of India and have been actually instigating them to take what amount to forcible measures for the recovery of their dues. This is a very serious reflection on certain officials, whose administration should have been above reproach; and in this behalf I can do no better than reproduce the following circulars issued by the

(1) Big Estate-holders

(2) Peasants

Deputy Commissioner of Rae Bareilly:—

“Confidential”.

“D. O. 12/6.

Deputy Commissioner's Office,
Rae Bareilly, 10-6-1931.

My dear.....,

“It is proposed to prosecute certain agitators of the.....police circle. I shall be obliged if you will kindly give all possible help topolice.

“Will you please issue instructions accordingly to your agents, i. e. Managers, Zileedars etc?

“Any objectionable activities of the Congress or Kisan Sabha (1) or Panchayats (2) directed either against Landlords or Government, should be likewise reported at the.....thana(3).

“You should direct your employees to act promptly and energetically and fearlessly in this matter.

Yours Sincerely”.

“D.O. No. 11.

Deputy Commissioner's Office,
Rae Bareilly, 19-6-31.

My Dear.....,

“I find that the balance outstanding against you on account of *khariif* arrears and *rabi* demand excluding remissions granted by Government is Rs..... This is a very large amount. In view of the special difficulties of the year, I have already allowed you sufficient time. I shall be grateful, if you will kindly pay up at least half of this balance by the end of this month—the rest thereafter as soon as possible.

“I think I have already explained to you how you can expedite your collections of rents. I am prepared to give you all legitimate assistance. If there are any villages in your estate, where collections are at a standstill, not for economic reasons, but on account of the ‘nonpayments of rent propaganda’, you should be well advised to institute arrears of rent suits without any delay against a few refractory tenants i. e. tenants who can pay an appreciable portion of their rents, but do not, and apply for attachment before judgment. If the revenue staff needs police protection in execution of the legal processes, it will be given and you can utilize this opportunity and the presence of the revenue staff and the police in the villages to push on your collection.

“This experiment has proved very successful in the estates of those landlords who have followed my advice. But you will have to act promptly. It would

-
- (1) Peasant Unions.
 - (2) Village-Councils.
 - (3) Police Stations.

also be advisable for you to supervise collection work personally instead of leaving it to your employees, who are only too ready to find pretext for their inactivity.

"Please treat this letter as confidential.

Yours sincerely."

Soon after these circulars were issued, inviting the big landlords to take strong action against the peasants and promising official assistance to them in these measures, orders were issued under Section 144, Criminal Procedure Code, against those workers who were trying to assist the working classes in the area which had been badly affected by the slump:—

"Order under Section 144, Cr. P. C.

"Whereas it has been made to appear to me that in view of the present agrarian situation and the tension between the landlords and tenants in the District, it is not desirable that you should make any speech or utterance or carry on any propaganda among tenants as it is likely to culminate in disorder, I, S. L. Dar I. C. S., District Magistrate, Rae-Bareilly, order you..... under section 144, Cr. P. C. to abstain for a period of two months from making any speech or utterance or attending any meeting or disseminating any leaflet or collecting subscription or doing anything in writing whatsoever on the present agrarian or political situation in the District in connection with any propaganda directly or indirectly connected with the agrarian, political or labour problems.

"Given under my hand and seal of the Court this 10th Day of June 1931.

District Magistrate,
Rae Bareilly."

Fortunately this circular, after a great deal of agitation, was withdrawn by the official concerned.

Mahatma Gandhi quoted a report, that he had received, in which it was stated that illegal and coercive methods were being freely used against the tenants. The report adds: "To give only a recent case, day before yesterday a tenant was admitted to the Civil Hospital, Rae Bareilly who has lost his eye and broken his nasal bone as the result of an organised attack by the Taluqdar's (landlord's) party on the villagers, for rent. A pregnant woman was beaten, the other day, till she became unconscious. Her case is before the Court. There is generally a feeling amongst the Taluqdars that short of breaking the head or bone, they can, with impunity, beat the tenants to any extent, and the Government will connive at it. Taluqdars plan regular raids with a dozen or more armed men on villages for realising rent. They abuse, beat and terrorise the kisans (peasants). The practices of making the tenant stand in the sun till he collapses, giving a thorough shoe-beating in the presence of the whole village are very common, yet very humiliating and are creating serious distress among the tenants. It is also a common practice, with Taluqdars of this type, to seize the property of a kisan and to credit it to his rent without

any reference to any court of law. We know of cases where bhusa (fodder) belonging to a tenant has been taken possession of and carried to the Taluqdar's residence by force, cattle have been similarly dealt with, ornaments on the person of boys snatched away, children beaten to compel payment of rent by the father".

What will this terrorism lead to? The sands of time are running fast in India.

I have given a brief conspectus of the industrial and agrarian problem facing the future Government of India. It is a problem essentially of poverty. It is a problem of an outworn system which has outlived its usefulness, if ever it possessed any. It is a problem of facing with courage the realities of the situation, realities which are fraught with the gravest danger to ordered progress, realities which shew up the contrast between great opulence on the one side and grinding poverty on the other.

So long as it is possible for the peasant and industrial masses to subsist even on the starvation level, it might be true that there may not arise any cause to believe that disaster is at hand, but world economic factors and the general growth of political consciousness are inevitably bound to lead to disastrous clashes unless imagination and intelligence are brought to bear upon the future relations of the governing power with the industrial and peasant classes in India. In India today the struggle is not primarily political: it has definite economic roots. No man can foretell the end of this struggle between the millions who are hungry and the few who possess all the riches that they need and all the joys and comforts that riches can purchase.

India is faced with an acute crisis of general unemployment. More than ten years ago in view of action that had to be taken by the Government of India in regard to the International Labour Convention, passed at Washington, enquiries were instituted throughout India in order to discover the extent of unemployment prevailing amongst industrial workers. In general, the method adopted was to circularise various officials and Government Departments, demands for information and, as no statistical information was available, the inevitable result was that department reports stressed the War period stringency of labour for Industrial purposes. Conditions have changed most radically during the post-war period and the story in every industrial centre is of acute unemployment. No centre in India is free from this malady. Large bodies of men are wandering for jobs that they can never find, and there are larger bodies of men who suffer because of acute under-employment. Together with this, new rationalisation schemes in industries have thrown thousands of men out of employment and now with the menace of retrenchment on railways, tens of thousands of workers have been summarily discharged. As to what is to happen to these workers seems to be nobody's concern in India. The Government of India, in times of famine, it has to be borne in mind, makes very inadequate provisions under the Famine Code for giving relief in famine-stricken areas by attempting to find work where no work is available in the rural districts. The theory adopted by the Government in regard to the unemployed in industrial areas is that, considering that industrial workers are

members of agricultural tribes, they must inevitably migrate to their village homes when no work is available for them in towns. This is not only an erroneous picture of Indian life, but it is a picture completely divorced from the realities of the Indian situation. Whether it is the Oil Industry or the Steel Industry or the Coal Mining Industry or the Cotton Industry or the Jute Industry, we see everywhere in India thousands upon thousands of workers wandering about the streets, hungry and unable to provide for themselves. The majority of them have really no homes to go back to in the villages.

Insurance against unemployment is provided for them, not by the Government, not by the employer, but by some less indigent relatives or else by the money-lenders. Whenever I asked questions of Government officials throughout India, I was faced with the stock reply that there really was no industrial unemployment in the country. Such officials, generally speaking, were impervious to facts and statistics relating to the industrial life of the working classes. A representative of the Central Provinces' Government was asked by me whether it was an accepted principle of his Government and of the Central Government that when in times of scarcity a worker has no means of subsistence, the State would come to his assistance. I was told that the schemes in regard to famines provided that if a man is willing to work he should not starve practically; but if he refuses to work, the Government refuses to feed him. This applied to the rural population. In regard to industrial workers no such schemes were available. He was asked to suppose that if it is proved beyond any shadow of doubt, that there is a certain measure of unemployment among the industrial workers, would the Government consider it a duty, under the Famine Code, or as part of its duty towards humanity, to make arrangements for the subsistence of the unemployed? And the reply received was that it would be impossible for the State to undertake an obligation of that nature. But he would not admit, when it was put to him, that the attitude of the Government was that it does not matter at all whether the industrial worker, who is out of employment, starves or does not starve, adding that the Government must wait until it is proved that the industrial workers are actually starving.

Now how does the Government in India endeavour to find out whether the industrial worker, out of a job, is actually starving or not?

In the Punjab, a committee was set up on the 16th February, 1927, to report on unemployment in the province. Replies to enquiries were received from about twenty individuals and associations; the rest of the evidence was derived from the Deputy Commissioners, and in sixty lines this Committee dismissed the question of unemployment by stating that the replies received from the Deputy Commissioners confirmed the view that there was no unemployment worth mentioning among the uneducated classes.*

Just about that time the following telegram was sent to His Excellency the Governor of the Punjab from Baghpur in the Rohtak District in the Punjab:—

*Report on unemployment, 1928, P. 74.

"This public meeting of the peasants and labourers of village Baghpur draws the attention of the Government to the serious famine conditions existing in the district."

The newspapers also at this time were ringing with stories of suicides throughout India among those who were unable to obtain employment.

The Ahmedabad Textile Brotherhood were examined on their memorandum in which they stated that they were not in favour of unemployment insurance in India. They were asked whether any census of unemployment had ever been taken in Ahmedabad; they admitted that no such census had ever been taken nor had any scientific enquiries been instituted into the prevalence of unemployment in Ahmedabad and that it was merely their own personal information that there was no unemployment in Ahmedabad, unfortified by any statistics.

I make bold to say that under-employment to-day affects more than 80% of the industrial workers and that more than 40% of the industrial population is actually unemployed.

In Bombay alone, if we take the figures of the workers for the year 1927-28, out of every four employed there was at least one who was unemployed. In this Province the Provincial Government was approached by the Central Government in regard to the question of the existence of unemployment and the necessity for providing labour exchanges, and, although years had elapsed, since the first report, it stated, *ex cathedra*, that there was no material change from 1921 and, therefore, no necessity to revise its verdict in regard to the institution of any machinery for dealing with the subject of unemployment. When the representative of the Local Government was pressed to state the evidence on which he based this information, the reply was that it was on "general information, it could not be based on statistics, because there were none". And yet the Government of Bombay in its memorandum states* that there does exist a certain amount of unemployment amongst those working in the Textile industries, and farther that the demand for labour has not kept pace with the supply. Although the facts are staring officials and employers in the face regarding the wide-spread prevalence of unemployment, yet because of the lack of pressure from the organized labour movement and the evident existence of pressure from the vested interests, which clamour for protection for their dividends, no action is taken to alleviate the miseries of the starving and the unemployed. Recently about 33,000 employees on the Railways, with one stroke of the pen, have been discharged in India. Under the law a request was made by me to the Government of India to set up a Board of Conciliation for the purpose of settling the disputes that had arisen in regard to the discharges and other matters connected with the service conditions of railway employees. This request was turned down after having been kept pending for about a year. A few days after this refusal (1931), there was a strike in an Engineering College.

* Memorandum of Govt. of Bombay, P. 13, to the R. C. on Labour.

which college is administered by the Government, of 49 Muhammadan students, and obviously because the Punjab Government had to depend upon the assistance of the reactionary leaders, an enquiry was immediately ordered into the allegations made by these students. Political pressure succeeded in this case, but the pressure exerted by the labour movement for taking a humane view of the miseries of the working class population in India failed to move the bureaucracy, thus sowing the seeds of danger in the industrial centres.

In fact the attitude adopted by various Governments in India is amply exemplified by the attitude of the representatives of the Local Government for the United Provinces, who, giving evidence before the Royal Commission, stated as follows:—*

“The labourer’s outlook is extremely narrow and produces in him an outlook to look upon his lot as one ordained by the fates and therefore not capable of much improvement by his personal exertion. Such a cramped outlook on life and fatalism help to perpetuate in the industrial centres the conditions which obtain in the rural areas and seriously handicap the reforming efforts of Government, the employers and private organizations”.

Mr. Shah was asked whether he could exemplify the reforming activities by his Government in regard to the amelioration of the lot of the working classes in his Province and when he was hard put to it to discover these efforts he stated that it would require a little thinking over the matter, but he could give instances of reforming efforts of other Governments. Category by category he was taken through the gambit of all the ameliorative measures; sanitation, housing, minimum wages, unemployment, sickness insurance; and he could point to nothing that had been done by the Local Government of any substantial value. But such representatives were prolific in making charges against the working class. This particular representative added:—

“Owing to the strong inclination of the workman to cling to his habits even when his environment has changed and to the migratory nature of a large proportion of industrial labour the reforming efforts of Government, public bodies, local boards and employers were slow to bear fruit, and the incentive to action for the improvement of the conditions under which industrial workers live and work is weakened.”

So that we have here fatalism of the worker, his habits and his environments, (but no lack of desire on the part of the employer, and of the local bodies and of the Government) which stand in the way of improving the conditions of degradation in which he lives.

Pressed to justify such remarks this particular representative could do no more than fall back upon the following statements:—

*Paragraph 14 of the memorandum by Mr. Shah.

(1) That the worker still continues to use the open space where Municipal latrines were provided.

(2) That he would not make use of sanitary wells for the supply of drinking water.

(3) That he would not keep his ventilator open to get fresh air.

(4) That he is careless regarding the disposal of refuse and rubbish.

(5) That he is so ignorant that he will stick nails into the walls of his little room and thus damage the place.(!!!)

Such were the illustrations on which these baseless charges against the working classes were made and justification was sought for the criminal inactivities and heartless indifference of the authorities. What is to be the end of it all?

India has had a middle class revolution. From 1851 to 1931, we may say that it was generally a period of upheaval and that the upheaval was the creation of the bourgeoisie. The worker and the peasant in India to-day are becoming class conscious. In 1921 Sir Louis Kershaw visited India on a mission sent out by the Secretary of State for India, in order to obtain information regarding industrial and labour conditions. Ten years ago he asked me whether it was true that the labour movement was shot through with Bolshevism. I said "No"; but that all the conditions were in existence in India, excepting one, such as prevailed in the Russia of the Czars. There is the same grinding poverty; there is the same cold indifference; there is the same tyranny and oppression. But there is lack of those leaders who alone would be capable of rousing the workers to white heat of anger in an economic struggle. Ten years have justified this statement. But the times are rapidly changing. Peasant revolts are becoming the order of the day. Industrial strife is becoming more and more bitter. The peasant is refusing to pay his rent. The industrial worker is refusing to be made a door's mat for every foot to wipe on. The year 1931 opens with reports of peasant action against money-lenders in the Central Provinces, where in several cases the peasants took the law into their own hands and burned down the houses and shops of the money-lenders, and in the United Provinces where they have taken to a steadfast refusal to pay rent, going even so far as, in some cases, to murder the landlord. A Frankenstein has been raised in India and there is no knowing how far its shadow will spread throughout the length and breadth of this country.

Tale of The Gunny-Bag.

Calcutta is a city of great contrasts. There is the marble city of the multi-millionaires, magnificent in its opulence, and there is the mud-plastered hovel-city of the starving workers driven, desolate and full of despair. It is out of the sweat of these modern slaves, earning, a quarter of a million of them in the jute industry, about six shillings a week (Rs1/-) that the great opulence of Calcutta has been built up. A handful of rice, occasionally the taste of a vegetable—that is what these workers feed on and give to their employers the efficiency and labour demanded of highly technical modern power-machinery. And yet Calcutta of the cock-tail and the jazz-band never hears the wail from the mud-hut—its ears are stuffed with gold.

The Magistracy of Bengal reckons the money-value of a jute worker's life at Rupees twentyfive (less than £. 2). The Magistracy of Bengal is not far wrong.

WOMAN COOLIE ELECTROCUTED.

Mill Manager to Pay Rs. 50/-.

Calcutta, Nov: 6.

There was a sequel to the death of a woman coolie when D. Scrimgeour, manager of the Hanuman Jute Mills, Ghursuri, was prosecuted before Mr. B. K. Banerjee, Deputy Magistrate of Howrah, under the Electricity Act.

It was alleged that on August 20 last, a woman worker named Kanti was killed by coming in contact with the loose ends of a live electric wire in the mill.

Accused did not report this accident to the Bengal Government Electrical Inspector on whose complaint two charges were made against the accused.

The Magistrate held that the accused had violated the rules prescribed by the Government and sentenced him to pay a fine of Rs. 25/-or, in default, to one week's rigorous imprisonment.

On the second charge the Magistrate observed that the very fact that Kanti met her death coming in contact with a live wire showed that it had not been rendered harmless as required by the rules, and sentenced accused to pay a fine of Rs. 25/-.*

*Extract from the Daily Press.

The following figures have been worked out for a few hundred jute workers in the Mills in Calcutta, of whom 211 were Bengalis, 148 Hindusthanis and 8 Ooriyas. These were prepared by Mr. F. C. Griffin, A. M.I.C.E., Chief Engineer, Public Health Department. Bengal.*

Diet survey of Industrial Labour in Bengal.

Average quantity per head.

(A chattak is the equivalent of 2 ounces).

Foodstuffs.	Bengalis.	Hindusthanis.	Ooriyas.
	Jute mills (211 workers).	Jute mills (114 workers)	Jute mills (8 workers).
	Chattaks.	Chattaks.	Chattaks.
Rice	9	8	11 $\frac{1}{2}$
Atta	1/3	2.1/5	nil
Dal	1/4	2	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
Fish	2/3	1/5	1,1/7
Meat	1	1/5	1/3
Eggs	nil	1/2	nil
Potatoes.	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	nil	2, 1/3
Other Vegetables	2	1, 3/5	2, 1/3
Oil	5/12	1, 2/5	2/3
Ghee	1/35	1/3	1/12
Sugar	1/4	1/7	1/3
Muri	1/3	nil.	nil.
Milk	2	1	1
Average income per head per month	Rs. 9-10-11	Rs. 11-3-2	Rs. 12-11-0
Average expenditure on food per head per month	Rs. 7-14-0	Rs. 8-6-4	Rs. 9-0-0

2 Chattaks of soaked gram is also taken in the mornings.

Two Chattaks of soaked gram! Such gram every owner provides for his horse. Men and beasts in India share alike.

The particular fact to be noted in regard to these budgets is that they provide the barest minimum. In the case, for instance, of the Bengalis, the expenditure is shown as Rs. 7/14/- per month on an average income per head per month of Rs. 9/10/11. The quantities given barely suffice for a starvation diet, and certainly would not be sufficient for men who are on call for nearly 13 hours a day. Even at this rate, the margin left over in the course of a month is about As. 1/- a day, (about a penny a day) for expenditure on anything else over and above food. This is the excess

*Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Bengal. P. 343,

of income over expenditure in the case of Bengali jute workers, not taking into account the expenditure on other items excepting food, out of which lakhs of rupees are supposed to be remitted every month by the Jute mill workers to their villages. There is no provision made for rent, clothes, sickness, social ceremonies, or for the subsistence of the family of the worker for which a penny a day is all that remains after the worker has consumed his starvation diet. If these are—as they undoubtedly must be—more or less typical cases of working class budgets, it is no wonder that scores of thousands of jute workers are living on the verge of starvation, steeped in the mire of indebtedness.

How appalling the housing conditions of these industrial slaves are will be seen from the following extract:-

Ninety per cent. dividends and ant-heaps of pestilence

“.....workers in this industry, which makes ninety per cent. dividends for the shareholders, are housed in vile, filthy, disease-ridden hovels called Bustees. These Bustees are one-story blocks of mud plaster on wicker and matting, with thatched roofs; no windows or chimneys or fireplaces; the smoke simply oozes through the thatch if it cannot get out of the doorway, which is so low that one has to go down almost on hands and knees to enter. The Bustees have neither light nor water supply; the floors are earthen; sanitary arrangements there are none; and usually access to groups of Bustees can only be had along a narrow tunnel of filth where myriads of mosquitoes and flies breed, and the stench is such that one fears to strike a match lest the atmosphere, being combustible, should explode. Inside the Bustee there is space for three or four people to sleep—if they are not smoked out by the cooking fire—but we were assured that frequently two families lived in a Bustee, though how that is physically possible we could not guess.

“The rents charged for these foul ant-heaps of pestilence run to about one shilling to one shilling and fourpence a month.the houses of these unfortunate mill workers.....are a standing disgrace to the Government, the Local Authorities, the millowners and everybody who has the slightest responsibility for them”.*

The total number of Jute Mills, according to the latest report of the Chief Inspector of Factories, in Bengal is 86. The total number of employees working in these mills is 3,31,899, and out of these there are 2,60,342 adult males, 53,678 adult females, 16,939 male children below 14, and 940 female children below 14.

Jute, the raw commodity, is a crop which is practically grown only in Bengal, where both the climate and soil provide the necessary conditions for the production of the raw fibre—along a distance of nearly 80 miles up and down the River Hoogli.

*Exploitation in India, by Johnston pp. 11, 12 and 13.

The metropolitan area of Calcutta is the centre for the manufacturing processes of jute both for weaving and spinning. Two-thirds of the total crop is consumed in this metropolitan area, and about one-third remains to be exported to foreign countries.

During the War, owing to a great demand for gunny bags and the manufactured products of the Jute Mills, a great boom period set in, **Hours of work** but soon after the cessation of the War, the manufacturers of jute in India were faced with the problem of low price and over-production. In the month of April 1921, they adopted the policy of short-time working in order to keep up prices and limit over-production. This was achieved by the method of limiting hours of work, which under the law were 60, but in actual practice, by voluntary agreement, were limited to 54 per week. In the month of March 1924, in order to restrict production, the manufacturers agreed to the prohibition of any further increase in looms.

During the War, apart from the production of narrow width Hessain and sacking, some of the mills produced the finer qualities of jute, **Efficiency** which manufacture is practically a monopoly of Dundee and of foreign concerns. The employers, were faced with a difficult problem. The workers employed in the Jute Mills, possessing no cohesion, no organization and no unity of outlook, coming from different parts of India as emigrants, and faced with the burden of a high cost of living in a metropolitan city, sunk in debt and cowed by the insecurity of their employment and the spectre of unemployment, have been willing to accept practically the lowest wages paid to industrial workers in India. The result of this has been that no attempt has ever been made to improve the skill and efficiency of the Jute worker. Efficiency, according to the employers, has increased nevertheless at a rapid pace. When such workers, living on the borders of starvation and faced with the spectre of insecurity, were called upon to do highly-skilled work in the production of the finer qualities of Jute, the employers discovered that the cost of production—because of the lack of efficiency, the opportunity to gain which had been denied to the workers—was prohibitive for the manufacture of the finer qualities. The net result is that, in regard to the finer qualities, there is no competition between Dundee and Calcutta. This does not mean, of course, that there is no inter-relationship between the Jute worker in India and the Jute worker in Dundee.

The Jute Mills Association admits that, in comparison with, say, 20 years ago, it has been proved that the shorter hours have resulted in more efficient working.*

Further, "so far as the jute mill industry is concerned, one foreign worker either in Dundee or the continent, has to do work that requires the services of two operatives in this country."*

In a report by Messrs. Johnston and Sime, entitled "Exploitation in India"*
it is stated as follows:—

The Future "This is not to say that Indian jute mills will not under any
circumstances become serious competitors with the Dundee Mills
for the finer qualities. On the contrary, should the trade in Indian centres
diminish for any reason, e.g. the discovery of cultivation of cheaper
substitutes elsewhere in the world or the discarding of sacks for bulk
handling—then we may take it that the Mills on the Hoogli,—most of
them splendidly built and equipped on the shed principle—will not be
allowed to rot and decay as historical monuments, but will be turned on
to a savage competition for the markets in finer goods."

The reasons that they give against the imminence of such a competition are,
firstly, that the Indian Jute Mill owners are making fabulous profits out of the
manufacture of narrow-width Hessian and sacking and, secondly, that while "the
wages are scandalously low", the relative efficiency of the Dundee Mill worker to the
Indian Mill worker is at least 3 to 1, and "we have heard competent authorities place
the ratio very much higher". They go on to enumerate further disadvantages suffered
by the Indian jute worker, viz. hot climate, which makes intensive work at
certain periods of the day and year physically impossible, lack of primary education,
lack of skill, indebtedness and lack of organization etc.

The other side of the picture reveals the fact that the jute industry in India
is practically in foreign hands, there being barely five mills
Foreign control Agent-managed by Indians, the rest—excluding two which are
Agent-managed by Americans—being British. These jute mills
are very highly organized under the Jute Mills Association, Joint action, where
and when necessary, can always be taken by employers through this Association,
and although there is a lack of standardization of wages, yet it may be through
conjoint action, or it may be through a tacit understanding, there is a maximum
limit of wages, as is revealed by the wage sheets of every jute mill in the metropo-
litan area. On the one side there is a highly organized machine controlled by the
employers and on the other $\frac{3}{4}$ million human beings who, with their dependents,
make up a figure of nearly two million souls, without any effective organization,
completely controlled by the exigencies of their employment, and on account of
the economic stress of their existence, unable to break through the barriers of
indebtedness and starvation, of unutterably filthy housing conditions, of ignorance
and illiteracy—mere pawns in the game of wringing gold out of jute. And what gold!

Between the years 1915 and 1924, the total gain to the shareholders has
been estimated to reach the grand figure of three hundred
300 million sterling profit million sterling, which gave a return of an average of 90% per
annum on the total capital invested in the jute industry. This

*Exploitation in India, Johnston & Sime, p. 4.

enormous profit represents £100/- a year wrung out of the working classes, as compared with an average wage of £12-10-0 per annum paid to them.

Let me take some typical cases:-

(In Rupees).

Name of Mill:	Total Capital.	Reserve Fund.	Block a/c.	Profits earned.	Labour employed.
				(from 1920-23).	
Fort Gloster.	43,00,000	91,15,056	1,84,52,489	2,18,63,054	10,164
Howrah.	77,50,000	49,71,906	1,37,41,220	2,42,68,578	12,523
Gourepore.	54,50,300	35,39,500	1,93,71,094	2,38,31,529	9,945
Khardah.	45,00,000	65,00,000	1,13,77,798	2,93,67,965	10,049
Kinnison.	30,00,000	41,62,034	96,75,216	2,29,80,763	8,054
Reliance.	44,50,000	36,49,130	82,02,915	2,02,58,173	6,061
Anglo-India	1,01,82,900	1,40,00,000	1,99,12,754	3,53,56,348	12,219

As much as 400 per cent.—dividend was paid in a single year (1920) by one mill, Kinnison; and from 100 to 250% was not an uncommon figure. The total extent of the capital and profit position is given in detail in the Appendix, but there is one point to be noted: that the capital position reveals in certain cases that free gifts of shares have been made out of the undivided profits to the shareholders. For instance, Andrew Yule & Co., on the 4th March 1925, capitalised a portion of their undivided profits to the extent of Rs. 65,00,000/-. In other words, the shareholders received a free gift of 13 shares for every 18 they had previously held.*

These facts are sufficient to reveal the strongly entrenched position of the Managing Agents, and of the Jute Mills Association in Calcutta, and are an instructive sidelight on the advance of British capitalism in India. These enormous profits that have been made out of this industry, must have been generally re-invested in India, so that when we consider the question of British capital investments in India, we must not lose sight of the fact that almost every penny of it is capital which has been wrung out of the blood and sweat of the Indian worker, and does not, in the main, represent any fresh inflow from abroad.

There are thus two facts which emerge from this survey—one, the strongly entrenched financial position of the capitalist classes in the jute industry, and, two, their highly organized position, which enables them to take prompt and conjoint action in safeguarding their own interests.

* Johnston & Sime, *Exploitation in India*, page 6.

What is the result? This will be seen in a survey of life and labour of the working classes in the jute industry. Generally, when a jute worker seeks employment, he has first of all to proceed to a one-man labour exchange before he can obtain a job in any jute mill in Bengal. This one-man labour exchange consists of what is known as the Sirdar. The Sirdar is an employee of the jute mill Agent, who is kept and paid either for the control of a particular manufacturing process or simply for recruitment and supervision. Before a jute worker can obtain his job, a bribe—known as Salami—has to be paid and has to be repeated every time a worker goes on leave and returns to his occupation again. Complete control of the labour force in the jute mill area is thus handed over to a recognized bribe-taker by the employer, who knows that, in case of agitation or in case of any labour trouble, he can depend upon the Sirdar to recruit in sufficient numbers black-leg labour, thus preventing any co-ordinated action on the part of the working classes. Often it has been known that these workers have to borrow large sums of money in order that this bribe should be paid or the expenses met during the period they are seeking employment. Not only do they thus remain in the clutches of the bribe-taker but they inevitably gravitate towards the clutches of the money-lender and are very seldom in a position to recede from the hopeless situation of debt and financial bankruptcy.

A confidential report dated 28th January 1930 has recently been prepared by Mr. M. Z. Abedin, Inspector of Co-operative Societies, Calcutta, who was placed on special duty to discover the extent of indebtedness in the jute mill area. This investigator examined the conditions in the Kankinara-Jogatdal group of mills with the primary object of organizing co-operative banks and stores among the mill operatives and in order "to free them from the clutches of professional money-lenders and to supply them with unadulterated foodstuffs and other necessaries of life at reasonable prices". His examination of 12 mills in this area revealed the fact that the average wage of a labourer was Rs. 19/- odd per month, or roughly Rs. 5/- per week. In fact 70% of the jute workers get less than four rupees (six shillings at 1/6 or sh. 5/4 at 1/4) a week. He states that only 12% of the labourers could be accommodated in the quarters made available for them by the mills, the rest, 88% reside in *Bastis* (mud hovels) owned generally by the mill Sirdars. He states that these *Bastis* are in an insanitary condition, badly drained, and are not provided with a suitable passage or with privies. He states further that the economic condition of the operatives is far from satisfactory, and that the indebtedness of the labourers is heavy. According to him, *about 80% of the mill operatives are always in debt*. Their average indebtedness varies from Rs. 30/- to Rs. 40/- per head, the interest charged varying from 75% to 300% per annum. There is one significant fact in connection with indebtedness which must be noted. The employers in Calcutta have made it a point to emphasize the fact that large sums of money are remitted annually from the jute mill area to the villages which

are the homes of the jute workers. This investigator, quoted by me, makes the following admission:—

"It would be interesting to note that while the labourers maintain themselves in the working centres by borrowing money at usurious rates of interest and purchasing on credit bad and unwholesome stuff at enhanced rates, they remit home a few lakhs of rupees annually for the maintenance of their family members and for meeting the needs of agriculture and ceremonial expenses etc. But the remittance per capita is small and does not represent at all the savings of members; for the labourers are so insolvent that they cannot remit a single farthing home if they have no facilities for indiscriminate borrowings".

The myth, which is evolved out of the imagination of the employing class, completely out of touch with the working class, of large savings. The myth of savings is thus satisfactorily explained by an investigator who took the pains to gather the facts from the workers.

What is the cause of this chronic indebtedness? Again, I would refer to this confidential report. The cause of the chronic state of Greasing the palm indebtedness of the labourers is not far to seek. The labourer starts life in the mills with a heavy debt. Sometimes he is compelled to seek employment in the mills because of his heavy indebtedness; sometimes because of the necessity to provide funds for the maintenance of his family and sometimes because he wants to live an adventurous life and thereby make a fortune, but he has to wait long before he can secure employment. Even if he finds a job, he is ordinarily put to work temporarily as a substitute for a considerable period before he is permanently employed. His earnings as a substitute are small and insufficient to make both ends meet. Sometimes he brings his family with him. In such a case, his expenses become high. For these reasons, he has to borrow at an exorbitant rate of interest, either from the Sirdar who is often his co-villager, or from a professional money-lender on the recommendation of the Sirdar, and to purchase foodstuffs on credit at enhanced rates. It is understood that to secure a permanent job, he has to grease the palm of the mill Sirdar. For this purpose also he has to borrow from a money-lender, to whom he has been introduced by the Sirdar, at such an inconceivable rate of interest and on such terms and conditions that he becomes for ever a serf of the money-lender. Thus he begins his life in the mills by running into debt. Until his economic condition is improved, no efficient work can be expected from him.

Mr. J.A. Tassie, Vice President, Bengal Chamber of Commerce, was attached to the Labour Commission as an Assistant Commissioner. Mr. Tassie was out to prove a thing or two on behalf of the jute owners. He was not going to take things

Serfs of money-lenders

lying down. No doubt it seemed a somewhat difficult task to establish that scores of thousands of jute workers, paid a miserable pittance of four rupees a week (six shillings) —a little over a penny an hour for skilled and semi-skilled work—living in the most unimaginably filthy and crowded slums, irretrievably burdened with debt, “serfs of the money-lender or the jobber,” were really leading idyllic lives; but Mr. Tassie was undeterred. I had been asking Mr. Laird, the Chairman of the Jute Mills Association, the Central employers’ organization, a few indiscreet questions. Mr. Laird agreed with me that in one mill (the Angus, an American concern, better than most) out of a complement of a little over 6,000 workers, 4000 were getting a wage of *less than* four rupees a week. I suggested that the average annual income of a jute worker seemed to be Rs 154/- or roughly about a pound a month. Was that an adequate wage to bring up a family on? Mr. Laird must have been taken aback. He said; “It appears to be. I mean they do it and they save money besides”. But at this stage, I must let Mr. Laird speak for himself -

The Angus Company had sent in a memorandum in which they quoted Mr. Jack’s statement that to keep a family in comfort a minimum **Actual earnings** income of Rs. 465/- is necessary; below comfort Rs. 233/-, above want Rs. 166/-, in want Rs. 115/-, so that, according to those figures, there are 4,000 people who are in the category of “in want”? Mr. Laird: “You are speaking about families whereas the figures given in our memorandum deals with individual workers.”

“I am taking the earnings of a worker who has a family and who is the sole bread-winner. Are you pleading that your industry cannot afford to pay a decent living wage?.....I maintain we do pay decent living wages.

“Do you consider this to be a decent living wage?.....It all depends how they live. It has proved itself to be a living wage because the people stay there and work.

“Is that your definition of a living wage?.....It is a very complicated question altogether. It is a question of the family life; very often you get four in a family working in the mill.

“Supposing the figure of Rs. 365/-, given by Mr. Jack, is approximately correct, you consider Rs. 154/- a year adequate for a person who has a family to keep with no other member of the family working?I should say no.

“You would not consider it an adequate living wage?.No.”

This was apparently too much for Mr. Tassie. He set out to prove that it was all nonsense that the jute worker, paid less than four rupees a month, was badly off. In fact, jute workers, according to **Better off than Dundee workers** Mr. Tassie are not supposed to possess dependent families—are better off than the rest of the population of India—nay indeed,

are better off than even their comrades in Dundee. These are the amazing propositions that Mr. Tassie put into Mr. Laird's mouth:—

“Referring to the book written by Mr. J. C. Jack, entitled: ‘Economic life of a Bengal district’, I see that for the population as a whole the cost of living in comfort per head is Rs. 65/- per year. Therefore if a man is getting Rs. 154/- per year he is fairly well off if he has only got himself to look after?.....Yes.

“Taking the best paid man, a *Sirdar*, on Rs. 20/- a week, or Rs. 880 a year, he also is fairly well off if, according to Mr. Jack's figures, the cost of a family living in comfort is Rs. 365/- a year?Yes.

“So that on these figures the mill hands are very well paid as compared with the people in agricultural districts to which Mr. Jack referred?...That is my contention.

“You have given some evidence about the position of the Dundee Mills. To what extent do the Dundee millowners provide housing for their operatives?...They do not provide it at all.

“Do they provide education? ..No.

“Do they provide doctors and dispensaries?...No. They may provide a few dispensaries.

“Is it possible that more than two people live in one room in Dundee?...Yes.

“With regard to leave, how many months in a year can a Dundee operative afford to leave his work and go to the country to cultivate his land or to enjoy himself?...He probably gets away for a fortnight a year.

“Therefore if you compare the conditions in Dundee with the conditions here, it looks as if the Indian employee is a good deal better off than the Dundee operative?... It certainly looks like it.”

I think I can do no better than give here a few instances as a commentary on the statements made by Messrs. Laird and Tassie:

Here is a boy worker of the name of Mangrul, who has worked in the Titagarh No. 2, Jute Mill, for a period of six months. He says that **“Don't get enough food”** he earns Rs. 1/14/- a week, and he adds: “Formerly, I was well-fleshed, but I am now weak, as I do not get enough food. I give my earnings to my parents. My father does not go to work as he is an old man of 70”.*

Here is another—Lachanao, who says: "When I was a little boy, I had a little sister, who fell ill and died. My family was badly in need of money, so I came to work." (1)

Here is, Gauri, a woman worker, who says: "I prepare my rice in the morning before I go to the mill and eat it at 9 o' clock. My husband comes at 8 and goes back at 9 o' clock. We start together at 5 o' clock in the morning to reach the mill at 5-30. At 1 o' clock my husband eats the food I cooked in the morning. When I go off at 3 o' clock, I cook the rice which we eat at night.....I had fever a year ago. I did not go to the Doctor because I was too weak and unable to move, nor did the doctor come and see me. I paid Rs. 3/- or Rs. 5/- to a man who came to my house and treated me." (2)

So much for the provision of doctors which Dundee jute owners do not provide for their employees for the simple reason that they have to make a contribution towards the health insurance of their workers.

Muthialu, another woman worker, says: "I cook my food at dawn and go to the mill at 5-30 in the morning, work till 6-30, return home, **Who cares?** take my food and go back to the mill at 8 o' clock. I then work till 1 o' clock, return home, take my food and go back to the mill at 2 o' clock. I work till 7 o' clock, then go home, cook my food eat it. My eyes have not been alright for the past few days.....I once went to a lady doctor in the other mill with my daughter. She was expecting a baby and was in the seventh month of her pregnancy. The lady doctor wrote something and told me to go to the Sahib of the mill. He read this paper and tore it. We did not know what to do. We had to work. My daughter went back to work. One day when she was passing under the cocoanut tree she got frightened and fainted. That night she was in great pain. We sent for a Dai (maternity nurse) and she examined her and found that the child was dead". And this philosopher of a woman added amidst laughter: "Some people go to the Doctor and they may get well. If they do not get well, they get very much worse." (3)

Another attempt was made, this time by Sir Victor Sassoon, to prove that the jute worker could not really be so terribly hungry. He asked Mr. **Are they terribly hungry?** Laird a significant question: and as the questions and answers are complete in themselves, I give them as they stand:—

Sir Victor Sassoon: "Therefore a time worker gets more money if he works longer hours. It, as Diwan Chaman Lall maintained, the wages were so low how would you account for the fact that they refuse to go on single shift when they could earn more money?.....They are earning a little less *but they like shorter hours.*"

(1) Royal Commission on Labour, Oral Evidence, (Bengal) Volume V, part 2, p. 79.

(2) Ibid, p. 78-79.

(3) Ibid. p. 79

"They cannot be so terribly hungry if they preferred to get less by working shorter hours. The wage that they get must be a subsistence wage?I quite agree.

"Is it your point that they must be getting a subsistence wage or else they would be prepared to work harder?Yes.

"Diwan Chaman Lall: Have you seen the report of the Government of Bengal on the indebtedness of your jute workers which shows that they are in a chronic state of indebtedness? It does not mean therefore that they are getting a subsistence wage?It only affects a certain percentage of our workers.

"It refers to 80 per cent. of your workers I think?.....I think only about 18 per cent. of our workers are indebted to any great extent."(1)

The question is: Are the wages low? Are they starvation wages? Are the employers making millions while the workers starve? In this connection, Mr. Laird was faced with the confidential report of the Special Officer on Indebtedness, and asked whether he or the owners had made any private enquiries into this matter. His reply was that they had talked to their workers, and that they knew how much money they remitted to their homes, and that Mr. Laird was certain that the figure of 80% of the workers being in debt was far too high, but eventually admitted, on being asked whether they had made any special enquiry into this matter, that they had "not the facilities for doing so." (2)

Such conditions of life and labour in the jute mills, revealing utter destitution on the one side and conditions of immense opulence on the other, **Utter destitution** were bound inevitably to lead to a disastrous clash between the employers and the employees. In the month of July, 1922, trouble broke out in the jute mill area. The Government Report states:—

"Never before in the history of the jute mills in Bengal had anything of the nature of a general strike been attempted. Strikes in individual mills have been common, but as a rule they have been confined to the concerns in which they broke out. From July the 1st to September the 30th, the period which includes the general strike which was settled by an agreement and the individual strikes which broke out after the agreement, the total number of employees affected was about 2,72,000and the total number of looms closed down was 42,700 out of a total of 51,000 in Bengal." (3)

(1) Royal Commission on Labour, Oral Evidence, (Bengal) Volumes V, part 2, p. 167.

(2) Ibid, p. 172.

(3) Ibid, Vol. V, Pt.1, p. 126.

Prior to 1st July 1929, the statistics collected by the Bengal Government reveal, in the following table, a chronic state of unrest from the year 1921 to the year 1929. *

Grave discontent

Year	Number of strikes in jute mills.	Number of men involved.	Number of working days lost.
1921	39	186,479	706,229
1922	40	173,957	1,079,627
1923	29	90,664	644,804
1924	18	69,488	346,756
1925	14	44,940	242,906
1926	29	38,042	794,384
1927	9	34,900	218,000
1928	18	56,524	1,508,708
Upto 30th June '29.	5	18,285	106,785
From 1921 to 30th June, 1929.	201	713,279	5,648,199

All naturally has not been well with the jute workers of Bengal even although they are supposed to possess better amenities of a civilized existence and a better competence than the jute workers in Dundee, in the words of the employers! The most protracted strike in this industry, before the general strike of 1929, was a strike in the Fort Gloster Mills, Howrah, in 1928, which lasted from the 17th of July to the 30th of December 1928. It has been estimated that the general strike of 1929 cost the workers Rs. 27, 57, 000/- in wages, and the industry Rs. 1,71,71,000 in lost production.

Now, the curious fact that emerges from this strike is that all the factors were favourable for a strong, cohesive organization on the part of the employees to match with the strong organization of the employers, and yet although the factors were present all the time, never in the history of trade unionism in Bengal has there been a strong organization of the workers. Nearly 100 mills employ nearly 400,000 workers within a radius of 18 to 20 miles on the north and south sides of Calcutta and Howrah. It should have been an easy matter to have organized the workers into a sound trade union. This might have been difficult had the habits of the jute workers been really migratory, but it is on record, according to the evidence of the Jute Mills' Association, that 90% of the workers are permanently employed in the jute mills, so that here we have another factor, absent in most parts of India, which should have added to the facility in organization.

* Royal Commission on Labour, Oral Evidence, (Bengal) Volume V, part 1, p. 126.

As the strike progressed, it became apparent that there was a lack of leadership. The strike was led by Miss Probhadas Gupta, but before the strike was over, the Union created by this young lady had already split into two. On the other hand, for the first time in the history of the Jute Mills' Association, concerted action was taken. Formerly, each mill was allowed to go its way, but in 1929 the Association took conjoint action on trade policy, with the result that the strike became inevitable. The Government Memorandum states:-

“When it was decided by the Jute Mills' Association, a policy actually laid down in 1928 but put in force in 1929, to increase the work-
Employers' agree-ing hours from 54 to 60, in order to meet growing competition
ment from continental mills, an agreement was entered into as follows:—

(1) That all mills which were members of the Association should work 60 hours a week.

(ii) That in multiple shift mills, the hours might be reckoned over two weeks, i. e. these mills continue to work as before 54 hours in the first week, but in the second week they will have to work 66 hours, i. e. 120 hours in a fortnight.

(iii) That no mill should make up for lost time caused by strikes.

“This agreement was enforced on the 1st of July 1929.”*

The result was that by the 20th July, although no strike had broken out, yet the workers refused to work more than 54 hours a
The strike prog- week, and they further refused to take their pay. Meanwhile,
resses a new leader had arisen on whose advice the workers had taken this action, and on his advice again the workers adopted ca' canny methods. Why such methods had not been tried before is a mystery, because the organization of jute production is such that if one section goes on strike, the rest of the mill is bound to close down. For instance, weavers refusing to take off less than one cut would inevitably produce a glut of yarn in the mills. The employers, realizing the seriousness of the position, immediately gave in and offered to restore the 54 hours stint, but the concession came too late. As is apparent from the record, the original trouble arose over a group of single shift mills in which workers were asked to put in an extra 6 hours a week, thus robbing them of their cherished rest on Saturday. The underhanded method of rate cutting adopted by the employers in the case of weavers added to the flames of discontent. In the case of the time workers, there was justification for more than an exact proportion of
Workers' demands: increase in wages. Numerous attempts were made by the employ-
no corporal punish- ers to get the workers back to work. Every such attempt
ment! met with the reply that they would obey the orders of their Trade Union. It soon became apparent that the workers must

*Royal Commission on Labour, 'Oral Evidence, (Bengal) Vol. V, part 1, pp. 127, 128-129.

stiffen up their organization and, if success was to be achieved, every mill in the area must be closed down. Picketing was immediately decided upon and effectively enforced. By the 5th of August the strike had practically become general. Meanwhile a motion for adjournment in the Legislative Council was moved, and the Government's position explained that since negotiations had started between the employers and the workers, they should be allowed to take their course. During the week commencing with the 12th of August, an agreement was negotiated, and the agreement was actually signed on Friday, the 16th of August. On Monday, the 19th of August, practically all the mills resumed work. The following were the demands of the workers:—

- (1) Proportionate increase in total earnings for extra time worked, the total earnings to include bonus of all kinds and *khoraki*; (dear food allowance);
- (2) no victimization;
- (3) payment of the wages for the period during which the workers had been on strike or had been locked out;
- (4) the creation of a board to consider other grievances, the board to consist of three Mill-owners, three representatives of the Bengal Jute Workers' Union, and two outsiders (one to be chosen by the employers and one to be chosen by the Union);
- (5) provision of maternity benefits; and
- (6) no corporal punishment.*

A strange request this—"No corporal punishment"—revealing as it does the depths to which the workers have sunk, that they have to make a request that they should no longer be flogged.

A settlement was arrived at on the following terms:-

"(1) *Wages*: The Committee of the Indian Jute Mills' Association will recommend to members of the Association the terms already publicly announced; (a) to pay the correct proportionate increase in total earnings for the extra hours worked; (b) to pay *khoraki* on the same scale heretofore.

They will also recommend to members: (c) that the scales of bonuses remain the same as they were before July 1st, when the mills were working 24 hours a week; and (d) that favourable consideration be given to an adjustment of wages to time workers on the basis of the concession suggested for piece-workers.

(Note:—This will not apply to mills where such adjustment has already been made.)

The Committee will also recommend to members; (2) that there be no

*Royal Commission on Labour, Oral Evidence, (Bengal) Volume V, part 1, pp. 135-136.

victimization; (3) that favourable consideration be given to the provision of maternity benefits; (4) that there be no corporal punishment.

(Note:—The Committee wish to point out that corporal punishment is already strictly prohibited.)

(5) That the authorities of each mill will consider favourably reasonable statements of grievances put forward by their workers.

The labour leaders also signed an assurance to the effect that they would do their utmost to secure a resumption of work on Monday, the 19th August.*

Here was an opportunity for consolidating the position and building up a most powerful organization of the workers. That opportunity was lost. Rival unions had come into existence to forward the strike. Some leaders retired from public life. Rivalries between others destroyed any possibility of unity. In one pamphlet of the time, it was stated as follows:—

“It is a pity that the vast body of working class people is not yet self-conscious and for some time may be beguiled by the glamour of reactionary personalities who feast on the fruits of their labour and treat them as pawns in the game of speculation and keep them paved with promises and bluffs, but these tactics cannot hold good for an indefinite period.”

The Bengal Jute Workers' Union was established after the Ghorpore strike in 1923, which fought compensation cases, bribery and corruption. **Personal bickering** It was affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress. The Union jogged along as best it could, the workers at one time getting splendid support from Mrs. Santosh Kumari Gupta, who did a great deal of work in feeding the starving strikers, at another from Miss Das Gupta. In 1927 dissensions had broken out among rival factions of Trade Unionists, which had to be composed through a Conference of Trade Union Executives, which I called in Calcutta in 1927. The truce was short-lived. But in spite of this the strike swept the leaders off their feet. As usual, funds collected and their disposal was a constant source of friction during the course of the strike and after its settlement. Miss Das Gupta, who was the President of the Union, stated in a pamphlet that the money she had at her disposal was not a fund of the Union and that she was in possession of it and that the Union had no right to call for accounts of money she had at her disposal, whether before or during or since the end of the strike. She said that she could, but would not disclose the source from which money came to her, but that she demanded accounts from the General Secretary.

An official memorandum on behalf of the Government of Bengal states that the private sources of revenue referred to in the statement made by Miss Das Gupta, as far as official information went, were “mysteries.”

*Royal Commission on Labour, Oral Evidence, (Bengal) Vol. V, part 1 pp. 136-137.

But none of these factors was so important in converting a victory into a defeat and, possibly, altering the historical course of the Trade Union Movement for the next few years, as the fact that the leaders in charge were not conversant with the technique of the industry with which they were dealing. Miss Das Gupta's leadership at this period was splendid, but her knowledge of the industry was negligible. What was gained through suffering was lost through ignorance. I do not think it will be easy, without considerable organizational work, to revive a consolidated Trade Union of the jute workers in Bengal, but that such an organization will ultimately be achieved, is only a question of time. In fact towards the end of 1931 Mr. T.C. Goswami and Mr. Subash Bose called a conference of jute workers which was attended by a hundred thousand. It is not to be expected that the employers will not take the necessary steps to prevent such consolidation, whether through closer contact with the workers, or through a greater hold exercised through the Sirdars (jobbers), for the first period of economic distress and high prices is bound to create necessary conditions for the recrudescence of trouble in the jute area. That trouble would have arisen in 1930 along with the political discontent prevailing in the country. It was avoided, as in every other part of India labour unrest was generally avoided, because of the tremendous slump in wholesale and retail prices, particularly of foodstuffs. This slump has led to an increase in real wages. The upward trend of prices, if it is gradual, will postpone the unrest; if it is sudden, will precipitate it—for it is obvious that a higher standard of living achieved through the slump in prices will not be easily given up by industrial workers without a fight. With intelligent leadership and sound organization the future is with the jute worker.

The management of the jute mills is at the time almost entirely in the hands of the European staff. This means that there is no contact between the employer and the employee, except through the bribetaking Sirdar. For instance, at the top the Manager, the Assistant Manager, the Engineer, the Batching and Preparing Mechanic, the Spinning and Winding Mechanic, the Factory and Calendar Mechanic (on the Mechanical side) are all Europeans. On the material side, the Batching Overseer, the Preparing Overseer, the Spinning Overseer, the Winding and Factory Overseer, the Calendar Overseer, are Europeans, and even on the clerical side, the mill clerks are all Europeans. The Mistries, the Babus, the Coolies, the Head Sirdars and the Line Sirdars—these are Indians. The worker before he can get to the Manager has to pass through, firstly, the Line Sirdar, secondly, the Head Sirdar, thirdly, the Babu, fourthly, the Batching Overseer, and fifthly the Assistant Manager. The result is that he never gets through to the Manager.

It has been estimated that the change over to the single shift system from the multiple shift system had, until the recent changes under which the multiple

shift system was given up completely, thrown fully 25% of the mill labour force permanently out of employment. (1)

It is further estimated that about forty thousand workers were, in the beginning of 1931, thrown out of employment in the jute area. **Single shift working** as a result of the change over to the single shift system. When the Indian Jute Mills Association were asked to submit their opinion as to what should be done in order to relieve the distress arising from unemployment, they stated as their firm opinion "that insurance for unemployment is scarcely a practical proposition at the present stage". (2) They had never considered this problem, never discussed it scientifically, but because it might have meant an advantage to the workers, and possibly a slight expense to the management, the statement was made that a scheme for unemployment insurance was not "a practical proposition at the present stage". It is no exaggeration to state that at no stage would a scheme for unemployment insurance be a practical proposition in the eyes of the multi-millionaires in the jute industry. When asked as to whether they could suggest any possible methods of alleviating and remedying distress caused by unemployment, they said that the "Indian Jute Mills Association **Unemployment** has no suggestions to offer in this connection". Had they been asked to state whether they had any suggestion to make how to increase the dividend of 90% per annum to 100% per annum, it goes without saying that the Royal Commission on Labour would have been presented with a treatise on the subject, if it had meant getting either the consumer or the worker to add to the profits, earned by these companies. Obviously, it is not the concern of the employer how the worker lives or how he starves, so long as the share-holders are satisfied with their 90 per cent. dividend. So little, in fact, has the welfare of the working classes been the concern of this, one of the most flourishing industries in India, that the Jute Mills Association admits that facilities for the training of jute mill workers, implying direct instruction from the managing staff or even from the supervising staff, are negligible, and they said: "The bulk of the work in the mill is unskilled, and where training is necessary, as—for example—in the spinning and sewing departments, this is obtained by the efforts of the worker himself. It frequently occurs, however, that a young workman learns his trade by assisting a relative at the loom or a sewing machine, as the case may be, until, efficiency is acquired." (3)

What is the result? The Jute Mills Association admits (4) that upsets do occasionally occur and are due, in the majority of cases, **Oppression** to oppression on the part of the subordinate supervising staff.

(1) Memorandum submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour by the Indian Jute Mills Association. p.3.

(2) Ibid, p. 3.

(3) Ibid, p. 6.

(4) Ibid, p. 6.

The system of production and sale of the raw material has a vital bearing upon the welfare of the working classes. The agriculturist who grows the raw material is miserably paid for his crop. Between him and the jute manufacturer, there are a series of middlemen,—each buying from the other—known as the Furia, the Beopari and Baler. At every crop and at almost every season of the year, there is great speculation in Calcutta, creating immense uncertainty as to the price of the raw material. We are told on the authority of Messers. Johnstone & Sime that when the price rises in Calcutta, there is at once an attempt to reduce the wages of the workers in Dundee. It is admitted by these two investigators that “It is, therefore, essential in the interests not only of the workers in India, but in the interest of the workers in Dundee whether the remuneration and *status* of the Indian worker should not remain at its present low level. What competition there may one day be should not be of international starvation or based upon the misery and degradation of the workers.”(1)

A document entitled: “Life Histories of certain workers employed in the Bengal jute mill area in 1929” was prepared by the employers, and an attempt was made to pick out generally the best paid workers. But a few instances are worth relating of the manner in which the lot of the exploited jute worker in Bengal compares with the lot of the Dundee jute worker.

Dundee and Calcutta

There is the case of Mr. Babu Jan, who, for five days’ work in the week, gets Rs. 5/-. We are told that he “eats twice daily whatever has been cooked between work times in day light hours, sleeps after work till the dawn, takes no physical recreation.(2) But so utterly superficial was this investigation that the investigator said that this man described his labour as “work in the mill” and that he was “probably” a weaver.

To a question put to another man, the reply came: “What ambition should I have? Why should I desire anything? Whatever is my fate will happen”. And it is said that none of those interviewed knew how many hours he worked; a few of them even did not know how much they earned and, when asked what they did with their money, the reply came: “Whatever it is we spend it”. This investigator, employed by the manufacturers, states, against all evidence on record, as follows:—“None of them would have grumbled at longer hours which meant more money.” In fact these workers grumbled to such an extent that they actually indulged in a prolonged general strike.

Here is another case of Tejia, a woman worker:—

“This woman was born at Subancha, Mirzapur district, and went to

(1) Exploitation in India, by Messers. Johnston & Sime, p. 19.

(2) Life Histories of certain workers employed in the Bengal Jute Mill area in 1929, p. 3.

Serajgunj Jute Mills with her parents when 10 years of age. She had no education of any description. She started work as a hand hammer in Serajgunj at Rs. 1—8—0 per week. When the mill was transferred here she came here with her husband and both were employed as coolies with a building contractor, carrying bricks, sand, etc., and her wages then were Rs. 3 per week. She eventually got employment in the Hand Hemming Department and she has remained there since then. Her wages are Rs. 4/- per week. Her husband is now dead and likewise her two children. She has six dependents at home and supports them to the best of her ability, going home once a year for three months at a time. She is about 50 years of age and as far as we know has kept clear of debt. She lives in the mill lines, her house costing annas 8 per month, and her living expenses are remarkably low." * Supporting six dependents on six shillings a week "to the best of her ability"! In forty years, perhaps more, this woman's wages increased from Rs. 3/- a week to Rs. 4/- a week!

Here is another case of Sukia Mallah, woman hand weaver:—

"Was born in Patna district, the daughter of one Chooni, a boatman by caste and occupation, age 70 years, was the only child of her parents and has only very hazy recollection of her early life. Knows that they had a very hard time to get food, even though it was at that time much cheaper than now.

"Was married at an age when she has no recollection of the ceremony, but does remember when her husband came to claim her. He was a boatman also and worked for the owner of a boat as an oarsman.

"At the beginning of her married life she does not remember any great difficulties. She had one child but it died in infancy.

"After a few years they fell upon hard times and had great difficulty in getting enough to eat. Witness remembers that the difficulty was at the time ascribed to the coming of steam boats on the rivers.

"At last, after many weeks of hard times, both husband and wife came to Calcutta in an endeavour to better themselves, and a little time after arrival they were able to live better. The husband found a job with Messers. Hoare Miller on their steam boats, while the wife got a job in the Howrah Mills, then a much smaller concern than now.

"The work she got was as a hand sewer, and she has worked in that capacity ever since. Witness cannot recollect what pay she got at that time, but says she was able to keep herself in comfort as long as her husband had work. She now gets an average of Rs. 4/8/- a week by dint of hard work, but as her husband has lately been dismissed from his employment on account of old age she now finds it very hard to get along.

*Life Histories of certain workers employed in the Bengal Jute Mill area in 1929, p. 12.

"They pay a rent of Rs. 3/- a month for the room they live in at the house of Jadarni, Ramkristopur.

"All the little savings she had have been swallowed up and she has been obliged to borrow Rs. 20/-. Pays interest at the rate of one anna per rupee per month. Says this is a cheap rate of usury, but got the loan from her landlord who knows her and she is paying him back." *

And the gamble goes on. Jute shares in the middle of 1931 suffered a precipitate fall. "An idea of the serious setback in jute scrips can be gathered from the following table" says a Press report, which shews the drops in one week.

	<i>Lowest Price.</i>	
	<i>Last week.</i>	<i>This week.</i>
	Rs.	Rs.
Anglo-India	331	290
Auckland	221	188
Bally	176	135
Belvedere	480	425
Clive	23-8.	21
Dalhousie	427	379
Delta	492	425
Fort Glo-ter	590	525
Fort William	265	215
Howrah	47-4x.d.	45-2.
Kamarhatty	530	461
Kanknarrah	428	375
Kelvin	678	615
Kinnison	800	710
Lawrence	545	490
Orient	271	220
Reliance	79	69-8.

And why? Because considerable sums were advanced on shares by banks to brokers, operators and investors, and depreciation occurred all round as the banks asked for more margins, leading to "forced" sales. Actual prices of hessian had nothing to do with this, nor the price of raw material or labour conditions. But each time there is a fluctuation, it is the worker who has to bear the burden. In the ultimate result, it is he who has to face the burdens of the investor-gambler and of the industry.

*Life Histories of certain workers employed in the Bengal Jute Mill area in 1929, p. 23.

The conclusion is that there is no industry which is more capable of immediate control by the State in the interests of the nation than **Nationalization** the jute industry in India. In the first place, the production of raw jute is a world monopoly for Bengal; in the second place, it is a highly organized industry; in the third place, the condition of employment of 400,000 jute workers in Bengal warrants immediate State interference; and lastly the recent slump has revealed that millions of agriculturists—who produce the raw material—are completely at the mercy of the jute manufacturer, thus emphasising the fact that the prosperity of the whole Province is dependent upon intelligent State control both of production, of marketing and of manufacture.

KING COAL

In the coalfields, as elsewhere in India, it has been a debatable point as to what is the correct position in regard to actual wages paid to miners.

If we take the average per capita per annum raisings of coal, we get a figure of 131 tons, or by taking only the underground workers we get an average of 182 tons. In the former case, we get at the rate of 1.5 tubs per ton, a production of about 196 tubs per person, and by dividing this figure by 260, which represents a year of five working days in a week, we get a daily average of 1.33 tubs a day, or in the case of only underground workers 1.43 tubs a day. Now, we do know that the worker is paid at the average rate of about seven annas or less a tub, so that for a working day the average miner gets less than ten annas. We also know that the total production of coal, in 1928 for example, was 21,515,796 tons of the declared value of Rs. 83,752,449/-, and that 1929 figures shew an even greater and a record output. The average value of the coal produced by a worker, as against his payment of less than ten annas per day, is at this rate (taking the price of coal at the very low rate of four rupees a ton) roughly about 62 annas worth of coal a day, which is an exceedingly moderate estimate considering that the average retail price would be at least 50 to 100 per cent. higher than the price quoted by me. The worker gets actually less than one-sixth of the value of the coal he produces, or if the retail price is taken, less than one-twelfth of what he produces.

It has been a regular system in the coal fields to raise this coal through contractors. The rate that I have been given by the contractors themselves for hand-picked mines is Rs.1/7/- per ton, including the cost of stores, contractor's establishment and contractor's profits of 12½ per cent. The contractors' rate for machine-cut coal is generally Rs. 1/12/- per ton which includes all the charges mentioned above. When all these extra charges are deducted out of these rates the balance that remains in the shape of wages to be paid to miners is a small sum barely sufficient to keep the miner alive. This is the actual position in regard to production price and wages, no matter what perjuries may be committed in the name of statistical accuracy.

The Chief Inspector of Mines, in his written statement says:

No better off than before the war "Since the war, miners' wages have increased a little, but as the cost of living has also risen, they are no better off than they were.....the average wage of a coal miner being thirteen annas per day."*

This statement is incorrect. The average is not thirteen annas; the actual average is less than ten annas a day for a five-day week. As a matter of fact,

*Written Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour Vol. IV, Pt. I, p. 133.

the mistake that has been made by the Chief Inspector of Mines is this: that he has not taken into consideration the fact that the tub payment is on the basis of two persons drawing the wages for the same tub, i.e. the miner as well as his wife, the loader, or the woman working with him.

The Chief Inspector of Mines gives the daily earnings in 1927-28 as As.-/14/3 and As.-/13/6 for miners underground. In reality, this figure should be halved to get the actual rate of wages paid to individuals. So that we come now to the same figure of wages which was reported by the Industrial Commission many years ago.

Is the Indian miner inefficient?
In fact there has been no mentionable increase for decades, if we exclude temporary fluctuations. Now, whenever there has been a question of increase in wages, there has been the cry set up, of which note has been taken in the Coal Committee's Report, that where there is increase in wages, there is a drop in output, and the picture is completed by stating that where there is a reduction in hours, there is a drop in output. The employers have stated that an increase in wages was given in December 1920, which was according to them followed by a drop in output but if they would only look at the statistics, they would find how false is the picture painted by them. Before this slight increase came into force, the output in 1920 was eleven million odd tons in the Jharia field. The increase came into force in 1921 and the output in 1921 was twelve million odd tons as compared with the eleven million odd tons of the previous year; and if it is argued that there might have been a larger number of men and women employed on this production in 1921, the answer is that there is a steady per capita increase in output from 1920 onwards.

A charge has been made in regard to the comparative inefficiency of the Indian worker, and yet we have it on the authority of the Chief Inspector of Mines, in his Memorandum submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour, that the efficiency of the Indian worker is apparently on an equal basis with his confrere in Japan, adding that the poor physique of the Indian miner is due to the enervating climate in which he lives and to the lack of nourishing food. When asked whether this was due to the insufficiency of wages, the Chief Inspector stated that he thought so.*

It is an admitted fact that there is no kind of material welfare work done in the coal-mining area, relating to provision for old age or sickness and such like matters, and next to nothing for education.

Living the life of an aboriginee The Indian miner in the coal field areas is living almost like an aboriginee.

When the representatives of the European employers, on behalf of the Indian Mining Association, came to give evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, they stated that the average number of tubs filled in a day by a miner

*Oral Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. IV
Pt. II. p. 303.

was three.(1) Such is the knowledge possessed by the mine-owners as to the actual wage statistics of their employees! When asked as to the basis for that statement, we were told by the employers: "Everybody in the coal fields thinks that is the figure and therefore it requires very strong evidence to the contrary that it is not so."(2) Then, when the statistics were examined, it was discovered that the figure was actually half of that given by the employers, i. e. 1.5 tubs per day instead of three tubs per day. The obvious reason for this statement was to induce the public to believe that wages received by the miners are double the figure which they actually earn. In fact, we were told that in 1920 there was a slight increase in wages, and that the rate then was seven annas per tub, and that the recent figure for 1930 was 6.75 annas per tub, which means that the miner today is worse off in the world than he was in 1920.

The employers admitted that they had done practically nothing for the betterment of the employees during the last ten years, in the matter of education, and I put it to them as follows:
A policy of do nothing "Mahatma Gandhi on the 27th January 1929, published in his weekly organ: "Young India" an ultimatum which he had issued to the Government, in which he stated:

"I would have waited if I could have been convinced that the condition of the masses has undergone progressive amelioration under British rule. Alas, he who runs may see that it has progressively deteriorated under that rule."

I asked the employers: "If you substitute for the words "British rule" in Mahatma Gandhi's statement the words "The Indian Mining Association" and for the word "Masses" the word "Miners", what is your record in regard to the amelioration of the condition of the miners?". And I was told in reply: "We are colliery owners; we are not here to follow the precepts of Mr. Gandhi. I do not accept them at all. They are unsound in my opinion."(3) It is obviously a business proposition, in the opinion of Indian colliery proprietors, to pay starvation wages for arduous and dangerous work.

A storm of protest was raised by Indian colliery proprietors when the Technical Adviser to the Labour Delegation to the International Labour Conference at Geneva (1931) stated that the condition of Indian miners was "horrible and inhuman". This charge was repudiated by owners of coal mines, both European and Indian, in Calcutta. They stated that the picture drawn was far from true and that "in

(1) Oral Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. IV, Pt. II, p. 322.

(2) Ibid, p. 322.

(3) Ibid, p. 324.

some respects, the Indian miner works under far more congenial conditions than his confrere in England."* They stated that "the miner in India is practically a free agent so far as hours of work are concerned. He is at liberty to come to work when he likes and to leave the mine when he likes. If he does not choose to work on any particular day, he is not subjected to any disciplinary action. In fact, miners in India, of their own choice, work on an average four days per week, and during this period they earn sufficient to supply the whole of their needs."* This statement, as we shall see presently, is an outrageously false one, because it leaves the real truth unuttered. We have already seen that the wages earned by the Indian miner are starvation wages, which are presumed by the mine owners to obtain for the miners a sufficiency of supply for all their needs. We will see presently that the Indian miner is a free agent in regard to his hours of work only in so far as he is under the law free to work a twelve-hour shift in the mines, and that often he remains inside the mine for two or three days continuously without check and without hindrance, and that although nominally, again under the law, he is presumed to work only 54 hours a week underground, yet when necessity arises, inspection is so inadequate that there is indeed no limit to the number of hours that he might put in at his work.

Again, the mine owners stated that the reason why they strongly objected to the enforcement of a 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ hour day for miners was their solicitude for the miners who refused to be regulated and disciplined and because they would probably be compelled to work six days in a week to earn enough for their needs. This is the first occasion on which any solicitude for the Indian miner has been exhibited by the Indian mine-owner.

The Chairman of the Indian Mining Federation stated that he was amazed to read the statement made by the Technical Adviser to the **Who should be amazed?** Indian Workers' Delegation to Geneva, and that the strong language used by the Technical Adviser was "determined more by academical zeal and forensic enthusiasm than by a real appreciation of the state of things" and added that "under the existing law a shift in a coal mine is restricted to 8 hours per day" but that the "employers have the option of limiting the working hours to 12 hours in a day of 24 hours."* And yet this gentleman does not seem to realise that twelve hours' work underground is horrible and inhuman from every point of view, particularly as it usually takes about a couple of hours for the miner to get back to his miserable little shed, which is his residence, after finishing his days work.

Here I must give a few life histories:—

At the Serampur Colliery of the East Indian Railway Company, Giridih,

*"Statesman" dated 21st June 1931.

Sillumian (miner) was examined by the Royal Commission on Life histories Labour in India and made the following statement:

"I am a coal cutter, a miner. I have been working at this job for four or five years. We work in a gang of 10 or 20. The gang varies between 2 and 50. We are 25 in the gang. We work two shifts: 12 men during the day and 13 at night. At first I got As. 9; then I got As. 10 to As. 11; where it was easy to cut the coal I was paid at the rate of As. 9; where it was a little harder As. 10; and where it was still harder As. 11. The rate used to vary according to the task; now whether the task is easy or difficult the rate is the same. It is As. 8. If I fill one tub I get As. 8. That is for cutting, loading, and hauling the tub from the coal face right along to the centre point. It is 500 ft. from the coal face where we cut the coal to the point to which I draw it. The women load the tubs. I worked yesterday in the mine during the day. I went down at 8 a. m. and at 8 p. m. I stopped work; by the time I got up to my place it was 10 p. m. Where we used to be paid at the rate of Rs. 2 a foot, we are now paid at the rate of As. 8 a foot. Two of us did As. 8 worth of work each yesterday but after the deductions we shall get in the end As. 6 to As. 6½. One pice in the rupee is deducted for the benefit fund. One or two per cent. is taken off for under-loading of the wagons. Out of the tubs that we fill one or two disappear. I do not know what happens to them. Whether it is that the *munshi* does not enter them or what happens to them I cannot say. When I go down I have to go and fetch the tub; we in the gang go and get the tubs. Yesterday we got the tubs as soon as we got down.

"What is going to happen to me?" Ten of us filled one tub per head; we cannot fill more than that because the work is hard. Out of the ten people two or three people go and get the tubs; some of the gang are engaged in filling the tubs and the remainder cut coal. Yesterday six people were cutting the coal. When the work is easy we can fill more than one tub. Ten people can fill as many as 50 tubs when the work is easy; that is if the coal is there. We 10 people can fill 50, 70 or 80 tubs if we get the tubs. If the coal is cut and ready 10 of us can carry the coal of 150 tubs during the day. Where the work is easier we can cut, load and take to the main tramway from 1½ to 2 tubs per head. I have never earned as much as As. 12 to As. 16 a day. I get my wages weekly. The contractor in whose name the tubs are entered pays me. It is the contractor not a *Sardar* nor the head of the gang. I am paid on Sundays. *Last Sunday I got Rs. 1—5—0. I worked 4 days last week. After you have gone I do not know what is going to happen to me." We have a caste punchayat.**

*Oral Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. IV Pt. II, p. 340—341.

Mauji Dhobi (miner) said:-

"I have worked at this colliery ever since I was a boy. I am a coal cutter. I went in the mine yesterday. I went to work at 8 o'clock in the morning and finished at 8 o'clock in the evening. I was both cutting and loading the coal. When I went down yesterday morning, the tub was not available when I went in. I work in a gang of 7. We all go down together and come up together. Between the 7 of us we loaded 8 tubs yesterday. Of the 7, 2 men were cutting the coal. The *munshi* enters the tubs. From the coal face to the tram lines we had to take the tubs about 1,000 feet. Two men were cutting the coal, 4 men were loading the coal and one man was bringing the tubs. We all divide the money equally, after all the deductions have been made. We 7 men always work together. The working place we were at yesterday was such that four times I had to wring my clothes because of the perspiration and heat. The name of my *sardar* is Ugan Chamar.

"The Chairman: Was not Ugan Chamar in charge of 22 people yesterday?... During the day there were only 7 people; I was at work and I know there were only 7.

"Because the information from the books shews that there were 22 people and they raised 60 tubs of coal. Had Ugan Chamar other men besides this gang of 7?... Ugan Chamar did not go to work yesterday. He was at home yesterday. The *munshi* writes the name and the tubs were entered in Ugan Chamar's name. The *munshi* is sitting over there. His name is Samthali. Last Sunday I drew Rs. 1-11-0 wages. Some deductions were made and Rs. 1-11-0 is what I received after the deductions were made. I worked 5 days last week. During the last three months sometimes I have earned Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 a week.

"Mr. Cliff: The Sahib says that if you were to work harder you could earn more than Rs. 1-11-0. Why do you not work harder and earn more money? When we go down we do 12 hours' work. We test the roof, we cut the coal, collect the coal, and then we load the tubs. At 7 or 8 o'clock our work stops; the *Sardar* stops the work in the place where we work. We eat in the morning before we go down at 8 o'clock and then we eat again at 10 o'clock in the night. We drink the spring water in the mine. From the time we go down we keep working all the time. We never rest. You do not know the difficulties of our work. Sometimes we cannot get anything to eat but rice; sometimes we get no *dal*, etc.

"Is it not possible for 7 men to cut and load and take to the tramway 20 tubs a day? If you come and see the place you will realise the difficulty of it.

"If it is a difficult and hardworking place, do you go to the manager and ask for extra pay? When they decreased our wages from As. 10 to As. 8 we were told that we must either do this work or go. Cases arise in which men have been working since their boyhood and then their work has been stopped.

"Do you ever try to raise the question of your grievances regarding wages at the *panchayat*? We did once, but rates were cut.

Five days' work — My wife is working on the surface loading coal into railway **One rupee wages** wagons. For five days' work last week she earned Re. 1. I have a mother, a brother, two sons and daughters to keep. My brother is younger than I am; he works in the mine. My children are small and they do not go to school. I have a plot of land and I am told that if I work 12 months I shall have the right to plough that land, but if not, the land will be taken away from me. I cultivate that land; this year I got 12 maunds of rice. I grow nothing but rice. My youngest child is three years old. When the child was born Rs. 5 was paid by the colliery. My wife did not work then for about 6 months, but then because we had not enough to eat she had to leave the baby and go to work. My wife works for a *hazira* of As. 3 or 4. It all depends upon the contractor: if he says she has not done enough work he will pay her only As. 3. It takes 12 hours a day, a *hazira*. She loads the big wagons. A *hazira* means a day's work. I will show you the work if you come along to that side."

"You are in a difficult working place; apparently there are two coal cutters, four loaders, and one man taking the tubs. Why were not more than two men acting as cutters?—It is very hot and it is very hard.

"Do you want to say anything further? One of the things I have got to say is this, that the *Sardar* takes Rs. 1—8—0 a week from the whole gang. If we do not give this Rs. 1—8—0 to the *sardar* he will stop us from working. Mr. Oran the overman, also takes a bribe from us. I shall be victimized for saying this. He, takes Rs. 2 from the gang of coal cutters. If we do not pay the Rs. 2 he stops us from working. I shall leave this place after you have gone because I am sure to be victimized after this. They will beat me." *

Well, we went down to this hard and difficult working nest mentioned by this poor miner. I remember that just as he had finished giving "Ideal" evidence he burst out crying like a child, so over-come was he with conditions. a gathering sense of his accumulated miseries and of the fear of victimization for having told the truth. We took him along with us inside the mine. We walked nearly a mile to the little gallery, where this particular gang was working. We found a man lying on his back in a seven feet gallery, where there was just enough space for an opening of two to three feet. The heat was terrible. Sweat was pouring away from the almost naked bodies of the

* Ibid, pp. 314, 342 and 343.

men. Lying on his back (the miner was quite right) he was unable to produce more. We had not spent 15 minutes near this gallery before an utter sense of exhaustion from the heat over-powered us and we beat a hasty retreat, being overwhelmed on the way up the mine with constant complaints from little groups of workers who gathered round us during our progress. Imagine the agonies of workers earning sometimes less than two rupees a week working six days in the week, twelve hours a day in such conditions, which are described by the employers as "ideal".

Now, in this connection, the *Sardar*—who is the jobber—made the following statement:-

"I have 24 men under me. Of them 8 are working on this shift in the mine. 7 men came on the last night shift and the other 9 are resting. The 24 includes 4 women also. If I tell the 9 men to come to-night they will come, otherwise some of them will stay behind. I filled 6 tubs last night. Last night we took coal out from above the band of stone and loaded it into the tub. We have to take the tubs from here to where it meets the haulage way. It is about 300 feet. I get As. 8 a tub. The money is divided equally among us. Everyone who comes gets the same whether he is a man or a woman. The 8 men working to-day include me. Of the 7 who were working yesterday 6 are here now. Some of the 9 who did not come either last night or this morning are away in their villages. The village is about 6 miles off. There is no woman in the 8 who are working at present. The women who were working yesterday did not come to-day. The boy who is working with us gets the same share as an adult. This boy has been working here for 3 years. His name is Jamruddin Meyan. All the men are able to cut coal except the boy. The men here came of their own accord in the morning. I did not call them. I never told anybody not to come. There is work enough for all those who are here. We do not get as many tubs as we want because the distances are long. If we do not get tubs we sit down and wait and then go home. I came at 8 o'clock this morning. We have filled 5 tubs up to now (3-45 p.m.). We will work till 7 and then go home at 8 o'clock. The reason why we can not fill as many tubs as some other miners is that the work is much more difficult here and the distance greater.

**Two rupees
a week**

We have been asking for higher rates but our rates were reduced by one anna about a year ago. At 8 o'clock we start off and get here at 10 o'clock. It takes us nearly an hour to get here. We are not allowed to start work before 10 o'clock. After 8 o'clock we are not allowed to work and they test the roof. I got Rs. 2 last week. Mauji (another worker) got Rs. 2-4-0 the week before last for 5 days' work. He got Rs. 1-14-0 last week for 6 days' work. Mauji looked after the work

yesterday when I was not here. We were all living together and I collected about 10 men and so I became a *sardar*. I have been here about 7 or 8 years. When the rates were not reduced I got as much as Rs. 4 a week at the most.”(1)

Gangia Kamin, a woman worker, said:-

“I am a loader. I have been working since childhood. I worked 2 or 3 days this week. I have five children. The smallest is about 2 years. My husband gets the money; I do not know how much he gets. I got Rs. 4-8-0 when my child was born. The head clerk gave it. When the last baby was born I stayed away 3 months before the birth and 6 months after the birth. The eldest chap looks after the others while I am in the mine. We have no land of our own. Those who do full amount of work get land. We have one *bigha* of land belonging to the Company. We each got Rs. 2-3-0 for 5 days’ work last Sunday.”(2)

Kailunia, a trolleyman, said:—

“Formerly we used to work on three shifts and used to get As. 12½ for each shift. Now we have two shifts and get As. 9 for 12 hours a day. The reduction was made about a year ago. Those who come at night do 12 hours’ work also. We work 6 days in the week.

When the the miners go out, they leave the tubs full here and we have to send them up. We work alternately on day and night shifts. Formerly there were 12 men doing this work. Now there are 8 men. If we go away at 7 o’clock half the *hazira* is cut off by the contractor. I have been working in this colliery for 3 or 4 years. When we complain to the contractor he does not listen to us and when we go to the manager he does not listen either. I work in front of the engine.”(3)

Kudirat Meyan, a trolleyman, said;—

“I have been working here 9 or 10 years. Since the rates of the contractor were cut we changed from three to two shifts. That was a year ago. There were three men at this corner formerly and there are two now. The one is myself and the other two are Akbar Meyan and Chattu Gho. Now Chattu Gho is in his house. He works at another point. I came here at 10 o’clock. We came at 10 and we can leave as soon as we have loaded the tubs after the miners have left. On the night shift we come at 10 o’clock and leave at 9 in the morning. The haulage is stopped when trolleyman are out.”(4)

(1)Ibid, p. 365.

(2)Ibid, p. 365.

(3)Ibid, p. 366.

(4)Ibid, p. 366.

We get a much truer statement of facts from the workers themselves and from the books of the managers, whenever they are produced. For instance, one manager produced his loading book from which we discovered that for screening, a gang of six men working under Fagu, got for the week, the handsome amount of Rs. 13/7/-. Again, the total earning of Dooki's gang, consisting of 7 workers-4 men and 3 women-which worked 5 days in the week came to Rs.20/9/-!!!(1)

The representatives of the Indian proprietors, Mr. A.L. Ojha, M.L.C., and Rai Bahadur D. D. Thacker, when faced with these figures-having given different ones themselves-were asked: "Is this figure correct or your estimate correct?" The answer was: "I do not know what the position actually is. The figure we have given is an average."(2)

These employers stated that the average number of hours worked by the miners was seven to eight a day and that they idled away the rest of their time. The employers said that these were the figures that they had from the supervisors. They were asked whether they had considered the question that what they called idling away was a process of waiting for work to be given to them or tubs to be supplied to them. They said: Not necessarily; they did not think so. (3) How ridiculous their position was is evidenced from the fact that they were asked whether a worker deliberately idled away his time underground because he considered it such a beautiful place to wander about in. They replied that the workers did not feel unhappy underground and that they smoked for some time and made themselves "merry in many ways". They actually tried to mislead the Commission into believing that a cutter was paid one rupee a day, but were forced to admit that they should have included a loader as well, i. e. they should have included the wages of two persons in that figure of one rupee a day.(4)

And what charges are levelled against the miners by the employers! In their Memorandum, the Indian colliery proprietors attributed the low standard of living of the labouring classes to their incorrigible habits and superstition, and without a blush added; "so long as the demand for a better living has not made itself felt from within the labour itself, all legislation or statutory proposals for uplifting labour conditions are bound to fail in their object." (5) According to the employers, it is not their poverty or their low wages which are responsible for their low standard of living, but their "habits". And all the time the cry goes up that the workers must put "more heart into their work".

(1)Ibid, p. 251.

(2)Ibid, p. 259.

(3)Ibid, p. 260.

(4)Ibid, p. 261.

(5)Ibid, p. 264.

The following table will give the total number of workers employed in various mines in India:-

Province	Coal Mines	Numbers employed	
		Underground	Total
Madras	..	..	..
Bombay	..	..	..
Bengal	208	29,497	44,303
United Provinces	..	..	..
Punjab	16	389	743
Bihar & Orissa	273	59,321	108,616
Central Provinces	29	5,376	7,656
Assam	9	2,159	4,128
Elsewhere	13	160	212
<hr/>			
British India (excluding Burma)	548	96,902	165,658
<hr/>			
Burma	..	..	..
<hr/>			
British India	548	96,902	165,658

In many a mine visited by me, I discovered that the attendance registers were faked, that miners came and went as they chose, underground, and sometimes cases were known of men living underground for two or three days on end. Admittedly, there is absolutely no check upon the number of hours put in by a miner.

Several mine owners have acquired Zamindari rights with a view to recruit labour for the coal fields, but principally with the purpose of keeping a better hold on their workers.(1)

It is officially stated that "with this end in view, they (the landlords) excuse the rents of the tenants on condition of their working as.....miners in the coal mines."(2) It is also said that "labour is encouraged to settle down near the colliery on small plots of land, given rent free or on nominal rent. The mineowners had complete hold over their men who were sometimes not even allowed to attend the Attestation Camps at the date fixed to put in their claims. The Malkatas (miners) were always afraid that if they opposed the claims of the mineowners they would not only lose their lands but lose their employment as well." (3)

(1) Final Report of the Survey and Settlement Operations of the District of Manbhum 1918-1925, p. 59.

(2) Ibid, p. 58.

(3) Ibid.p. 59.

Before the passing of the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act, since 1910, no tenancy could be created on condition both of rendering personal service and of paying a small rent.(1) Now, either a tenancy must be created on the condition of rendering personal service or on the condition of paying a small rent. But what is most surprising is that even today it should be possible for an employer to obtain what is nothing short of forced labour under the sanction of the law.

It was stated by a Committee of Enquiry appointed to report on the housing of colliery labourers in Bihar and Orissa, that when the rice crop is a failure, the miners return to the mines earlier and in larger numbers. "Hence a famine year in Manbhum or Hazaribagh relieves the colliery manager of much anxiety about his labour supply. The Committee is of opinion that 75 per cent. of the labour force of the Jharia coal field is to be placed in this class."(2) And this committee of "busy men"(3) made the astounding statement that "it is unnecessary to provide houses on the colliery for the villagers...They need only some sheds in which to rest and cook their meals; and a supply of wholesome water."(4) Another class of colliery worker, we are told, is living in huts and shanties, huddled together or scattered about. This Committee nevertheless found that "a large proportion of the existing rooms are unfit for human habitation"; and that it was evident to them that the existing accommodation was quite inadequate and that every witness examined by them stated that there was overcrowding in the busy season.(5)

The committee inspected some huddled conglomerations of huts and pig-sties at Katras and Angarpatra, which could only be described as appalling." They stated that "it was pleasing to note that the rabbit-warren at Angarpatra has since been demolished under the order of the Mines Board of Health; but there are others still in existence."(6) Many of the collieries have just mud—walls roofed with tiles laid on bamboo shoots. Generally no doors are provided and the occupants improvise doors out of old kerosine—tins, sheets of galvanized iron or matting.

I must say a word about the horrible conditions that prevail in the coal-mining areas in the Punjab. As an illustration, I would cite the case of one small pit near the salt range of Khewra, which I visited. The entrance to this small pit was a circular hole, and one had to go down on one's hands and knees in many parts of it in order to make any progress. A few workers were employed who dragged

(1)Section 101.

(2)Report, p. 6.

(3)Ibid, p. 1.

(4)Ibid, p. 6.

(5)Ibid, p. 7.

(6)Ibid. p. 7.

sacks of coal on their backs several hundred yards to the pit opening and earned in the course of a day, a meagre sum of four to five annas. Scattered up and down are small pits of this nature. There is no limit to the utter destitution and abject misery of the population which is being exploited by those engaged in coal production under the most wretched conditions.

The figures of coal output for 1928 are as follows:—

	<i>Thousands of tons.</i>
Jharia...	10,786
Raniganj...	6,828
Bokara...	2,119
Karanpura...	467
Giridih...	771
Rest of India...	1,337
Total.....	22,308

It is obvious that there are other methods for improving the workings in coal mines than wage-cuts. To-day coal is carried from the mine in baskets on the heads of the workers, sometimes up very steep inclines, and dumped into the tubs assembled at a railway siding. If rails could be run up in order to obviate the necessity of dumping coal by this method, it would mean some reduction in cost. Secondly, if stacking could be avoided, it would again reduce cost not only by preventing the necessity of additional handling, stacking and re-stacking but by preventing deterioration. But this is not all. When comparing the total production of 193 tons in Natal, of 316 tons in the Orange Free State and 323 in Transvaal with the output in India it must be borne in mind that obsolete methods of coal production, when compared with the latest methods of coal-getting by electrical machinery, can give no index of the efficiency of the two classes of workers utilising those methods.

**Ruining the
collieries**

It has been established that during the boom period there was practised and has continued to be practised a most uneconomical method of coal-getting, that mines have been ruined merely because the employers were eager to get rich quickly in a rising market. For example, here is Mr. A. Farquahar's testimony:*

"In some cases also due to the short-sighted policy of some Managing Agents, collieries have been seriously damaged by over-production, and in many cases during a period of heavy demand the best interests of the colliery have been sacrificed for a temporary advantage."

There are some mines in Jharia which are now employing modern machinery. The costs in these mines are obviously lower, efficiency and production greater. In fact, the Indian Coal Committee realised that there are only two

*Evidence before Indian Coal Committee: Report 1924-25, Vol: 11, Page 38.

methods of improvement for the purpose of effecting any appreciable reduction in raising costs:

(I) Increase in output by an extension in machine working; and

(II) (as I have already stated) avoidance of stacking by loading directly into waggons.

Neither of these methods has anything to do with the efficiency or the inefficiency of the coal-miner.

The industry has been suffering from a slump owing to the heavy drop in the exports of coal to foreign countries after 1920-21. This, **Market conditions** it has been stated, has been due to a mistaken policy on the part of Government of imposing restrictions upon the exports of Indian coal, as also to foreign competition. These restrictions were abolished in 1923 but, as a result of these restrictions, the foreign market for Indian coal, was almost entirely ruined. In fact, the total productive capacity of Indian coal mines is in excess of the total demand for internal consumption as well as for export. This over-production has led to depression in a falling market. Mr. Murray in his evidence before the Coal Committee stated: (1) "machine-mining is a comparatively new thing in India and mines are very conservative. Machine-mining increases production and so reduces cost of production per ton, but per ton it is more expensive than hand-cut coal." In the written statement he, along with his colleagues stated: (2) "In India, on the other hand, some miners will, on no account, fill more than 2 tubs per day in hand-cutting collieries. Where coal-cutting machinery is installed, the miners will load up to 4 or 5 tubs per day".

As regards wages; this witness, representing Messrs, Turner Morrison's Lodna Colliery, stated as follows:—

- (1) these collieries pay 9 annas per tub for hand-cut coal,
- (2) five annas per tub for machine-cut coal.

At the rate of 2 tubs per day, the earnings of a miner are 18 annas per day, but this represents, according to the evidence given on behalf of this company, the earnings of a man and his wife during the course of the day both for cutting and for loading. And yet with this fact staring this gentlemen in the face, he quotes with approval, the Chief Inspector of Mines in India, who in his report of 1923 says:—

"In January 1923, the coal-cutters went on strike but they returned unconditionally within a week. In some instances, the rates of wages for coal-getting were reduced and this had the immediate effect of

(1)Ibid, p. 2. .

(2)Ibid. p. 1.

increasing output", and says: "reduce the wages and a two-fold effect will immediately result, firstly by an actual saving in cost by **Starvation Wages.** the reduced rates and secondly by the increased output which will effect a reduction in total costs". This, knowing perfectly well that the wages being earned in collieries are starvation wages.

The evidence tendered on behalf of the collieries is such that it takes no account whatsoever of the fact that this industry is being run on sweated labour. Employers do not generally think either of making improvements, namely efficiency and modern methods, of coal getting or of reducing the cost where it could easily be reduced, through (taking a few examples) the reduction of overhead charges by standardising conditions, reduction of Managing Agent's commissions, wastage from stacking, improvements in wagon supply, tackling the questions of railway freight, of pooling and of grading, of co-operative coal-getting and of co-operative coal-marketing.

The Coal Grading Board Act was passed in 1929. The Board itself was constituted in 1926. Whether this will result in capturing the export market (already showing signs of liveliness) remains to be seen, but there are other evils in the industry which require attention. To-day it is a custom that prevails in some coalfields for a Managing Agent's firm to purchase **Nationalisation** coal from its own colliery at a low rate, and re-sell in the market at a higher rate, all the while employing the name of the firm for this extremely shady transaction. It is the custom again in some collieries for the Managing Agents to charge their commission on stores purchased for the collieries. And in reckoning the cost of production of coal, these unnecessary charges should not be lost sight of. Attention should be concentrated not upon reduction of wages that are already low, but upon searching those avenues of retrenchment which are easy of access and those methods such as nationalisation which alone can save the industry.

Those who are zealously complaining about the hours of work put in by a miner during the course of a week, suggesting that the Sonthal, which race generally supplies the mines with labour, has no incentive to do better work or constant work and being lazy will not work more than 4 days in the week, must realize that the actual statistics do not prove the allegations that have been made against the Sonthali.

The hours of work in large representative mines in each mining field for the year 1925, are stated by the Chief Inspector to be between 42 and 48 hours a week. In some cases, in mines other than coal, the average actually goes up to 54 hours a week, according to the Chief Inspector. These facts are incorrect. The fact that a man and his wife on an average produce and load two tubs of coal

a day proves that the average earning per head is between 7 to 9 annas a days. Now if we examine the Chief Inspector's Report (for 1925) in regard to the question of wages in the coalfields, we will find that the average for the Jharia coal-field is Rs. 4 per week and for the Giridih coalfields Rs. 4-8-0 per week. Calculating at 9 annas a day, the average of Rs. 4 per week shews that far from working only 4 days in the week the average miner puts in, in order to be able to earn Rs. 4 a week, at this rate, 7 days a week, or perhaps working at 12-hour shifts, is enabled to get a weekly rest day. If it is correct that the average wage is Rs. 4 a week, then it necessarily follows that in order to be able to earn this amount, the average miner has to put in more or less constant labour. The hours of work for the wages quoted by me above relate to miners underground; males other than miners work in Jharia 52 hours a week, in Ranigunj 48 hours a week, and in Giridih 48 hours a week; and their weekly earnings are slightly less, for in Jharia they get Rs. 3-9-0 per week and in Ranigunj Rs. 3 per week, whereas in Giridih they get the same wage of Rs. 4 per week. Women working underground are getting a miserable pittance in Jharia of Rs. 2-8-0 per week, in Ranigunj Rs. 1-14-0 per week and in Giridih Rs. 3 per week. Surface males work in Jharia 54 hours a week, in Ranigunj 48 hours a week and in Giridih 48 hours a week, and their weekly earnings are Rs. 3-2-0, Rs. 2-10-0 and Rs. 3 respectively. Surface females work in Jharia 54 hours a week, in Ranigunj 48 hours a week and in Giridih 48 hours a week; and their earnings are Rs. 2-5-0, Rs. 1-8-0 and Rs. 1-14-0 respectively.

If these wage statistics do not reveal a most desperate state of affairs and the fact that the average miner is engaged in a sweated industry, **Wage statistics** earning a mere pittance, unable to get a decent living out of the wages paid to him, then no statistics in the industrial world in India, that I am aware of, can establish a stronger case for a radical improvement from the workers point of view.

The Mines Act of 1923 prohibited the employment of children under 13 years of age and their presence underground, limited the hours of work of adults to 60 a week above ground and to 35 below ground, and prescribed a weekly day of rest. It did not however impose any limits on the hours during which any person might work in a mine on any one day. Accordingly a Bill further to amend the India Mines Act was passed by the Legislative Assembly on the 27th March 1928, according to which 12 hours was the maximum fixed for a one-day shift.

Now, it is known that there are about 1,000 coal mines in the whole of British India and that the quantity of coal raised per year is over 20 million tons, namely a little above 50 tons per day per colliery. There are of course small collieries which are opened or closed according to the conditions of the market and

*Chief Inspector's Report for 1925, p. 5.

Scientific management. the financial convenience of the owners. In some cases, colliery-owners get a lease of the coal of the collieries for the purpose of raising coal for a certain period from the landlords who are paid firstly a lump sum down, according to the value of the property, and secondly a royalty which ranges between four to eight annas per ton. When the lease is granted, the last consideration-which under modern conditions should be the first-is that the proprietors should give some thought to the scientific management and future prospects of the property which they are exploiting. It is recognized by every intelligent observer that the only consideration weighing with the proprietors has been the question of the maximum amount of profit that they can make out of their proprietary holdings with the result that these properties have been gradually ruined and brought to such an uneconomical pass that not only has there been great wastage of coal but a great deal of marring of the future prospects of the coal industry.

The only method of achieving success in this industry is the method of nationalisation of all the coal-mines and any tampering with this question and a refusal to face it with courage is bound to lead to continued disasters in the coal industry. The question to face in the future is whether small individual holdings coupled with the system of managing agency profits and royalties to absentee landlords are going to benefit not only the industry, not only the workers engaged in that industry, but the nation; or whether a system of national co-operative production, grading and marketing is going to bring prosperity both to the industry and to the nation.

Mr. A. A. Purcell, then M.P., in his speech at Cawnpore in November 1928, said:—

The British miner and the Indian miner “In every industry in India we found the workers working almost twice as long as their fellow workers in Great Britain, in Europe and in America; the British miner gets as much for one working shift as ten Indian miners receive and yet from every coalfield in Britain there comes a cry for a living wage.”

The following tables give the comparative basis:-

A representative British Colliery in the Forest
of Dean, Great Britain.

Miners' wages per ton of coal raised.	Overhead and other charges	Total
10s. 1. 45d.	4s. 1.21d.	14s. 2.66d.

A representative
Colliery in India.

Miners' wages per ton of coal raised.	Overhead and Other charges	Total
Re. 1-0-0.	Rs. 3-11-0.	Rs. 4-11-0.

These instructive tables reveal the fact that, whereas in Great Britain about 80 per cent. of the total cost of production is spent upon wages of miners and 20 per cent. for overhead and other charges; in India, on the other hand, a little over 70 per cent. of the total cost of production is shown to have been spent for overhead and other charges, while a little over 20 per cent. is reserved for wages for the workers.

The following table gives the fluctuations in the market rates of good second class coal and the rate of wages:-

Year	Market rates of good second class coal	Rates of wages.
1924	Rs. 4-0-0 per ton	Rs. 0-8-6 per tub of 14 cwt.
1925	Rs. 3-8-0 -do-	Rs. 0-8-0 -do-
1926	Rs. 3-0-0 -do-	Rs. 0-7-6 -do-
1927-28	Rs. 2-8-0 -do-	Rs. 0-7-0 -do-

Section 29 (j) of the Indian Mines Act, 1923, empowers the Governor-General-in-Council to make regulations prohibiting, restricting or **Women miners** regulating the employment in mines or in any class of mines, of women either below ground or on particular kinds of labour which are attended with danger to the lives, safety or health of such women. The Joint Select Committee on the Mines Bill made a suggestion that an examination of the question of female labour underground should be undertaken at an early date in consultation with local Governments. The question of the prohibition of women in mines is of long standing. Originally, it was raised by the Secretary of State for India in 1890 when Lord Crewe forwarded to the Government of India the proceedings of the Berlin Conference and suggested that Government should consider the advisability of legislating for the regulation of women in mines. The Government of India took the question up; a Bill framed in 1899 empowered the Inspector of Mines to prohibit the employment of women when such employment was dangerous or unsuited to female labour, and it included another clause empowering the **Legislative history** Governor-General-in-Council and the Local Governments to make rules, prohibiting or regulating the employment of women below ground or on particular kinds of labour. When the Bill was submitted to the Secretary of State for his approval, the Secretary of State noted that, while it provided for the supervision and control of female labour, it

did not prohibit the employment of women altogether. He warned the Government of India that, as the mining industry developed, it would become increasingly difficult to prohibit the employment of women and suggested that the question of further safeguarding such employment should be carefully considered in Committee. The employers naturally objected to this and raised criticism stating that, if women workers were prevented from working underground, this would prevent male relatives from working in the mines. The time-honoured plea that conditions of employment in Indian mines were fundamentally different from those in Western countries was again raised, and the employers eventually prevailed upon the Government which left the discretion in the hands of the Governor-General and the Local Governments to frame rules prohibiting the employment of women in mines. As predicted by the Secretary of State in 1839, the Indian mining industry had developed and the Government of India were eventually forced into the position to reconsider the question of the employment of female labour underground. In this connection, the Chief Inspector of Mines reported that he realised that the withdrawal of women from mines would appear to be inevitable sooner or later. He says:

Opposition of mine owners or managers to the proposal is not due to the principle involved but to the immediate practical difficulties which the proposal involves." The plea, it must be remembered, was that these women worked in family gangs and therefore it would dislocate industry, if women were withdrawn from the mines. The Chief Inspector of Mines in an enquiry that he held, the report of which will be found in the Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour, No: 35, says that "in one colliery, Purusothampur, where the whole of the output of coal is obtained by means of machines, 83 per cent. of the women are unattached". As a matter of fact, no proper enquiry has been held and the variation of unattached women working in the mines is from 10 per cent. to 83 per cent. In 1927, the Government referred for opinion to the Mining Boards and the Provincial Governments mainly concerned, the matter of the prohibition of the employment of women underground in the coal mines of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and the Central Provinces and in the salt mines in the Punjab. They published the draft regulations in this behalf for public criticism in June 1928. These regulations under section 29 (j) of the Act were finally promulgated on the 7th March 1929. They prohibited the employment of any woman underground in the areas mentioned above with effect from the 1st July 1929 and in all other mines with effect from the 1st July 1929. The result is that in the mines of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and the Central Provinces and in the salt mines in the Punjab, women may still be employed underground up to the 30th June 1929 provided that the total number of women employed at any time does not exceed a gradually decreasing percentage, i. e. 29 per cent. in the case of coal mines, decreasing by 3 per cent. each year and 40 per cent. in the case of salt mines, decreasing

by 4 per cent. each year .As to what justification the Government had for waiting nearly 40 years to bring in regulations which will have full effect in the course of another 10 years for the purpose of prohibiting the employment of women workers underground is a matter which is left shrouded in mystery in view of the fact that the only doctrine that could have weighed with the Government was whether any civilized country in the world is permitting the employment of women underground in modern times. That argument seems to have been balanced by the representation of the employers to the effect that the industry would be dislocated by the withdrawal of women workers—a doctrine which cannot be substantiated by any statistics or facts relating to the coal-mining industry. The real truth is that it is cheaper to employ women than to employ men and the coal-owners realizing this have fought down the demands of all humane persons in regard to the prohibition of female labour underground. Both Mr. N. M. Joshi and myself have time and again raised a discussion in the Legislative Assembly. Under present conditions, our cry has inevitably been a cry in the wilderness.

On pages 37, 38, 39 and 40 of Bulletin No. 7 of the Department of Industries (Bihar and Orissa) tables are given relating to the cost of living index in Jharia for the years 1922 and 1923 and it is obvious that, taking the normal period at 100, the composite index number had gone up to 178.5 in March 1923, in the course of one year. I am mentioning this as but one example of the havoc that has been created in the mining area with constant and deplorably high fluctuations in the cost of living with no commensurate rise in the wages given to miners.

Let me now take the question of the health of the miners. The Jharia Mines Board of Health Report, 1923-24, gives the figures for death from cholera:—

For the Jharia Coalfield alone:	
1919,	407 cases, 104 deaths.
1920,	173 cases, 51 deaths.
1921,	596 „ 212 „

The Chief Inspector of mines in his Report for 1924 states that the infantile death rate in 1934 was 145.7 per thousand. There were then 1,407 cases of cholera with 578 deaths and 503 cases of small-pox. Infantile mortality for 1925 is reported by the same authority to be 171.1 per thousand. There were 952 cases of cholera with 364 deaths reported by the Jharia Mines Board of Health, and 717 cases of small-pox with 54 deaths.

If evidence is needed of the urgency and efficacy of mass organisation for India labour, then we must search for it in the story of the Indian miner. As a class, the miner is miserably ill-paid, abominably ill-treated and wretchedly housed.

In this vast continent, coal mines are to be found in Assam, Central Provinces, Hyderabad, Rewah, Baluchistan Rajputana, Burma, Punjab, Bengal and Behar; but the most important of these are to be found in the two latter provinces, which produce more than 84 per cent. of the total of India's coal supply. In fact, what are known as the Gondwana coalfields produced over 20½ million tons of coal out of a total production of over 21 million tons in 1924. According to the latest statistics, there are over two hundred and sixty thousand, one hundred and thirteen men, women and children employed in this industry. The two hundred and sixty-thousand actual workers represent a mining population of more than three-quarters of a million, and it is possible that twice this number is actually employed than shewn.

What then is the significance of these facts? The true significance will not be perceived until we commence an investigation into the incidence of the miner's exploitation. A few years ago, the Industrial Commission appointed by the Government of India reported that the average wage of a miner was seven annas a day. Seven annas a day for arduous and dangerous work: (There were 227 fatal accidents in the mines according to the 1927 report, of whom 190 were males and 37 females). Seven annas a day for a working day of twelve hours. Seven annas a day where there are no cheap market facilities and prices are necessarily high. Seven annas a day with which to rear and sustain a family of citizens supposed to be well-nourished and healthy. Seven annas a day with which to provide against sickness and unemployment, with which to provide for births, marriages, education, funerals and social dues.

Let me now turn from the Industrial Commission's Report to a valuable compilation officially published by the Government of India, under the title "Wages and Prices".* Between the year 1897 and 1920, the average total earnings per day of the miner,—reckoned not on per ton production, but on actuals—ranged between a little over four annas a day and a little over nine a day. Reckoned on the basis of average daily earnings per ton the figure varied between Rs. 54 in 1897 and Rs. 59 in 1920—that is, roughly, wages were stationary at eight annas per day for twenty-three years, rising to Rs. 7 in 1900, keeping to this level till 1918, and dropping again to Rs. 57 till 1923—a figure almost identical with that of 1897. Reckoning on the basis of tonnage production is in reality no test of actual earnings, which are obviously much less in individual cases whatever may be the wages-bill of the employers for all employees. I have deliberately stopped at the year 1921, as a slightly different chapter begins in the life of the Indian miner in the coalfields of Bihar and Orissa—a chapter in which the Trades Union Congress plays a significant part.

The most striking fact which these statistics display is the immeasurable

*Wages & Prices in India 1923 p. 212, Table No: 23 (8).

penury of the miner whose wages were practically stationary between eight annas a day and eleven annas a day at a period during which retail prices of essential foodstuffs, like wheat, rose in a district like Purnea in the coal province of Bihar and Orissa, from Rs. 2.787 per maund in 1898 to Rs. 6.299 in 1921—that is by a little less than 250 per cent. In real wages the miner got at the end of 1920 not eight annas a day but only about 3.1/5 annas a day.(1)

Let me regard another aspect of the miner's life as disclosed by these statistics. The figures for the year 1923 shew that each miner on an average raised 103.5 tons in that year. The Indian Coal Committee appointed by the Government of India in 1924, stated that the raising costs of coal in Ranigunj were Rs. 5/- per ton and in Jharia Rs. 6/- per ton. In fact the average pit-head price of coal in Bihar and Orissa for the year 1924 was Rs. 6-11-9 per ton. It follows that a miner raised in the course of a year for his employers from the bowels of the earth, coal worth nearly nine hundred rupees; and obtained in return a little over one hundred and twenty rupees twelve annas a year for a full working month of 23 days, this being the basis on which official statistics of wages have been compiled.(2) And with Rs. 91/- to last him a whole year, the miner has to feed and clothe a family of five, consisting usually of a wife and three children, and sometimes also of an aged parent or some other dependent.

One last remark that I would like to make is a quotation from the Report of the Chief Inspector of mines, 1926, in which he says:-
Great variations in wages "The wages alleged to be paid at mines in the same mineral field vary within such wide limits—up to 100 per cent.—that there is reason to believe the relevant entries in the returns to have been, in many instances, made at random".

And it must be remembered that the returns regarding wages are supplied by the mine-owners themselves.

Let me here draw the attention of the reader to the profits earned by a few of the more respectable firms in the coal fields even at a period of acute depression artificially caused by the Government's embargo on the export of coal from India. Firstly,
Profits there is the Adjal Coal Co., Ltd., of which Messrs. Andrew Yule & Co. are the Managing Agents. This company has a paid-up capital of 3½ lakhs. It paid the following dividends:-

(1)Ibid, p. 82.

(2)Ibid, p. 212.

1922	...	50 per cent.
1923	...	50 per cent.
1924	...	21.5 per cent.
1925	...	21.5 per cent.

These figures do not disclose the actual profits which were considerably more than what appears on the surface.

Secondly, there is the Bansdeopur Coal Co., Ltd., of which Messrs. Jardine and Skinner are the Managing Agents. It has a paid-up capital of 6 lakhs. It paid the following dividends, also in the lean years:—

1922	...	30 per cent.
1923	...	37½ per cent.
1924	...	45 per cent.
1925	...	38¾ per cent.

Lastly, there is the Bengal Nagpur Coal Co., Ltd., with Messrs. Andrew Yule & Co., as its Managing Agents. The dividends paid by this company were enormous:—

1922	...	65 per cent.
1923	...	85 per cent.
1924	...	90 per cent.
1925	...	90 per cent.

Many of these companies are in the hands of Scottish firms.

In July 1920, Mr. Swan, M.P., questioned the late Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, concerning the distressful lot of the Indian miner. He suggested "a minimum wage sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living and also compensation for accidents." Mr. Montagu replied that he had referred the matter to the Government of India and asked them to consider the suggestion. To this day, however, the Government of India are apparently still considering the suggestion. Meanwhile the officials of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain took up the cause of the Indian miner and declared their open sympathy with him. At the special session of the British Trades Union Congress held in 1919 to discuss the policy of direct action, Mr. Robert Smillie devoted a large portion of his speech to the horrible conditions existing among the industrial workers in India; and on one occasion actually spoke of a boycott of Indian coal, because it was produced by sweated labour to swell the profits of English companies. In September 1919, Mr. Smillie delivered a speech at a Keir Hardie Memorial Service meeting at Glasgow and said that when Keir Hardie was editor of the Labour Leader, he had with him Geordie Christie as cartoonist; and one day the latter depicted a scene in Africa with hundreds of mutilated bodies of negroes strewn over the place while in the foreground there stood a gentleman, semi-fashionably dressed, his apparel

including a tall-hat, a cannon in one pocket, a bottle of rum in the other, a sword in his clenched teeth and a Bible in his hand. Underneath were the lines:-

“When Sol brought morning to the Dawn
Said he to her, My dear,

“Tis evident some Christain folks
Are opening markets here”;

And Mr. smillie proceeded: “At that time we were carrying on a civilizing war in Africa, and when people objected to being civilized, we **How to civilize.** simply wiped them out. *We had been engaged in civilizing India for 160 years, despite the fact that India had a higher standard of real civilization before that time than we were likely to have for thousands of years to come. Today as a result of the British civilization of India, Indians were being paid ¾d. per day for their labour, with from 4½d. to 7½d. for fairly good skilled labour. British capitilists were out to exploit the natural resources of India, which would yet become a great coal-producing country, and already preparations were being made to land Indian coal in this countay which had been produced by the labour of men who were being paid anything from ¾d. to 6 d. per day. He was against Protection and an ardent Free Trader, but he hoped workers would not allow coal soaked with Indian blood to come in and cheapen labour in this country. He was not opposed to Indian coal coming to this country, if it were produced under decent conditions and it would, therefore, be the duty of the miners’ leaders to organise the Indian workers to demand better wages. There was no freedom for the common people of India under British rule, for which the people of this country were as much to blame as the Government, and it was, therefore, their duty to use all their power to wipe out the conditions existing in India at the present time.”*

In October 1920, a letter was sent to the Press by one of the miners’ leaders concerning the conditions of employment in the coal fields. I give **Living from hand to mouth.** below a few extracts:—

Jharia Coalfield is situated in the Province of Bihar and Orissa and there are about 700 collieries in which thousands of workers are dragging out a miserable existence on the verge of starvation. Many actually perish of starvation daily. These poor labourers are supposed to work for 12 hours a day. They have to go through life on insufficient food, they do not know from year’s end to year’s end what it is to have their hunger satisfied. They live from hand to mouth, are always in debt, cannot save and have nothing to fall back upon in bad times. The average production of their labour is in no way less than Rs. 8/-to Rs. 10/-a day, and it is amazing to note that the proportion of this sum which the miners recieve in wages is hardly more than six to nine annas a day in many collieries.

It was Mr. John Burns who, when asked by Chicago interviewers to state his opinion of Chicago, exclaimed: "Chicago is the epitome of **Epitome of Hell Hell**". Pressed to state at the time of his departure, whether he had revised his opinion, he added: "Yes; Hell is the epitome of Chicago". A visitor to the coalfields of Bihar and Bengal will harbour feelings not dissimilar to those entertained by Mr. John Burns when he visited Chicago. I think Europe first became aware of the terrible conditions prevailing in the Indian coal mines through Mr. Robert Smillie's constant references in his public speeches from 1918 onwards. In that year he told me that he had heard that Indian women and children were in many cases leading the lives of semi-slaves in Indian coal fields. I determined then that I would take the earliest opportunity of organizing the coal miners of Bihar and Orissa. I need merely add here that I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that when I visited Jharia in 1921 the sight that I saw left a ghastly impression upon my mind. The coalfield landscape is a treeless desert decorated with tall, towering chimneys and obstructed by numerous habitations and workshops huddled together around the engine-rooms. The broken roads are covered with a black layer of coal-dust; and here and there a single railway line curls round the collieries. Over the black country there hovers an unhealthy haze partly dust and partly vapour. The condition of the miners is miserable in the extreme. They are half-naked; the children have barely rags on their backs; sometimes one sees an imitation bangle round a woman's ankle. This is all the evidence of luxury that meets one's eyes amidst so much destitution. The women as a rule wore a dirty and torn *dhoti* hardly five yards long, which served both as a skirt and a blouse. The semi-nude Sonthal carrying a long pole, like the stem of a young tree, in his hand and a tattered piece of cotton cloth on his back, makes a contrast with the richer folk decked in their costly shawls.

A word more about the housing conditions of the miners which are some of the worst that I have come across. A row of four brick **Housing conditions** walls and a roof partitioned by dark and unventilated cubicles which could barely contain two beds and leave any room to spare, form the dwelling places of thousands of miners. One has to stoop down almost to the knees before it is possible to enter and find a bare cot, a fireplace with no outlet for the fumes, two or at the most three cooking utensils; and that is all.

A Memorandum submitted by the Government of Bihar and Orissa, 1929, (to the Labour Commission) says:* "All collieries in the Jharia coalfield (as distinct from the Mugma for Lower field) are amply and efficiently equipped with approved types of houses. Their design, construction, ventilation, and general

*Ibid. p. 12.

amenities are governed by the Jharia Mines Board of Health bye-laws. This is the standard, according to the bye-laws:-(1)

- (a) Floor space 100 sq. ft.
- (b) Cubic capacity 1,000 c. ft.
- (c) Width of rooms 8 ft.
- (d) Average height 7 ft.
- (e) Verandah floor space 40 sq. ft.
- (f) Verandah width 5 ft.
- (g) Doors 5 ft. x 2 ft.
- (h) Adequate and independent ventilation.

Imagine a room 8 feet wide, 7 feet high, which has to house the six-foot Sonthali, his wife, three children and often one or two dependents. **Voiceless miners** And when the Government of Bihar & Orissa is asked as to whether workers have made any demands and whether the requirements in regard to housing comply with any of the demands made by them, this is the reply given by the Government:—

“The workers having at present no association have never been known to make demands. Their convenience has however, been closely studied in drawing up type plans on which the houses are built.”(2)

And it must be remembered that, in many cases, for this accommodation, rents are charged by the employers. In the mines underground-scavengers are employed as ordered by the mines Act. **Slaughter of innocents** Their work is without exception inefficient owing to the lack of arrangements for the removal of night-soil. There are no latrines below ground. At home attempts have been made to deal with the problem of promiscuous defaecation”(3) and yet on the same page the Report says: “A septic tank latrine on one colliery is proving very success-ful.”

As already stated by me, in 1917, as a result of a resolution passed by the Legislative Council of Bihar & Orissa, a Committee(4) was appointed, to which I have already referred, to enquire into the housing conditions of labour in the coal-fields. The Committee found that there was a real scarcity of accommodation and actual overcrowding on certain collieries. The sites chosen for the houses were in many cases insanitary. The drainage and the layout were bad. Floors were not more than 5 feet square and walls only 3 or 4 feet high, and no doors were provided. Houses were inadequately ventilated and there was no arrange-

(1)P.14 of the Bihar & Orissa Government Memorandum to the Labour Commission.

(2)Ibid, p. 14.

(3)Ibid, p. 24.

(4)Report on Housing of colliery Labourers, 1917.

ment for the disposal of night-soil or kitchen refuse. This was in 1917. A Bill to give effect to the recommendations of this Committee was introduced but it has not yet been passed into law. Powers, however, have been taken by the Mines Board of Health to frame bye-laws in Ranigunj and Jharia. The houses constructed by the workers themselves are much more satisfactory than those provided for them.

We saw a nude, emaciated baby lying on a dirty napkin. The mother could not afford to buy any milk, nor afford the luxury of **Never have enough to eat** providing a nurse to look after the baby during her absence at work. We were told that a decrepit old woman kept her eye on the children during working hours. When I arrived at the pit-mouth, I found a clamorous crowd saying bitter things in the presence of the contractor, and I can confidently assert that nowhere in all my experience have I seen such scenes of fearless and universal complaint in the presence of the proprietors or their agents. Men must be desperate to turn so fearlessly on their employer. They said they never had enough to eat, their wages were disgraceful, their housing abominable. At every colliery I heard the same complaint and I heard no contradiction beyond a vague denial. It seemed to me that the owners and their agents were ashamed of their work. Often the miner has to go a mile underground before he can get to his digging nest. He takes with him his wife to help him fill the usual tub. When the tub is full, it is to be brought up to the pit-mouth. If it is found that the tub is not overfull, as it should be according to the exacting demands of the owners, the miner's dues are deducted by means of a fine. The tub is usually of a 13 to 14 hundredweight capacity when brimful. But the poor miner is usually made to build a pyramid of coal above the brim far beyond the legitimate capacity of the tub. One woman told me that she had often been compelled, by necessity, to take her new-born baby underground, as her husband wanted assistance, and there was no one to look after the child. The best she could do was to find a spot not dripping with water and leave the infant in the damp darkness while she herself assisted in filling the tub, in clear breach of all regulations. As I have stated 7 to 9 annas a tub is the usual rate paid to a miner who can dig, with the assistance of his wife, no more than two tubs a day; and sometimes he is not even as lucky as this, because his work counts only from the time the tub is brought to the pit-mouth and duly checked by the overseer.

I remember asking a meeting of Scottish Colliery Managers at Jharia in 1921 how much they paid in compensation for death or **Compensation** injuries in case of accidents to miners. They said for death the compensation varied up to Rs. 100/- and lower sums for other injuries. They did not tell me what often is the fact that, in many cases, no compensation is paid at all. I learned from absolutely unimpeachable sources, as well as from the lips of the workers themselves, that when there is an accident,

the miner is kept under treatment for a week and, if the Manager is a hard-hearted brute, the miner is sent out and left to fend for himself. There are collieries, of course, which provide no adequate medical relief and you may search Jharia, as I did when three miners were brought to me with battered heads and bleeding limbs having been assaulted by the agents of the proprietors as a warning for having attended the second session of the Trades Union Congress, and not find one within your reach. And now let us ask as to what is to happen to the children when the parents are out of work owing to illness or injury? Who is to provide the meals of coarse rice and coarse pulse washed down with impure water? There is nothing for them to do but to hope for help from neighbours or die in starvation. The greatest optimist in the world will not dare to say that there is ever a shred of comfort for the miners throughout the short span of their existence. Prostitution, which is the handmaid of poverty, is practised on an extensive scale.

The result of constant impoverishment, a bad water-supply, now being improved, and unhealthy surroundings is the frequency of deadly epidemics. Cholera and pneumonia take their seasonal toll from the foul and insanitary huts. Sometime ago the Health Officer was asked to disclose the information in his possession regarding the ravages of cholera among the miners. This gentleman

The toll of a colliery. refused to do so on the ground that any public man demanding such information is to be considered a troublesome "busybody". But official information for statistical purposes cannot always be withheld and now the Health Officer states that *between May 1st and September 10th, 1921, there were 48,946 deaths from cholera in Bihar!!! Hold up your hands in horror at this murderous detail as you would, there is no denying the fact that not a newspaper, not a public man, not an official, not an employer had a word of comment or condemnation to offer*, although the columns of all newspapers at the time were full of the most distressing details of the ravages of cholera and typhoid and starvation in Russia. There are certain inconvenient facts which it is best to smother in silence.

I have only one more statement to make before I close this part of my story. The Coalfields' Committee reported that coal "was a national asset" but the question of labour, the Committee **Coal of national importance: not so the miner.** apparently regarded as only of secondary importance, and it decided nothing beyond approving the system of shifts in mines. Coal is of national importance; not so the coal-getter who is merely of secondary importance. The glare of gold is such that it turns men's hearts to stone.

In view of the horrible exploitation of the workers in Indian coalfields I decided to stimulate their efforts at organization and unity, **Stampede of Employers.** by holding the second session of the Trade Union Congress at Jharia. No sooner had the project been mooted than the employers became frantic with fear and rage. Undeterred, we

invited them to attend the Congress. They accepted: The Indian Mining Federation actually nominating twenty representatives to attend the Congress. Having done this, the Federation, rather inconsistently, began making hysterical appeals for suppression of the Congress. I want the reader to note that this Federation is representative of the Indian colliery-owners. The British colliery-owners also joined their voices in outcry against us almost at the same time, through their organization known as the Indian Mining Association. It is obvious that the Mining Federation, having accepted our invitations were really stampeded into opposition by the efforts of the Indian Mining Association. Apparently at the suggestion of the latter body a joint Conference was held on the 23rd of November 1921, because it was alleged: "The Committee (of the Federation) are not entirely free from any suspicion of the movement taking an unhealthy development". Rumours were carefully spread warning people of the dangers of an outbreak of violence. This was done not because there was any justification in fact, but in order to create an eleventh-hour propaganda against the holding of the Congress. The Indian Mining Association were apparently somewhat more wide awake than the Mining Federation, and realised that, if the miners were to be prevented from demanding better conditions, the Congress must not be allowed to be held at Jharia. The circular letter after quoting the resolution of the Joint Conference, asking for the prohibition of the Trades Union Congress within 200 miles of Jharia proceeds:-

"The recent happenings in Bombay, Calcutta and elsewhere in India are quite sufficient evidence as to the danger which is inseparable from unchecked propaganda, economic or otherwise, amongst the labouring classes during a time of economic stress and general unrest. Recent events have shown that if any effective steps are to be taken, such steps should be taken before and not after the occurrence, and it is therefore earnestly hoped that the Government of India will lose no time in prohibiting the above meetings which are fraught with such serious consequences to life and property.

"It is true that the Government of India have under consideration a Bill to recognize and regularize Trade Unions in this country and the principle has been accepted by this Association provided such Trade Unions are properly organized and are subject to some control. But it must be obvious to all that the Congress which is advertised to take place in Jharia at the end of this month is not an honest or spontaneous effort on the part of the labour to obtain better conditions, but arises out of a desire on the part of a small self-seeking section of the community to exploit the labour and take advantage of the present state of unrest to spread a dangerous propaganda from the evil effects of which the whole country is already suffering.

"There is reason to believe that, if the Congress is allowed to meet according to advertised arrangements, there will be a very considerable

number of people present largely consisting of imported and paid agitators. Extravagant ideas as to wages will be put into the minds of the workers. Vernacular hand-bills have been issued broadcast inviting the labour at the collieries to cease work and attend the Conference, and, in the present perilous condition of the coalfields, it will be evident that the position of public utility and industrial companies in the matter of their coal supplies will be immediately and seriously affected. This will again react upon labour conditions at mills and factories throughout the country, should they be compelled to close down through lack of coal and it is not improbable that Government may be faced with an extremely grave situation the risk of which can be localised if not entirely prevented by firm and prompt action now.

"It is understood that the Government of India have deputed Mr. R.N. Gilchrist to keep in close and constant touch with the doings of the Congress, if it should be allowed to take place. It is hoped, therefore, that Government will keep this association informed of Mr. Gilchrist's arrival in the coalfields so that arrangements may be made for keeping in constant touch with him in regard to the situation."

On the same day, the Mining Association circulated a letter signed by the Secretary, detailing measures contemplated against the Trade Union Congress. The following words are significant:-

"I have also to intimate that it has been suggested to the Committee that individual action might well be taken by Colliery owners and proprietors, either direct or through their Colliery Agents, under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1893, by laying an information before the Magistrate of Dhanbad, calling upon him to prohibit the meetings in anticipation of a serious breach of the peace, and danger to life and property resulting. Section 144 which is sub-joined below, gives very wide powers to the Magistrate on his being reasonably satisfied that the need for action has arisen."

In pursuance of this policy, the joint Conference passed the following amazing resolutions:-

Employers Resolutions. "1. Resolved that this special joint meeting of representatives of the Indian Mining Association and the Indian Mining Federation is of opinion that in view of the present disturbed state of labour and the general political unrest throughout India, the proposed holding of the All-India Trade Union Congress at Jharia on the 30th November to the 2nd December 1921 is likely to lead to serious trouble and imminent danger of a breach of the peace, and that the holding of the proposed meetings anywhere within 200 miles of the coalfields should be prohibited.

"2. Resolved that in the event of Government being advised that they have no powers or considering it inadvisable to prohibit the meetings referred

to in the above resolution, this joint meeting demands that full and adequate provision be immediately made for the protection of the lives and property of peaceful European and Indian residents and employers of labour in the coalfields and for the due maintenance of law and order”

Well, we went ahead with our organization and held the second session of the Trades Union Congress at Jharia in the coalfields. The employers had demanded protection from the Government. We were told that machine-guns were made available, prepared to meet any awkward contingency. We made a polite request to the employers to allow our delegates to attend the Congress. We met with a curt refusal. Mr. John Miller, the Irish organizer, took his bugle and marched from colliery to colliery, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, gathering every man and woman of these collieries on his march, with the result that there was a general strike. I have seldom seen such a mass meeting as the one addressed by us on the opening day of the session of the Congress, a vast sea of faces eager for a message to be given to them. Eventually the employers sent their representatives, who were allowed a hearing at the session, having given a donation of Rs 500/- towards the funds of the Trades Union Congress. They had realised that action of the type instanced in the following statement had roused the workers to a high pitch of fury and that there was nothing else to do but to recognize the power of the working classes conscious of their might.

I append a statement made to us in the presence of witnesses by one of the workers who was dismissed, a Mistry (Tram line-electric) of Jamadaba Colliery No. 2 pit:—

“On the 30th November, I told the Electric Manager (new) that coolies did not wish to work that day. On being asked by the Sahib, I told him that the coolies will go to attend the Trades Union Congress and they want leave. The Sahib said that if coolies did not attend to their duty he would fine them four days' pay. He with myself taking measuring tape began to do something or other with the new electric points and lines. He further told me that the name of such coolies should be dictated to him. After this, I, leaving my work, came to Jharia to attend the Congress. The next morning the Sahib went to duty at about 10 a.m. I went to the workshop to bring nails. When I asked the Sahib to sign a slip for nails, the old Electric Sahib asked me where I had been the last day. I told him, that when leave was not allowed to the coolies, I went to the Congress. Upon this the old Electric Sahib told me that as I did not go to the Jamadar, I had been dismissed though the Jamadar went to Bhagathan, and the Electric Sahib took charge from me. After this the Sahib asked me whether I wanted my pay. I told him that when my services were no more required, it would be better if my pay were paid to me. He billed my pay for 29 days only but I worked for 31 days. Furthermore my pay was Rs. 40/- per month, while the Sahib billed me at Rs. 30/- per month. On the 3rd I asked the Time keeper

regarding my bill and then it was that I was informed to this effect. Before this I had served in this very colliery as Tindal on Rs. 40/- per month and for this I possess a certificate of my work.

Besides this I know nothing.

Left thumb impression of Dwarka Mistry.

Dismissals were not enough. Our men were actually assaulted".

Here is a statement by Mr. J.H. Grey, Assistant Manager, Ramjas Agarwall Colliery, Jharia.

"I came up from the mine and on seeing a crowd near my work and seeing a ghari (carriage) with five injured men, I offered them first-aid and dressed their wounds."

The question will readily be asked as to what became of the Miners' Federation, and of all the great enthusiasm that was generated at Jharia? Did we take advantage of it? Did we get going a mass movement? No. One of the greatest hoaxes that has ever been played against the Labour movement in India was staged at Jharia. One of the mine-owners, under the guise of displaying great sympathy with the working classes, joined the Reception Committee as Chairman. He spent large sums of money, and probably collected still larger sums. He put his signature to a 25 per cent. increase of the wages of the men; he gave us a right royal reception; he literally shed tears about the woeful condition of the miners; and directly our backs were turned on Jharia, wound up the Miners' Federation. For seven long years, nothing more was heard of Trade Unionism in the coalfields.

I quote below from the text of a communique issued by the Central Provinces Government on the Rawanwara Colliery disaster published in the newspapers of the 30th June 1924:—

"Comparing this with the Rawanwara Colliery case, we find that at Rawanwara, in order to win extra coal, a most dangerous system of working was deliberately initiated. The mine was in charge of a temporary and unqualified Manager, and the proprietor and Manager of the mine were prosecuted in the ordinary course and convicted of offences under the law relating to the management of mines. Apart from this, no proper arrangements were made to look after the injured and although skilled assistance for the rescue of the miners who were buried alive was offered by Messrs. Shaw Wallace and Company, when the accident occurred, it was refused; and when at the instance of the Deputy Commissioner two mining engineers of this firm took charge of the operations, to save the entombed miners, it was too late for a successful result. It appears that a subordinate medical officer was usually employed in connection with the colliery, but he was away

at the time of the accident. The principal proprietor, who was in fact in general charge of the colliery, never visited the scene of the accident or the injured. He first sent out a local medical practitioner who only stayed a short time at the mine, and then returned to Chhindwara. The proprietor then attempted to get a compounder to take charge of these seriously injured persons; but did not even succeed in getting a compounder to attend to them. It was not until two days after the accident that the proprietor wrote for the assistance of the medical officer of the local large collieries, who was available all the time, if he had been asked to attend the injured, and could actually have taken care of them in the hospitals attached to the other collieries."

Such are the brutal conditions of life and labour in Indian coalfields.

OUR STEEL KINGS

Jamshedpur is one of the most important centres for the production of steel in India. It is not a peaceful centre, the sword is ever drawn ready to strike at Jamshedpur. Labour and capital have been constantly at war, a curious comment on the relationship between what is presumably an Indian organisation and its Indian employees. Jamshedpur is an isolated town, entirely self contained, the property of the Tata Iron & Steel Co. Ltd., whose associated companies have also a substantial interest in the town. There is only one road-way that leads into this town, which is fed by the main Bengal-Nagpur Railway line.

About 27 years ago, where Jamshedpur stands to day there were just one or two villages surrounded by the jungle. The reason why this site was selected was that it was close to the source of raw material, both coal and iron ore. Moreover the two big rivers one on the North and the other on the West, were sources of a plentiful water-supply.

A report prepared by a Government Official* admits that the site for this town was chosen as "there is also reason to suppose that it was believed at the time that it would be a centre of a large supply of cheap and unskilled labour".

The Tata Iron & Steel Co. owns about 25 square miles of land in Jamshedpur and surrounding areas and although the first stake was driven in 1907, today Jamshedpur is a town with a population of 100,000 inhabitants. In Jamshedpur meet the various races, Indians, Europeans and Americans.

Let me mention a few facts worth remembering in regard to Jamshedpur:

A few facts Firstly the administration of Jamshedpur for a long time had no form of Municipal Government, the company being practically the autocrat of the town. The official report states that the company was a "benevolent autocrat". Secondly the cost of living at Jamshedpur has always been very high and it is stated that this was an important factor in industrial trouble. Thirdly in 1919 a special Committee was appointed to consider the problems that arose out of the growth of Jamshedpur. The recommendations of this Committee led to the creation of the Board of Works controlled mainly by the company. The Board of Works had no legal powers, whereupon the Local Government in 1924 made Jamshedpur a notified area under the Municipal Act and appointed a Notified Area Committee. There is no democratic form of Municipal Government in being at Jamshedpur even today and it may be said with a great deal of reason that 100,000 inhabitants are completely at the mercy of one employer.

An insanitary area to the South of Jamshedpur known as Jugsalai is the

*Royal Commission on Labour Vol. IV, part 1 page 115.

home of small merchants, attracted to Jamshedpur by the prospect of making fortunes, and the unemployed, and of the poor workers. It holds about 15,000 inhabitants and is also controlled by a Notified Area Committee, which, not possessing funds is unable to look after the sanitation, and yet the official whose report is the basis of these statements states as an excuse for the lack of sanitation in that area that the "Indian is inclined to be restless under the restrictions imposed by modern sanitary authorities and even if he could get a house in Jamshedpur he prefers his primitive habits and the comparative sanitary licenses of Jamshedpur". How many of the unemployed could afford to "get a house" in Jamshedpur is left to the imagination of the reader by this official who is out to do special pleading for the employer.

It is no exaggeration to state that for a considerable period the treatment meted out by the Tata Iron & Steel Co. to its Indian employees has not been such as would be in consonance with the oft-vaunted claim that the Tatas are a national concern. In fact it seems to have become an incurable habit on the part of employers when in distress to demand protection from the Government by putting forward the plea in almost every case that they are of national importance to the development of India. In almost every case the record of such employers is a record of strife of low wages, autocracy and of high-handedness.

During the War prices shot up enormously and wages had lagged so far behind that by about the year 1920 India was a seething cauldron of economic unrest. In Jamshedpur where the cost of living was proverbially high the workers were hit the hardest and had been demanding for some time an increase of 50% in wages. It was during this period also, it must be noted, that this industry was a great flourishing concern-not able to produce enough to sell. As usual, the complaints made by the workers went unheeded for a considerable period when suddenly an American Manager of Tatas awakened to a realisation of the possibility of impending strife. He explained matters to the deputation of the workers and told them that he could not settle matters off-hand and asked them to collect statistics regarding their grievances themselves. Meanwhile, he proceeded to Bombay-hundreds of miles away-where the Board of Directors sat in complete oblivion of the impending disaster. On the morning of 24th February 1920, the foundry employers went on strike and within an hour, except for the clerical staff, the works were at a stand-still.

One of the features of all the strikes that had taken place for many years had been the great concern displayed by the Local Government in providing the employer with large contingents of police and military forces whose presence obviously has resulted in attempts to intimidate the working class into a quiet acceptance of the terms of the employers. In an isolated area such a show of

determined force could have had only two results, either to exasperate the men or to cow them down and, be it said to the credit of the workers of Jamshedpur, that in almost every case they refused to be cowed down.

The power House employees on whom depended the supply of light and water were also on strike, with the result that European employees were called in to work day and night closing down and packing the blast furnaces and keeping the Power House going. In all about 32,000 men were on strike.

Now the curious fact that emerges from the history of strikes is that it is not the employers who open negotiations with the workers, but it is either the Local Government or officers in close touch with the employers.

Within two days, the officers of the Government arranged a meeting between six strike leaders and the company's officials, when an agreement was drawn up subject to ratification by the workers, in which the substantive portion related to pay for the strike period and an investigation in consultation with the workers to be completed regarding the grievances of the men, by the first of May. Needless to say that the strikers turned down these proposals.

On the 8th of March the Company offered to re-instate all the strikers, to consider the question of paying men for the period of strike and of increasing wages if the financial position of the company permitted. Meanwhile a complaint was made that the company were trying to starve the men by refusing to sell them grain, which complaint had a substantial basis in fact. Normally grain was sold below cost price; but many were unable to obtain it after the strike and later on orders were given to sell it at market rates. The workers ultimately refused to consider the terms offered by the Directors and stated that they wanted an increase of 50% in all wages which, in many cases before the strike, did not exceed Rs. 8/- per day, and made 19 other demands such as, strike wages, holidays, sick leave, increments, codification of service rules, working hours; in short items which were apparently of an industrial nature were put forward. The general Manager agreed to place these demands before the Directors. Meanwhile, for reasons that I cannot understand, except there must have been premediation, Government increased their forces at Jamshedpur, both armed and military police including 50 mounted men. The official report states "that the military authorities were also asked to hold in readiness a company of Indian Infantry who were subsequently despatched but did not reach Jamshedpur until the morning of the 16th." Picketing meanwhile had been accentuated. How it came about that a motor lorry belonging to the Government was being utilised by the employers for conveying black leg labour to the Works remained a mystery. If the officials were entirely impartial, they had no business to place transport facilities at the disposal of employers. The Deputy Commissioner agreed not to utilise the lor-

ries any more provided no violence was used to prevent the willing workers from going to the Works. Nevertheless, no violence was used by the workers. The official report states that three times willing workers were brought in (to the Workshops) by means of a motor lorry under the protection of a strong escort...". Is it to be wondered at that the lorry and the escort alike and also the military police guard at the gate were stoned by the strikers although this charge is denied by them. The third trip by the lorry was barricaded by the strikers at two places. The attitude of the workers is summoned up as follows:—

(1) They would not leave the Company's service.

(2) They would not return to work unless they received an increase of 50% in their pay.

(3) They would not allow any Indian to work while the strike was on.

(4) They would not vacate their position until those already working in the works were brought out.

The Commissioner of the Division gave them an hour from 10 to 11 A.M. and told them that if they did not disperse force would be used against them.

It became impossible to move supplies for European quarters by lorries or cars and the workers expressed their determination to stop **Strike intensified** workers and suppliers from entering the Works. Picketing was so intense that even servants of European employees were prevented from entering the Works. It showed a strong and powerful organisation.

Apparently, what was exasperating the employers as well as the Government officials and the controlling forces of law and order was the fact that the strike was being intensified. Orders were given to arrest as many people as possible who were blocking the railway line. So far there is no allegation that there was any violence indulged in by the workers and yet at this stage orders were given to the mounted police not to shoot, but if resistance were offered, to use their swords.

Gurkha and British soldiers were sent on an engine along the line fully armed, with the object of arresting—what the official report calls "offenders"—whose only offence in this case was that they had gone on strike and prevented the workers from entering the Works. Orders were given to this party to arrest as many offenders as possible.

It is interesting to note that this party was accompanied by one Mr. Sawday, who is an important official in the pay of Company dealing with staff affairs, and who apparently in order that he should effectively discharge his duties, was given the rank and authority of an Honorary Magistrate. It is this officer, who, on this occasion acts as a guide to the military and police party, which discovered that the line was blocked. Forty or fifty men were arrested by the police without

Law and the employer

resistance, without any violence being indulged in by the workers, and the party making the arrest was quietly allowed to proceed back in order to bring reinforcements. One party remained on spot. It is stated officially that 1,000 workers collected and came to close quarters with the police and surrounded them. "The attack was of the most resolute character" says the official report. The attack apparently was of the usual apocryphal character in the shape of stone throwing. This charge has been denied by the workers and all impartial investigations lead to the conclusion that it was a false charge.

It is note-worthy that Mr. Sawday, as stated in the official report, "being the only magistrate present gave the order to fire. Mr. Sawday also gave the same order independently to his own party." This atrocity was, therefore, committed under the direct orders of the agent of the Company, by a party of men under his charge as well as under his instructions by the police and the military.

Two strike-leaders Gopi and Bhuta proceeded immediately while the firing was still going on, to report the matter to the Deputy Commissioner who arrived post-haste on horseback on the scene of action and heard the firing when he came close to it. This one gentleman Mr. Scot, the Deputy Commissioner, with the assistance of Gopi and Bhuta, was capable of holding the crowd and making it obey his orders even after the shooting, and after a statement had been made, according to the official report, by the workers that they would kill any officer, who came near them. It is obvious that the mob could not have been in a mood to commit violence and that even though it had been exasperated to the point of taking drastic action, yet one single official riding on horseback was capable of controlling a mob which the police and the military, under the orders of an employee of the company, it is alleged, were incapable of doing. It was a gratuitous piece of work, this shooting of innocent workers under the orders of an employee of a company which claims to be in the vanguard of national industrialism and of national patriotism. One hundred shots were fired. Five strikers were killed, 10 wounded severely and 13 not too severely.

I do not remember any occasion on which there was such an enthusiasm displayed as when in the month of October 1920 a delegation from Jamshedpur attended the session of the All India Trades Union Congress in Bombay and when one Mr. Singh, who was called upon to address the assembled delegates, nearly 900 in number, came to the platform. Mr. Singh's eloquent speech consisted merely in this, that he displayed the stump of an arm which he had lost as the result of the shooting down of the strikers by the police and military at Jamshedpur.

A charge was made on the 20th March by the Amrita Bazar Patrika, a leading nationalist daily of Calcutta, that Mr. Sawday on behalf of the company deliberately fired with his pistol on the strikers on four different occasions, when there was no danger to any

one of personal violence.

It is significant that even the official report admits that Mr. Sawday fired on four different occasions and that there was no other European servant of the company, who fired at all.

I want the reader to stay for an answer, when, after reading the details given by me mostly from official statements, almost in the language of official records, I tell him that the same official record ends up the story with these two sentences:

"No attempt whatever was made at any time to compel anyone to work who did not wish to do so. On the contrary, the violence was on the side of the strikers, who forcibly prevented the entrance of willing workers.(1)

Firing a hundred shots; killing and wounding a large number of innocent workers is not violence; emptying a revolver into a crowd is not violence!

No wonder that the Directors of the Tata Iron & Steel Co. "passed a resolution expressing their appreciation of the services of the officers of the Government not only in the matter of preserving law and order but also in the assistance rendered by them in bringing about a termination of the strike."(2)

Out of the ashes of this tragedy sprang the Labour Association of Jamshedpur, which, from now onwards, took the field on behalf of the men. By 1922 the Labour Association had obtained complete hold over the men. In a manifesto it expressed the view that the workers demanded "a reasonable share of the produce of our labour and right and justice done to us in other respects." This manifesto proceeded to examine balance-sheets and urged that the shareholders and the reserve fund had more than their share of profits. Jamshedpur was in for another strike. Detailed demands nearly ten in number relating to wages, accidents, service conditions, hours of work etc., were made by the Labour Association. The real reason, it is alleged, of the strike was the high prices prevailing at Jamshedpur and the inability of the company to prevent profiteering. On the 19th of September, the Company announced that grievances would be considered in the first week of October on the return of the General Manager. That very night the strike was complete. As in the case of 1920, large forces of military and police were concentrated in the town. The European staff took charge of the essential services. A meeting was arranged, on the initiative of a Member of the Legislative Council of the Province, between the representatives and the management. Although the Company in the previous year made a profit of Rs. 88,00,000/-, yet they declared that they would make no concessions to the workers on the point at issue, which might lead to increased cost of production. Even Government officers at that time were inclined to think that the com-

(1)R. C. on Labour, Col. IV, part I, P. 121.

(2)Ibid, p. 122.

pany's attitude towards the men was that of autocrats, who know that they were the absolute owners of a town of 60,000 inhabitants and that their attitude was overbearing in comparatively small matters.*

Orders had been given by the management that all these who rejoined would draw wages reduced by 10%. Realising that a few thousand men had come back to work, the company thought that they were now the masters of the situation.

As a result of discussions between the Deputy Commissioner, the General Manager and the leaders of the workers, a decision with regard to this matter was postponed to the 25th of October as the workers wanted to take legal advice. This was on the 16th. Meanwhile, it is stated that 14,000 workers had gone back to work including about 3,000 skilled men.

Meanwhile also telegrams had been addressed to me asking me to take charge of the strike. Although I was about a thousand miles away, I immediately wired to the Director in charge asking if he was prepared to settle the strike. I received a long telegram in reply

Negotiations asking me as to what guarantee there was that the workers would listen to what I had to say. In reply I forwarded to the Director in charge a telegram received from the workers' organization forwarding a resolution in which they had expressed complete confidence in me and had decided to accept any settlement arrived at between me and the management. On receiving a favourable reply from the Director I proceeded to Jamshedpur. The night of my arrival was signalled by a large number of workers downing tools and joining the strikers. I learned the next day that there were barely 3,000 workers at work out of the 14,000 who had gone back. I lost no time in intensifying picketing. The official report states that "on the 20th October, a sudden change came over the scene. Hitherto there had been intimidation but practically no picketing. That morning there was picketing by thousands of men all over the town and surrounding villages". I had hardly had time to take stock of the situation when an official rode up to my residence and presented me with an order under Section 144 forbidding me from indulging in picketing under pain of immediate arrest. The reply to this was that picketing continued in an intensified form. When it was impossible for them to arrest thousands of men as they would not have jail accommodation enough for them, I was approached by the officer in charge of the military forces, the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner, I informed them that I had no hesitation in meeting them in the Rest House. I met these officials and was informed on arrival that I should not indulge in picketing. I was asked whether I intended to continue picketing realising that an order had been issued prohibiting it.

Picketing an issue I told them, pointing to a table map of Jamshedpur, that at all the important centres the next morning there would be batches of one hundred picketers and that they were welcome to take whatever action they

*Ibid, 126.

liked. I was there to bring about a settlement. On the one side were the forces of law and order being utilized for the purpose of assisting the employer and on the other side was the organized force of the working class, which had no other weapon except the power to picket and that this organized force would utilise that power to the best of its ability.

I was asked whether I would like to meet the General Manager. I said, "yes". In reply I also told them that it was in pursuance of a telegram received from the Director in charge and from the workers that I had arrived in Jamshedpur. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon I was officially informed that the order under Section 144 prohibiting picketing was withdrawn. I was informed later that the Manager of the Tata Iron & Steel Co. was unwilling to meet me in my representative capacity, but afterwards he agreed to meet me in order to discuss the strike situation. I had no difficulty within a very short period of time in making the Manager realize the importance of a settlement. On that very evening in a meeting I announced the following terms of settlement:—

(1) Everybody was to return to work at 5 a.m. the following morning.

Those who had gone to their homes to return to work at once

Settlement on their return.

(2) There would be no reduction of 10% and all who returned to work would draw the same wages as drawn by them before the strike.

(3) A Committee of 10 men representing the All India Trade Union Congress and 10 men representing the management would be appointed to arrange a settlement of all the items.

(4) The re-organisation of the Union would be undertaken by the All India Trade Union Congress.

The men obeyed the order given to them. The management did not reduce the wages, but the conciliation board was never set up owing to the dilatory tactics employed by the management.

Matters lingered on for months until Nationalist leaders like the late Mr. C.R. Das, Pandit Moti Lall Nehru and others took charge and paid, with me on different occasions, visits to Jamshedpur to bring about a settlement which had become complicated by this time.

It was decidedly a victory for the strikers. The 10% reduction in wages was not enforced. The management which had refused to negotiate with the workers' organisation was compelled to negotiate with the parent body. So clear—evidently was this that the official report states that there was also discontent among the European and American supervising staff, who considered that they had been "let down" by the management in coming to any form of compromise particularly in taking back the ringleaders. The result of this discontent was obvious in this that

the secretary of the Labour Association was immediately discharged. Not only this, but some of the men who came back to work were given **Trouble again** less lucrative jobs in spite of the fact that a promise was made that there would be no reductions. Over the entire agreement entered between myself and the management hung the shadow of a breach of faith on the part of the management.

Meanwhile the Government, in view of competition with foreign steel concerns, had set up an enquiry under the Tariff Board into the need for the protection of the steel industry. Very heavy protection was granted to this industry by the Steel Industry Protection Act, which came into force on the 13th June 1924. Two subsequent reports of the Tariff Board in regard to further protection for the steel industry were also submitted and action was taken by the Government on these reports granting assistance to the industry.

At this stage it is advisable that I should turn back to the question of protection for the Steel Industry. On behalf of labour, in the **Protection for whom?** Legislative Assembly, we put up a strenuous fight opposing protection tooth and nail. It was reckoned that the burden the Government was placing upon the consumers and the taxpayers would amount to practically Rupees three crores a year or more. In the Select Committee I moved that this industry, since it was demanding protection on the plea that it was an industry of national importance, should be nationalized. It was by the narrow margin of one vote only that the motion was lost. All amendments moved in order to get a fair wages clause and obtain protection for the working class engaged in the Steel Industry, were turned down by what can only be described as packed house. The acting President of the Legislative Assembly himself was a very large shareholder in Tata's concern, although this is not a reflection on his integrity. Prominent leaders of some groups were also shareholders in Tata's, one deputy leader being actually a Director of the Company. Several members of the Legislative Assembly were also shareholders. This particular meeting of the Legislative Assembly might easily have been described as that of the chairman and shareholders and the Tata Iron & Steel Co. Nevertheless, there was a large number of members, who had no holding in the Company but yet the constitution of the Legislative Assembly is such that protection for industrial concerns, no matter what it is, is likely to be passed by the House on every **Shareholders all** occasion. However, advantage was taken of the agitation against the grant of protection, to set up a conciliation committee headed by the late Mr. C.R. Das including Mr. N.M. Joshi, myself and others, which succeeded in obtaining from Mr. R.D. Tata, one of the Directors of the Company, and from the other Directors a settlement on many points and the re-instatement of the discharged Secretary of the Labour Association. Two years later came the third report of the Tariff Board. The point that the Tariff Board laid stress upon

all along was that there should be a reduction in staff although they admitted that the labour cost was high, not only because of an excessive number of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled employees, but because of higher salaries paid to imported American and other labour.

This policy of reduction led to further trouble in 1927 and 1928. There was a six months' strike in the year 1923. The two important issues were mass reduction and payment of lock-out wages. However, after a long period of negotiations, on the 11th of September on the intervention of Mr. Bose a settlement was arrived at to the following effect and on the 13th men returned to work.

(1) The reduction policy was to continue in the form in which it had begun before the strike, but immediate reduction was stopped.

Another strike (2) Lock-out wages would not be paid, but recoverable loans were to be given.

(3) The previous promise of a bonus scheme was ratified.

(4) Substantial increase in wages was promised.

(5) The proposal to change the Works Service Rules, so as to give the men no claim where the company had to lay off men, was dropped.

There was a split in the Labour Organization, a new one which soon gained complete ascendancy known as the Labour Federation having come into existence.

It was not known, at that time that the leader of the new Federation had been indulging in speculative transactions in the Tata Iron & Steel Co. stock on the stock exchange and a communication addressed by him was subsequently published in the Press in which he stood "self-condemned". Over other matters, subsequently this particular gentleman was sentenced to a term of imprisonment and the Federation naturally suffered a set-back.

Normal hours of work in steel industries in India for unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers, who in the case of the Tata Iron & Steel Co. **Hours of work** number about 25,000, are 8 a day and in the noncontinuous processes these workers put in 6 days in the week, but in the continuous processes they work for seven days in one week, and less in the next, alternately.

In regard to housing, the workers at Jamshedpur are able to obtain only 30 to 40% of their requirements. The housing problem at **Housing** Jamshedpur is very acute, whereas the sanitary arrangements of the town are inadequate. On the one side the European quarters possess decent bungalows fitted with a complete flush system and on the other there are just a few central latrines. No adequate facilities are provided for bathing and washing.

On the question of wages, the claim is made by Tatas that the average monthly wage paid to the Indian employees is over Rs. 30/- a month. In reality

large number of women can earn only 5 to 7 annas a day. When the salaries of the highly paid supervising staff are taken into account and the wages of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers reckoned, the estimate will fall astoundingly below this figure.

The only other important steel concern in India is the Indian Iron & Steel Co. of which the Managing Agents are Burn & Co.

Finance	The financial position of this Company is as follows:-	
Paid up capital ordinary.	Reserve and other funds.	Block Account.
Rs. 1,44,01,100	Rs. 34,32,898	Rs. 2,11,33,310

The financial position of the Tata Iron & Steel Co. Ltd., is as follows:—

Paid up capital ordinary,	Mortgage or debentures.	Reserve & other funds, including depreciations.	Gross Block Account.	Paid up per share.	Market quotations.
Rs. 2,62,32,300)	Rs. 4,02,27,085,	Rs. 8,45,01,880,	Rs. 23,04,42,055	75)	27
14,62,500)				30)	273

As the question of protection is a problem of importance in India not only generally but specially in connection with the steel industry and the Cotton Textile Industry, it is worth mentioning here that whenever this cry has been raised in India, it has been generally an accepted fact, however it may be hidden by statistical manipulations or by false propaganda, that it is the incompetency of private enterprises, which has been chiefly responsible for the burden placed upon the consumer through protection. It is a well-known fact that one of the largest steel works in America obtains its fluxite, coal and iron-ore from distances as far away as a thousand miles from the steel works, having to bear extra charges for transport from the mines by rail to steamer and from steamer to rail and that it pays the highest wages known in the steel industry of the world, and yet it is held that the Tata Iron & steel Co. Ltd., which obtains its fluxite, coal and iron-ore from a distance of about a hundred miles of direct railway connection from the steel works, pays the least wages known in any steel industrial undertaking in the world, is unable to compete either with America or with Great Britain or with the continent. It does not interest the legislator to ponder over these simple facts which lead to the inevitable conclusion that the failure of the steel industry in India during the post-war period was due either to the exorbitant charges levied by the Managing Agents or to the incompetency of the administration or to the failure of private enterprise.

The Steel Industry in India has been bolstered up by the State, which has

been paying subsidies to the industry on its production and which **Bullets and dividends** has levied high duties on imported steel products in order that the steel concern in India should obtain the necessary monopoly in the sales. There is no similar protection afforded to the workers and whatever protection the consumers had in the matter of competitive prices has been taken away from them by the action of the legislature. Unfortunately the public in India has a short memory. Like the Burma Oil Co., which is an Oil State within a State, the Tata Iron & steel Co., Ltd., at Jamshedpur is a Steel State within a State. As we have seen, it is the dispenser of law in the area which it controls. As we have seen it has displayed a callous disregard of the woes and miseries; aye, even of the lives of its employées. But because it happens to be an Indian concern, in the eyes of Nationalist India, blind to all other considerations in industry except the racial, the industry has obtained its pound of flesh from the Indian nation and given its workers, asking for bread, the bullets which they did not deserve.

800,000.

The Railways in India have a brief history, dating back not more than 70 years. The total route mileage today of the Railways is about 40,000 miles. This is in excess of that of any other country in the world, excepting the United States of America. The total number of employees is over 800,000. Out of the 12 principal railways, there are five which are state-owned as well as state-managed. These are, the North Western Railway, the Eastern Bengal Railway, the East Indian Railway, the Great Indian Peninsula Railway and the Burma Railways. There are five state-owned railways which are managed today by private companies, namely, the Bengal Nagpur Railway, the Bombay Baroda and Central India Railway, the Madras and South Indian Railway and the Assam Bengal Railway. There are two company-owned and company-managed railways, namely, the Bengal and North Western Railway and the Rohilkund and Kumaon Railway, the former of which is, under the terms of agreement, due to be taken over by the state almost immediately. Apart from these there are a few small railways managed by private firms, and others by the Indian States.

Taking the figures of expenditure on staff the average wage paid to the employees on these railways amounts to between Rs. 30/- to Rs. 35/- per month. The system of control on these railways is partly central and partly individual. Every railway administration is in the charge of an Agent. Over and above the Agents of each administration, there is a Railway Board, members of which divide their duties—some dealing with the staff, some dealing with the technical side and some dealing with finance. The head of the Railway Board is known as the Chief Commissioner for Railways. He is the head of his Department working under an Executive Councillor who holds the portfolio for Commerce and Railways in the Executive of the Governor-General. It is claimed by the Railway Board that, in the case of company-managed railways, it is difficult—if not impossible to initiate any measures for the improvement of the terms of service of the employees except by way of suggestions to the Administration concerned.* Naturally, difficulties are bound to arise, but in actual practice if the Railway Board is so minded they can carry the day against individual administrations.

The following statement shows the capital charge at the end of 1928-29 contributed by the Government and by the Companies, in the case of company-owned or company-managed or both, railways:—

Capital

*Memorandum of the Railway Board for the Royal Commission on Labour

	Capital con- tributed by Government.	Capital con- tributed by By: Cos:—	Total cap- ital at charge.
	(In Lakhs of Rupees).		
A. B.	18,01,43	3,60,87	21,62,30
B. & N. W.	8,37,25	88,71	9,25,96
R. & K.	1,55,89	—	1,55,89
M. & S. M.	44,68,37	10,07,08	54,75,45
B. B. & C. I.	67,71,80	2,52,46	70,24,26
S. I.	31,72,20	4,15,34	35,87,54
B. N.	61,07,94	10,53,13	71,61,07

The manner in which some of these companies have been allowed to control railway systems, although the major capital was invested by the Government, will be seen from the bare facts relating to the Bombay Baroda & Central India Railway. In 1905, the Secretary of State for India actually went to the length of purchasing the property vesting in the Bombay Baroda and Central India Railway Company, by paying a fixed purchase price, according to the contract then subsisting between the Company and the Government. Apparently, pressure on the part of those who controlled the Company, or of certain other interests, was such that, although the Government paid the price, yet they announced that they were not prepared to take over the direct management of this Railway, with the result that they handed back the lines to a new Bombay Baroda & Central India Railway Company for maintenance and working. In reality the management continued to be the same as before. The result, acknowledged by the Government, has been that differential rules relating to the staff continue in existence and the Government has found certain hesitations and difficulties in assimilating the rules with those prevalent on State-managed railways.

The following statement shows the earliest dates of termination of contracts with the Railway Companies:—

	Date of termination of contract.
A. B. Railway.	31st December 1931.
B. & N. W. Railway	31st December 1932.
R. & K. Railway	31st December 1932.
M. & S. M. Railway	31st December 1937.
B. B. & C. I. Railway	31st December 1941.
S. I. Railway	31st December 1945.
B. N. Railway	31st December 1950.

In order to comment upon the general position it is necessary to take as an example any one particular railway system, such as, for instance, the Great Indian Peninsula Railway.

The Agent of this administration gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour. In his written memorandum, he had made the astounding statement that Rs. 15 per month, in his opinion, and in the opinion of his administration, was an adequate wage to be paid to the generality of his workers on this system. He was asked to disclose the figure of the salaries paid to the Agent as well as the Deputy Agent of this administration. He said that the salary of an Agent is Rs. 3,500 and that of a Deputy Agent Rs. 2,150. Presumably, these figures do not include various allowances, nor do these figures disclose the fact that cheap residences, palatial in many cases, are available for the use of the officers and free travelling facilities in the most luxurious circumstances are at their disposal.

The Agent was asked to disclose the basis on which he considered Rs. 15 per month to be an adequate wage. (1) He said that wages are based generally "on economic considerations, supply and demand, the nature and responsibilities of the work involved, the initial technical skill required, and so on." (2) When pressed in regard to the first point, namely, economic considerations, and asked whether he could substantiate the statement that Rs. 15 per month was an adequate wage, he admitted that he had no figures to shew the cost of living, and added further that what he really meant by the economic character of the wage was that the wages current in the neighbourhood were Rs. 15 and that, while making the statement, this was the factor taken into consideration. He was asked: "You do not, therefore, make that statement on the basis that it is an adequate living wage?" and he replied: "I am of opinion that it is an adequate living wage. At the same time I have no figures which shew the minimum wage on which a man can live." He was further asked: "And yet it is your opinion that Rs. 15 a month is an adequate living wage?" and he answered: "That is so". He was immediately confronted with his written memorandum which stated that he had no system of fixing wages, nor any criterion in regard to a living wage. He was asked to explain the basis on which he fixed the minimum wage in certain divisions covered by his administration, and he replied that the wages in the different districts were largely fixed by the prevailing wages in those districts. "And on no other consideration?" he was asked. And he answered: "I would not say that no other factor comes into it."

(1) Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol: VIII, Pt. II, p. 296, et. seq.

(2) p. 296, et. seq.

In fact, nearly 20,000 workers on this Railway system were being paid wages which range from nine to seventeen rupees a month. Naturally such conditions of service were a constant source of trouble. When the workers asked for interviews in the matter of the redress of their grievances, the reply generally received by them was as follows: "I see no reason to grant a personal interview"; or else: "The matter has been referred to the Chief Transportation Superintendent and no good purpose will be served by an interview".

It was inevitable that such a state of affairs should lead to disaster. In fact no sooner had the Agent of the G. I. P. Railway finished **A move forward** giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, than every one familiar with the attitude displayed by him was convinced that the workers could not for long put up with the treatment meted out to them by his administration. Not many weeks passed before a general strike was called by the workers. Eventually I was called in by both parties to the dispute to settle the strike. The settlement arrived at between myself and the Railway Board was important for two reasons: firstly, because it was decided that meetings between the All India Railwaymen's Federation, the Central Railway Workers' Organization, were for the future regularized, it being agreed that the two bodies should meet twice a year to settle matters of dispute; and secondly because a charge of breach of faith was publicly made against the Labour Member of the Railway Board, in that he did not disclose the correct figure of permanent vacancies filled up and thereby misled the negotiators into an acceptance of terms which would have been repudiated had the correct figures been made known.

A great deal of stress was laid by the Agents of all the Railway administrations on the existence of what are known as **Staff Councils** for the purpose of dealing with individual grievances. Originally these were started as a counter-blast to legitimate trades unions of the workers. Under the rules of recognition of legitimate trades unions, the unions are expressly prohibited from dealing with individual cases, unless such cases involve some principle, but in order to give them a fillip the Staff Councils, which are in reality organizations set up by the employers, were permitted to deal with individual grievances, and we were told by the Agent of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway that "if a man receives an order which he considers is not correct, he has a right of appeal to the officer above the officer who passed the order". with the result, as we have seen, that when the aggrieved person asks for an interview, he is told that no good purpose would be served by granting it. In regard to these Staff Councils, the administrations expressed a definite opinion that they would not seek the co-operation of the Unions in their establishments. One particular Agent stated that "he was not prepared to have a Union take any part in Staff Councils as they are constituted at present."

Another Agent, Mr. Coirvin, of the East Indian Railways, was asked to

give the Commission an idea of the fundamental principles underlying Trade Union organization, and he said:— "It is an association of the staff, joined together to help themselves." (1) He admitted, when questioned, that it must be a free association. He was then asked; "In what way does a Welfare Committee or a Staff Council differ from a Trade Union? Is the fundamental difference between the two this: that in the one case there is freedom of association, but that in the other case, there is no freedom of association?" And he stated that he did not know, but that the Welfare Committee were partly elected bodies, and that in the new rules he proposed to increase the number of elected members on the Committee. Further that the rules were laid down by the Administration and not by the members of these committees. For instance, taking one example, the Administration lays down the rule that there should be eight representatives of the staff on the Committee, two Europeans or Anglo-Indians, two Indian clerical staff, two lower subordinate staff drawing Rs. 20/- p.m. and two lower subordinate staff drawing less than Rs. 20/- p.m. Mr. Colvin was asked: "Therefore the difference between a Trade Union and a welfare Committee is that a Trade Union is quite competent to make its own rules and to appoint its own officers as it chooses, while in the welfare Committee there is the official hand" and he said: "official hand only up to a point." For instance, as regards the condition of work and wages, all that the Staff Committees could do is to put up or forward their recommendations in the shape of a petition to the higher authorities. Here is the actual phraseology: "After discussion, the Committee agreed that the following entry should be made in the Minutes: 'Nature of Request,' 'Reasons given for request' etc., etc.:' that is to say it is a petition forwarded in the shape of a request to the authorities to ameliorate the condition of the workers.

No wonder that, during recent years, this Administration has been faced with nine strikes. A system of this kind is bound to be faced with the problems that arise out of such flagrant carelessness and irresponsiveness. Here is a charge made against this Administration:

- Frequently men are employed by the supervising staff without scrutinising previous records of service or trying their efficiency whether skilled or unskilled. The general opinion is that the jobs are sold to the highest bidder".

Now, when charges of this nature are made, instead of investigating these charges, what is the action that the Administration takes? All that happens generally is that the case is filed, in spite of the seriousness of the charge, and those who bring such cases to the notice of the authorities are the subjects of victimization. For instance, after the 1923 strike, 54 men who were alleged to have taken a leading part in the strike were discharged. (2) We were told that these 54 men were charged with rioting. Subsequently this statement was

(1)I bid, p. 416.

(2)I bid, p. 420.

modified by the Agent, who said that their names were taken; they were not charged in a police court.* Now, first of all, no police court charge was made against these 54 men for rioting, and it is unthinkable that, if the statement were correct, a charge would not have been made, when it is general knowledge that even when there is not a riot, cases of this nature are sometimes concocted against the workers. But, further it is on record that, not even a charge sheet was given to any of these 54 men, nor any statement made at the time to them that they were being discharged because they had been rioting.

I am concerned in shewing at the moment that as far as the workers are concerned, they are completely at the mercy of their immediate superior officers, or of the head of the Administration. I am equally concerned in shewing, that in reality there is no contact between the heads of the Department and the staff, which would enable a careful, impartial and judicial examination of the grievances of the workers.

Take the case of racial discrimination, Mr. Colvin, Agent of the East Indian Railway, made a categorical statement that on his Railway no racial discrimination was made (as far as they could achieve it) and that in principle there was no racial discrimination. He was asked whether in the F class, Assistant Station Masters Deputy Trailers' and Mail Drivers' posts were reserved for non-Indians. He said; "No". He was asked whether throughout the whole history of the administration, he could give the name of a single Indian in any one of these classes, and he replied that he did not know of any one. It was put to Mr. Colvin that before an Indian could become an Assistant Station Master, he had to pass an examination in telegraphy, signalling, interlocking and so on, and after passing that examination, he was appointed on a minimum pay of Rs. 40 p. m. with an annual increment of three rupees, rising to the grade of Rs. 55, while an Anglo-Indian, after passing exactly the same examination, was started on a monthly pay of Rs. 100 going up to Rs. 200, and as the vacancies occurred, he started again on Rs. 260 and finished at Rs. 280. Mr. Colvin was asked to give the name of a single Indian who was given more than Rs. 40 p. m. as starting monthly pay. Not a single Indian was recruited direct and only 9 Indians out of 200 have been able to work their way up into the higher grade. Anglo-Indians and Europeans were all recruited direct and yet there is no racial discrimination. !!!

Under the law, as it stands today, the number of hours fixed for Railway workers is 60 per week and 84 per week for intermittent workers. Of course the Indian Factory Act applies to many classes of workers on the Railways, but although 60 hours a week and 11 hours a day is the maximum limit, the actual limit in the Railway

*1 bid. p. 420.

Workshops is generally based on a 40 hours' week. Over-time which is limited to 12 hours per week in excess of 60 hours per week is generally avoided. Nevertheless, the International Labour Conference Hours' Convention of 1919, such as it was, putting India on a differential basis to other countries by applying to it the 60 hour week instead of the 48, was not applied, except in the collieries and in the Workshops controlled by the Railways. Only recently have attempts been made to apply these Conventions to the Railways. Even then the running staff has been excluded, as well as Watchmen, Watermen, Sweepers etc., who are declared to be essentially intermittent by the Head of the Department. However, exemptions and exceptions, both in regard to the weekly rest day and the daily limits, are abundant on the Railways and the Agents of Railways have been authorised to make temporary exceptions, provided that no man shall be required to work for a continuous period of 21 days without a rest of at least 24 consecutive hours, and when a man is required in consequence of exceptional pressure of work to be on duty in excess of 60 or 44 hours of work, as the case may be, overtime is to be paid to him at the rate of one and a quarter times the regular rate.

Insecurity of service on the Railways leads one to the firm conclusion **Insecurity of Service** that the strongest and the closest bureaucracy in the world is the bureaucracy of the Railway Board. Under the service agreement recently characterised by Sir Henry Gidney, leader of the Anglo-Indian community in India as a "slave-bond", entered into by the employees with the Railway Administration, no matter what the length of service of the employee may be, the officer in-charge can, by giving one month's notice, terminate the services of that employee. This particular clause, which is clause II of the Service Agreement, is often made use of for the purpose of victimizing men whose activities are not to the taste of the managerial staff.

The theory, under the cloak of which the Railway Board and their Agents and other officials working on the line preserve this privilege or justify this power, is that Railways being a commercial concern should not be fettered with hide-bound rules that prevail in the matter of service conditions in other services of the Government. How great has been the abuse of this theory in actual practice on Indian Railway and what misery has been caused to the poor and ill-organized workers can only be imagined by persons who have been in close touch with the Railway Trades Unions and who have, for the last many years, made un-successful attempts to represent individual cases and restrict the power of the officials. The attitude of the officials is obvious from a series of questions that were put to the Agent of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway by Sir Alexander Murray.

Sir Alexander Murray asked the Agent why he did not approve of the Unions dealing with individual cases. Mr. Burn, the **Individual grievances** Agent, replied that he did not approve of the Unions where a discharge had been ordered by the officer-in-charge.* He was asked whether he did not think this an unreasonable attitude. "No" he did not think that this was unreasonable. He was asked to leave out the Union, but supposing a man had been dismissed, could he not see the Agent personally? The answer was, No; he could see the Agent if the Agent desired to meet him, but he had no right to demand a personal interview. "Then with whom has he a right of personal interview?" he was asked, and the answer was "only with his immediate officer". Sir Alexander Murray remarked that he felt personally from what he had heard that one of the main causes of disaffection amongst the Railway workers is this insecurity of tenure, that he had tried to discuss this question of giving a right of appeal and personal interview with others and he found that the Agent of the G. I. P. Railway was more unreasonable than others in this matter. The Agent replied that he agreed that this was a great cause of discontent and relented to the extent of admitting that the matter should be considered. Soon after this incident in 1930 as already mentioned by me came a general strike on this Railway system. No wonder!

Personal predilection, union activities, favouritism, are some of the grounds for the exercise of the arbitrary powers which are vested in **Victimisation** the lower officials of the Railways, and operate to the great detriment of the working classes. In 1927 there was a strike on the Bengal Nagpur-Railway and statements were issued in regard to the strike by the General Secretary of the Railway Union. In one of these statements the Secretary stated that a certain gentleman, Mr. Prag Datt, represented himself to the Police as being in the pay of the authorities and requested them to find out the truth of it by reference to one Tara Chand. This happened just before the assault took place on the strikers by the auxillary force resulting in some bloodshed. A charge was made over the signature of the General Secretary of the Union that this Prag Datt was a spy and in the pay of the Agency and that as a consequence he was acting as an *agent provocateur*. The auxilliary force were called in and opened fire. Another charge was made by the Secretary to the effect that the assault on the workers was led by one Colonel Anderson, and that Colonel Anderson was an officer employee of the Railway. Regarding this charge no information could be elicited from the administration, but it was admitted that Colonel Anderson was an officer employee of the Railway. It was further admitted

*Oral Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. VIII, part II. p. 303.

that the senior auxilliary force officer present at the time of the attack was also an officer employee of the Railway. Many people were killed and many were wounded, and yet no judicial enquiry was held into this matter, the Government being content with the departmental enquiry by the District Magistrate, under whose directions the law was taken into their own hands by the auxilliary force.

Here is another interesting case. The North Western Railway Union had at its head an Irishman of the name of John Miller. In the year 1921, Miller, who had indulged in one very successful strike followed by an unsuccessful one the following year, was organizing his men for a third strike. This was the time when the Prince of Wales was about to tour Northern India and it was hinted that there might be a great deal of trouble if a strike coincided with his visit. Miller, as was his custom, organized daily meetings at the Railway workshops in Lahore. As usual, there were *Agents provocateurs* and a few bricks happened to have been thrown haphazardly while the meeting was in progress. Miller was immediately arrested and was charged with rioting. As he was of European birth and origin under the laws of British India, he could claim a jury trial. The case was tried in the High Court of Judicature at Lahore by Mr. Justice Martineau with the assistance of jury. The evidence was meagre and discrepant; it was in fact a got up charge. The jury returned a majority verdict against Miller and the Judge solemnly sentenced Miller to six months imprisonment. Almost immediately after this happened-apparently the Judge having realized that this was a crime being committed against an innocent man-he wrote a letter in his own hand writing to the old Irish-woman, mother of this labour leader, in which he said that he wanted to apologize to the old lady for what he had done in sentencing her son to six months imprisonment, that he had meant to sentence Miller till the rising of the court but that the sentence had escaped his lips, and that he was exceedingly sorry for what he had done, adding that he was moving the Government of the Punjab for the release of her son. On the strength of this letter, I myself wired to the Governor of the Province, obtaining a reply that the Governor-in-Council did not think that it was a fit case for the exercise of his powers of clemency!

The employees who stand in immediate need of the application both of the Washington and the Geneva Conventions are the running staff. Guards, drivers, firemen and shunters are put on duty for 24 hours. It usually takes a train 16 hours to run from destination to destination, but it may easily take even 24 hours or more. When the train arrives at a destination, the running staff are booked as under-rest, and refusal on their part means punishment. In one case a grievance of this nature was communicated to the administration, with the result that instead of meeting the grievance, the administration transferred this

man to a frontier division where the climate is most uncongenial, and, as one witness stated "just to strike terror amongst them".(1)

The Railway Board were asked whether they would be prepared to consider cases of individual grievances which had been put through the sieve of commonsense by the Union and the reply was that the Railway Board were prepared to consider such cases. The Railway Board were immediately reminded of individual cases where no action was taken by the Railway Board, except merely to refer the case back to the agent of the Railway concerned(2). It is indeed a fact that the Agent of a Railway administration sits in his office as the Grand Mughal sat on his marble throne in his marble pavilion, dispensing justice and injustice.

Here is a typical case of discharge in shape of letter from the Chief Mechanical Engineer:—

"Please inform.....that his services are no longer required by the Railway from date and that he will be given one month's pay in lieu of notice; also he will be given seven days' leave which is due; gratuity under the rules will be paid to him. (N. B.) If the party concerned has anything to say in the matter of his punishment, he should do so without delay and in case of loco staff through his foreman and district officer."(3)

The signature of the person involved was taken in token of receipt who wrote: "Received under protest-subject to appeal" and added "Received at 11 a.m. and made to leave the office at once." This is the way in which discharges take place on the Railways.

Here is another case:—

"Mr. Saleh Mohammad, Assistant Station-Master Padidan, service about 25 years, discharged under terms of agreement. He was debited Rs. 2,000 towards the cost of a cash bag stolen from the station safe. The Police did not hold Mr. Saleh Mohammad to blame. The debit was not cancelled though he appealed several times. Eventually, on the advice of his pleaders he filed a civil suit against the administration for the illegal debit. He was called by the Divisional Superintendent and all the expenses and the amount of debit were paid to him and a compromise effected. On the third day of this event when the Divisional Superintendent came to know that the case had been withdrawn Mr. Saleh Mohammad was discharged telegraphically under terms of agreement."(4)

(1)I bid, p. 6.

(2)I bid, p. 97.

(3)I bid, p. 136.

(4)I bid, pp. 166-67.

P. G. Lobo was a head train examiner at Dehra Dun. Having commenced taking great interest in the affairs of the Union and its organization, he was transferred to Moradabad in a subordinate position and placed under his junior, Mr. Thompson. His troubles did not end here, but poor Lobo was continually being harrassed until ultimately he was discharged in terms of paragraph II of his agreement, without any regard being paid to his "long, faithful and meritorious services."

Nawab Ali, driver, Moradabad, was discharged because he made a representation which he asked the Union to draft for him. In the first instance, he was discharged in consequence of the failure of an engine, but when he appealed against his discharge order, stating that the failure of the engine was not due to any negligence on his part, he was called by the Superintendent who asked him whether he was a member of the Union and whether the Union had drafted his representation. He stated that he was a member of the Union, which had drafted his representation for him. Nawab Ali was informed that he must apply to the Union for reinstatement.(1)

The East Indian Railway Union's memorandum states that the general opinion is that jobs are sold to the highest bidder, and that especially is this practice rampant in the Lillooah workshops. "A great agitation was carried on by the official organ of the Union, "Mazdoor" resulting in dismissal of the foreman of "H" Shops, one Wilkinson, and Mechanics Feron and Ghosal, as well as two mistries and shop clerk.(2) Definite charges were made in regard to another shop, naming individuals, as those responsible for bribery and corruption and yet no action was taken: the Secretary of the Union actually going to the length of issuing an open challenge asking the administration to prosecute him for the publication of the allegations made by him.

The story of the first lock-out at the Lillooah Workshops throws an interesting side-light on the affairs of the administration, and I give it generally in the quaint phraseology of the Union's memorandum:—

(3) The cause of unrest among the workshop men was as follows:— Certain officials had been extorting bribes from the workmen in various ways before the Union was started (1) At the time of appointment the workmen were compelled to pay Rs 30/- to Rs. 40/- to their respective foremen, through their respective babu and mistry; (2) in order to obtain privilege passes they had to pay Rs. 3/- to Rs. 5/-; (3) at the time of annual increment Rs. 5/- to Rs. 10/- had to be paid; (4) the workers were forced to purchase lottery

(1) Written Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol: VIII. Pt. I. p. 472.

(2) I bid. p. 477.

(3) I bid. p.p. 481-482.

tickets when a foreman wished to dispose of his watch or car or household goods by raffle: (5) A "Dali" (presents) had to be presented during Christmas and occasional payments had to be made to the foreman to meet his domestic expenses.

"As soon as the Union was established the workmen began to expose the officials through the organ of the Union, a vernacular weekly and the "Mazdoor"; and also workmen of "H" shop, "F" shop and "L" shop filed written complaints against the respective officials, as a result of which the foreman of "H" shop, Mr. Wilkinson, two mechanics, Ghosal and Feron, the shop clerk and two mistries were summarily dismissed, and the shop clerk of "F" shop also met with the same fate. In the meantime the workmen of "M" shop brought serious charges of bribery against Foreman Low, Chargeman Kundoo, Ahmed Bux and Narau Babu, Hiroo, Bali Ram and Bhut Nath. On 23rd January 1928, while this case was pending, Fazel Mistry of "L" shop was trying to take the signatures of the workmen on a blank paper under orders of the workshop manager, in order to save the mistry of "L" shop.

"The staff refused to give their signatures on a blank paper, and thus incurred the displeasure of the works manager who at once ordered the workers to go out of the shop. The workers struck work as a protest against the high-handed action of the manager. The shop was locked up for 24 hours. The next day (24th January 1928) the deputy agent appeared in the workshop and on his assurance that he would look into the matter, Mr. Mitra, the then general secretary of the Union, induced the workers to join work, which they did at twelve hours. Thus the first lock-out ended.

"Incidentally it is necessary to give an account of Fazel Mistry. This man had no less than three previous convictions on serious charges under the Indian Penal Code. It is a matter of importance as to how a man of his type found employment in the railway department, and became the right hand man of the works manager."

I give the story of the second lock-out which resulted in the shooting
Second Lock-out down of the workers, with the result that three were instantly killed and thirty-five wounded.

There was a mass meeting of nearly twelve thousand workmen on 1st
Workers demand March 1921, demanding the same standard of wages as is obtainable in Lucknow and Lahore, and in the meeting the following resolution was passed:— "This meeting of the workers of Lillooah demands for them the same standard of wages as is obtainable on other State-owned railways i.e. Lucknow and Lahore. They further demand that they should be provided with quarters or house—rent in lieu of quarters since the European employees, the staff, and the people of loco, and traffic departments, enjoy the same privilege.

*Ibid, pp. 481-482.

" This resolution had been communicated by telegram to Sir George Rainy, the Commerce Member of the Government of India, the Chief Commissioner of Indian Railways, the Railway Board and the Agent of the East Indian Railway.

"In the meantime four workers of Lillooah "L" shop were discharged for taking an active part in the work of organisation of the Lillooah Union and for their attempt to bring about a charge of corruption against the mistries of the said workshop. This matter was given publicity in "Lillooah Kahini", the official organ of the Lillooah Union.

"On the 4th of March, the workers of Lillooah workshop held a mass meeting, and passed a resolution to the effect that they should appear before the D.C.M.E. in a body, and should demand of him the reinstatement of their six comrades, two of "M" shop who had been discharged on the allegation of misbehaviour, and four of the "L" shops as stated above.

"The result of this was that the latter four men were reinstated in their places, but the authorities, however, declined to make any inquiry regarding the other two of the "M" shop.

"On 7th March, 1928, the agent declared a lock-out without enquiring into the true facts of the case. Had he taken the trouble to enquire personally into the case instead of depending on the report of shop authorities, there would have been no lock-out at all. This matter also was duly communicated to the Honourable Sir George Rainy, the Chief Commissioner of Indian Railways, and the Railway Board, and also to Mr. Joshi, M.L.A., and Diwan Chaman Lall, M.L.A., to the British Trades Union Congress London, and to the International Labour Federation Amsterdam. This brought forth an adjournment motion by Mr. Joshi in the Assembly to discuss the Lillooah situation, but the Honourable Sir George Rainy gave an assurance to Mr. Joshi that the union officials could interview the agent so that agent might settle the matter. According to this assurance the president of the E. I. Railway Union, the general secretary and the workers waited upon the agent in a deputation with the following demands:— (1) Reinstatement of two discharged men, of the "M" Shop, or an open enquiry regarding their case; (2) A 25 per cent. all round general increment; (3) Minimum wages of Rs. 30; (4) Recognition of the union; (5) Provision of quarters or in the alternative, house allowance at 20 per cent. of the men's salary; (6) Payment for Sundays and other public holidays.

"These terms were rejected by the agent except the recognition of the union. So the workers resolved to hold out till their grievances were removed and redressed. Again, on the 27th of March, a mass meeting of the workers was held, and it was resolved to see the agent in a body and demand the removal of their grievances. Accordingly Mr. K. C. Mitra, the general secretary of the union,

and a few workers waited upon the agent, and demanded the solution of the above-mentioned grievances. But again they were disappointed. After this the men returned to Howrah Maidan and there held a mass meeting, and explained the matter to the workers assembled there. After the meeting, while the people were coming back to their respective houses, there was a clash with the police near the Bamungachi Bridge. The police and the railway officials began to fire on the unarmed mob without giving them any chance to disperse, or without giving warning before firing, and even without the orders of the magistrate, who was within 15 minutes reach, resulting in three being instantly killed and thirty-five wounded. The workers of the loco, traffic, block signalling, engineering departments, as also of Messrs. Jessop, Burn and Martin companies all went on a sympathetic strike after this brutal murder. Still the Government took no precautionary measures. Both the Indian and the Bengal Chambers of Commerce wired repeatedly to the Governor of Bengal and the Railway Board for the appointment of a conciliation panel in order to settle the dispute. We quote His Excellency's exact telegram to the Indian Chamber of Commerce for the Commission's satisfaction:

"H. E. is deeply interested in the present situation in the strike area, but the railway strike is primarily the concern of the Railway Board, and H. E. is unable to refer this dispute to the Bengal Conciliation Panel. As regards the disputes between Jessops and Burn and their workers and Ludlow, Jute workers, the conditions for appointing the panel have not been fulfilled. H. E. receives daily reports regarding the conditions in the strike area, and is watching the situation keenly, and will not hesitate to return to Calcutta immediately he is satisfied that his presence will conduce in any way to the restoration of peace and good will.

"There was another telegram by Mr. M.P. Gandhi, secretary of the Calcutta branch of the Indian Chambers of Commerce to the Railway Board, Simla, suggesting the use of the agency of the Bengal Conciliation Panel for dealing with the Lilloah strike. The following is the text of his telegram:—

"The Committee of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, invite your attention to the extremely serious situation caused by the prolonged strike of the railway workmen at Lilloah. My committee requested His Excellency, the Governor of Bengal, to refer the Lilloah dispute for settlement to the Bengal Conciliation Panel, to which His Excellency replied on 1st May that the matter was the primary concern of the Railway Board, to utilise the agency of the Conciliation Panel appointed by the Bengal Government to deal with industrial disputes in public utility services in Calcutta and its neighbourhood in the absence of any other existing organization, and to refer to it the Lilloah dispute immediately in order to bring about an early termination of the strike, and to prevent breach of public peace and safety in the city of Calcutta."

"Disinterested persons like Mr. C.F. Andrews also made an attempt to settle the dispute, and for that purpose he interviewed the agent, but did not succeed in arriving at a settlement.

"Mr. Citrine, the secretary of the British Trade Union Congress, also pressed the India Office hard for a settlement of the Lillooah dispute. But the reply of the Railway Board was as follows:— 'The Railway Board is not likely to favour any proposal to send the Lillooah dispute to a conciliation panel.'

"The Central Government deputed Mr. Rozars, I.C.S., to make an enquiry and to effect a reduction in staff in the Lillooah workshop. This is the attitude of the Government concerned towards the down-trodden Indian employees, and such is the manifestaion of sympathy of the Government towards the people".*

On the 17th August, a communique was issued by the Government of India, accepting the recommendations of Mr. Rozar, who had been deputed to investigate the possibilities of effecting a reduction of staff consistent with efficient and economical working of the Lillooah Carriage & Wagon Department of the East Indian Railway, and the manner of effecting such reduction: if necessary, without causing undue hardship to those affected. The recommendations consisted of reducing the number of workers by about 2,600, but spreading this reduction over a period of 20 months, and finding places for about 400 workers in the new East Indian Railway Workshops at Tatanagar. It was further recommended that the discharges should be primarily confined to men either above or nearing the age of 55 years, or those with only one year's service, who should be given one month's pay as bonus.

It might be mentioned that the enquiry conducted by Mr. Rozar on the strength of which the above recommendations were made and which the Government hastened to accept, was a strictly purdah enquiry, inasmuch as no opportunity was given to the representatives of the workers to represent their case.

Thus, 2,600 Indian workers were thrown into the streets to starve, while an extra production engineer and an Anglo-Indian Train Examiner were appointed, apparently to off-set some of the savings effected.

It would not be out of place to mention here that only the "convenient" recommendations of Mr. Rozar were adopted by the East Indian Railway, an attempt being made to absorb discharged hands in the Workshops at Tatanagar, and no extra salary or gratuity being awarded to them.

During the Lillooah strike, a deputation of the workers waited on the Additional District Magistrate, as a result of some correspondence exchanged

*I bid, pp. 482-483.

between the parties, and the workers were assured on the authority of the Agent, East Indian Railway, that there would be no victimization of the workers when they resumed work. After the calling off of the strike, however, on the 10th April 1928, fifty four men were summarily dismissed being, as the authorities alleged in their memorandum to the Royal Commission on Labour, responsible for the disturbance and the "lock-out". (1) The true facts of the case, however, were that these men were taking a leading part in exposing the corruption and bribery rampant in the Workshops among the Mistries, Foremen and Sardars, and were probably considered undesirable.

And yet, the Agent in the notice which he issued, has the hardihood to repeat the following statement :—

"Before the recent strike ended, I had already given an assurance that there would be no victimization, and I repeat that assurance."

This, after victimizing 54 of the leading members involved in the strike!!!

The Bengal and North Western Railway is a Company-managed railway due to be taken over by the Government shortly. The state of affairs prevailing under this administration has been an open scandal for many years. For instance, about the highest dividend of all the railways has been paid by this concern, and this has been possible because of the miserably low wages paid to the staff. Take one example; fresh hands are employed and made to pass certain test examinations. After they pass these examinations, they are not given substantive jobs. They are kept in the capacity of Assistant Guards, or extra hands, who receive salaries from Rs. 12/- to Rs. 18/- per month. When they obtain their substantive jobs, promotion is refused to them on the ground of there being no vacancy. In the workshops, there is no question of seniority or merit. Promotion takes place according to the whim of the officers in charge. A great deal of contract labour is employed by this administration. Men employed by the contractors naturally do not enjoy the privileges of those employed by the administration direct. (2)

The length of the line controlled by this administration is 2,074 miles, and for the purpose of looking after the health of workers in charge of this line there have been established only twelve dispensaries with a complement of 22 male doctors and 15 compounders and dressers, in addition to a Medical Officer, generally the Civil Surgeon of the District.

The lowest paid workers in this administration are the gatemen at level crossings, who are paid Rs. 5/- a month ranging to Rs. 7/8-. Gangmen get a minimum of Rs. 7/- per month and workers in the Gorakhpur Workshops

(1) I bid, p.p. 482, 3, 4.

(2) p. 497, et. seq.

get five annas per day, drawing wages for 24 days in the month on the average. Pointsmen start at Rs. 9/- per month, the highest rate being Rs. 13/- per month. Watchmen and Lampmen get monthly Rs. 9/- to Rs. 10/-; Point Jamadars Rs. 14/- to Rs. 18/-; Shunters Rs. 18/- to Rs. 25/-; Keymen in the Engineering Department Rs. 9/- to Rs. 9/8-; Fitters, Carpenters, Painters, Blacksmiths Rs. 15/- to Rs. 25/-; Indian Firemen Rs. 12/- to Rs. 16/- and Indian Shunters Rs. 17/- to Rs. 25/-.

The memorandum of the Union states that the Bengal & North Western Railway pays to its Agent Rs. 2,700/- a month and to its gateman Rs. 5/- a month, i.e. 540 times more to the former!!!

The following letter addressed to the General Secretary of the Bengal & North Western Railwaymen's Association, Gorakhpur, dated 24th June 1925, by the Acting Agent, one W. Miller, is instructive :—

"As you are aware this Railway does not recognize the Bengal and North Western Railwaymen's Association, and I now beg to inform you that in future any communication received by me or by any of the officers of this Railway from you or from any member of the Association will not be read but will be immediately torn up and put in the waste-paper basket."*

Let me here give an extract from the evidence tendered by a particular Railway Administration before the Royal Commission on Labour about the arbitrary action taken by the authorities in regard to discharges and dismissals.

"Mr. Cliff-Mr. Sastri called attention to a suggestion of the Railway Union with regard to dealing with cases on appeal. Your reply was that it was impracticable. Is that due to the volume of disciplinary cases?—No. It is due to this that when you are dealing with, say, 100 cases, every one of which will form a matter for discussion, as a business proposition we cannot get on with our job. If we were to deal with the administration of the staff in that way we could not get on with our work.

"Is it within your knowledge that that is done in other parts of the world?— I do not know.

"Do you anticipate, dealing with the cases of discipline that arise in a public service, you can continue to go along as you have been, and not be subject to challenge? — We are always subject to challenge.

"By whom? — By Government.

"Do you suggest that the time of the Legislative Assembly should be taken up in challenging you on cases of appeal? — We wish it would not be, but it is.

*Ibid, p. 509.

" Do you suggest it should ? — No, I do not think it should.

" Do you agree that you should be subject to challenge?— Yes.

" Why do you say that the trade union should have no right to make representations on personal appeals?— I understood the question to mean whether they had a right to decide in discussion with us every case.

" At the moment you say to the trade union ' Unless it affects a particular grade or class, we are not to be subject to challenge '. Is not that what you say to the trade union?— In individual cases, yes.

" Can we get clear what you mean by an individual case? Take a case like this. Please inform the following staff that they have been reduced one step in grade for six months in connection with the above noted case'. This was a complaint from passengers at Rawalpindi being refused admission to the platform in consequence of which they were left behind by the down mail. Is that a case upon which the trade union is entitled to make representations? — If it involves a principle we admit the right of the trade union to make a representation.

" Can you tell me whether the principle applies here? — I could not say unless I examined the facts of the case.

" In a public service the running staff must be subject to a very considerable number of reports from the travelling public. Are those cases questions of principle or not? — We deal with each of these cases on their merits.

" What happens to these people I have just mentioned? There is a reduction in two cases which means a loss of Rs. 60/-; in another case a reduction which means a loss of Rs. 24/- and in another a loss of Rs. 18-. Is your decision really subject to challenge by a trade union? Then there is a certain gentleman who is to be informed that if he does not stop writing on the subject he will be reduced. He has been fined Rs. 10-. — Have you got the entire case, or just that one letter?

" I am just testing the principle by a few cases which are recorded as having occurred. I am taking one or two actual cases to see just where you are challenged. Here is a man fined Rs. 10-. I saw the other day a letter in connection with this case, and I asked how many times the man had written, and they replied " Here are the letters'. There were three. The final note is " Tell Mr. so and so that if he does not stop writing he will be reduced', and he has been fined Rs. 10. Can I, as a Union officer, represent that man in a case like that?—Yes. If you have a principle involved, we will admit the right of a union to represent the case or where a glaring act of injustice has been done.

"The principle being this that having worked a week I work a portion of that time for nothing.—I do not quite follow.

"If I work during this month and I am entitled to Rs. 60 as my pay, and if you fine me Rs. 10, there is a portion of that time during which I have worked for nothing. Is that a principle?—I would look at it as a re-assessment of your value for that period.

"That is a principle, surely. In an important principle like that I understand the practice and policy of the North Western Railway is to decline to allow trade union representation?—That is not a principle.

"If it is not, will you demonstrate any cases where you do allow it?—It is not in many cases.

"Do you expect, with a large staff like this, the men will be content with a condition of affairs of that character?—I think the staff will be satisfied with the steps we are taking with regard to the establishment of a Personnel Branch.

"Is that a considered answer?—Well, certainly for the near future."*

It must be remembered that when a man is cautioned or fined or discharged or dismissed, the evidence against him is never made available to him, and at the most he is presented with a charge sheet.

It is usually the custom in India for the C. I. D. to send their representatives to all union meetings, and one union actually complained that even their working committee meetings were disturbed by C. I. D. visitors. It is a regular procedure for the police to attend such meetings and take verbatim reports of the proceedings.

Racial discrimination has been in effect abolished on paper on the Railways in India, but in actual practice as we have seen, it still exists as much in regard to the scales of pay as leave and other matters. Europeans and Anglo-Indians are recruited on different scales of pay than those given to Indians.

For instance, the average expenditure incurred by railways for educating a European pupil in a railway primary, middle and high school respectively for the year 1926, according to the report of Mr. C. L. W. Jones submitted to the Railway Board, was Rs. 57-, Rs. 62-, and Rs. 204- respectively, whereas the corresponding figure for an Indian child was Rs. 9-, Rs. 14- and Rs. 19- respectively.

*Oral Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol: VIII' pt. II, pages 44, 45 & 46.

During 1927-28, the total amount of money spent for the education of children of Europeans and Anglo-Indians by the North Western Railway was Rs. 1,64,214-11-6; for Indians, for the same period, the handsome grant of Rs. 11,959-9 was made. One labour organization stated before the Royal Commission on Labour* that preferential treatment is extended to well-paid European and Anglo-Indian staff on the one hand, but half-starved and ill-paid Indian employees on the other are compelled to keep their children at home, being unable to afford for them technical or academic education. In fact, the amazing anomaly is witnessed in the case of the North Western Railway Administration, where in some cases an Anglo-Indian employee gets education allowances for his children which exceed the sum total of the salary paid to him. Not so the Indian. In fact, thousands of workers on the Railways in India are today started on wages of thirteen or fourteen rupees per month each, and in some cases even ten rupees each, such as gatemen. Cabinmen are started on fifteen rupees per month, peons sixteen rupees, luggage porters seventeen rupees, Assistant Jamadars on twenty-one rupees, and the maximum that they can rise up to is thirty rupees.

Let me here quote from the evidence tendered before the Royal Commission on Labour, when I put a series of questions on the subject of racial discrimination."

"Have you seen the memorandum handed in to the Commission by the Union of the Eastern Bengal Railway?—I have.

"Will you look at the supplementary memorandum relating to racial discrimination. Do you agree with that statement?—No. I do not I will say at once that on the Eastern Bengal Railway we would never tolerate any racial discrimination.

"It says 'Europeans and Anglo-Indians are recruited at the higher, if not the highest, rung of the ladder and the Indians always at the lowest'.—That is a very sweeping statement.

"Is that generally true?—No, it is quite wrong.

"It says: 'In the Locomotive Department the wide difference in the rates of wages of European and Indian running staff will be clear from the following table?' That has been superseded now by the revised rules which put them into three classes, I, II and III. This document shews what we are now doing :—

'There are three classes of Drivers :—

'Class (I) Illiterate running staff and those who draw the English Test Allowance ;

*Written Evidence, Vol: VIII, Pt. 1, page 359.

'Class (II) Literate class not below the Matriculation or 6th Standard.

'Class (III) Running staff of special merit.

'The class to which an applicant is first appointed will depend entirely on his qualifications and selection.

Drivers.

2. (a) Drivers will be paid as follows:—

	Class III Rs.	Class II Rs.	Class I Rs.	
	per month	per month	per month	
1st year	140	90	34	
2nd year	150	100	36	
3rd year	160	110	38	
4th year	170	120	42	
5th year	180	130	46	
6th year	190	140	50	Ordinary grade
7th year	200	150	54	increments are given
8th year	200	150	54	for approved service.
9th year	200	150	54	
10th year	210	160	58	
11th year	210	160	58	
12th year	220	170	62	Special grade.

2 (b) Special grade.— A driver may be appointed to the special grade only after three years' approved service on the highest pay of ordinary grade and to the highest pay of the special grade after two years' approved service on the lower pay of the special grade.

(c) Approved service means:—

(i) That his consumption of fuel and oil for the last twelve months has not been above the average of his Section.

(ii) That the driver has had no serious offence recorded against him during the previous twelve months.

(iii) That his attendance has been regular.

(iv) That he has kept good time with trains.

(d) The number of drivers in the special grades of each class shall not exceed 25 per cent. of the total number employed in that class. In selecting men in Class I for promotion to the special grade preference will be given to those who are in receipt of the English Test Allowance referred to in Rule 3 below.

3. (a) English test allowance :- An allowance of Rs. 5 per month will be granted to Class I drivers who can read and understand the rules in English and who can draft intelligible reports in the same language. This test will be made

by a gazetted officer. Drivers are also recruited from shunters subject to the following conditions:—

A shunter in Classes II and III may not sit for the drivers' examination unless he has done six months' actual shunting which may be made up of broken periods. After passing the drivers' examination and on reaching the highest pay of his class, a further service of six months is necessary before he can be permanently promoted to driver.

A shunter in Class I must put in at least twelve months' actual shunting, which may be made up of broken periods, before sitting for drivers' examination and after passing the drivers' examination, he must serve for another two years and reach the highest pay of his class before he is eligible for permanent promotion to driver.

No shunter in Class I shall be passed as a driver unless he can read code initials, train and private numbers and dates and is fully competent to work with line clears and tokens.

A shunter will not be promoted to the highest pay of his class unless he has passed the drivers' examination. The services of any shunter who fails to pass the drivers' examination within five years of confirmation will be dispensed with.

A shunter (passed driver) working as a driver will be paid at the lowest rates of a driver of the corresponding class and will be paid overtime allowance on the scale as laid down for drivers.

Shunters.

Shunters' rates of pay are as follows:—

	Class III Rs. per month	Class II Rs. per month	Class I Rs. per month	
1st year	100	60	23	} For approved, service.
2nd year	100	70	25	
3rd year	...	80	27	

"Taking Class III Drivers, will you give me figures of recruitment during the last three years?—We have no Indians in Class III at present; the difficulty being that we cannot get educated Indians to take up this class of work; they have to start low down as firemen; we have now made a start and we have 12 Indians in Class II. It is of course a matter of evolution.

"Will you give me the figure for recruitment in Class III during 1929?—I have not got the figures here now.

"Was there not a single Indian working on your Railway who was fit to enter class III?—Yes.

"Unfit from what point of view?—Efficiency, qualifications and ability.

"Who decides that?—The head of the department decides finally ; it starts with the Foreman, then the District Officer and finally the head of the department.

" You are revising the system and saying that recruitment shall be through the Staff Selection Board according to the scheme you have thought of?—In the Locomotive Department I suppose the Deputy Locomotive Superintendent and the Deputy Agent will be on all these committees.

" So that instead of having individuals like the District Officer and the head of the department, you will have three or four officers of a type similar to those who in the past have not been able to discover a single Indian capable of entering Class III?—It is not a question of race at all ; it is a question of fitness to do a particular job. It takes a little time for things to develop : Indian drivers are now improving and there is no reason why that improvement should not continue ; it is merely a question of time. The personnel of the Audit and Accounts Service is almost wholly composed of one community because that particular community has definite qualifications for that kind of work. Our intention is to have a proper selection committee to remove patronage or racial discrimination.

" Have you ever thought of having an independent body or a body on which there shall be representatives of the workers' union who would be members of that body?—No ; I should be opposed to it.

" Would you consider an independent body?—No, because they are not responsible for the efficient administration of the railway.

" You are opposed to the principle of having an independent body engaged **Recruitment** in the task of recruitment?—Yes.

" Have you at any time sent up to the Railway Board any objection to the recruitment of your higher salaried officers through the Public Service Commission?—That is outside my province ; if the Railway Board think the Public Service Commission is a suitable body, that is entirely their responsibility ; I am a servant of the Government of India.

" The Public Service Commission does recruit?—Yes."*

And further :—

" On the Eastern Bengal Railway. Indians after having passed the apprenticeship examination are appointed at a salary of Rs. 80/- a month?—Yes

" And at what salary is an Anglo-Indian appointed for the same work?—Rs. 150/-, but it is a question of supply and demand.

" Is it the policy of your administration to give an Anglo-Indian a wage according to supply and demand?—There is another factor. An Anglo-Indian can

*Oral evidence before Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. VIII, pt. II pp. 353, 354, 355 & 356.

take charge at once while an Indian requires training because he has not the necessary drive and does not carry weight.

"Is that a general charge that you are making against every Indian that he has not the necessary drive and therefore cannot be paid Rs.150/- but that Anglo-Indian has the necessary drive and therefore must be paid Rs. 150/-?—No, I do not think you can generalize like that.

"What are the specific grounds on which you would give Rs. 150/- to an Anglo-Indian and Rs. 80/- to an Indian holding the same post?—If you want a man for any particular job and you find that by paying less than Rs. 150/- you get a man of a quality which does not give efficient work it is no good having him at all. It is really a business proposition. If an Indian with the same qualifications came to me, I should not have the slightest hesitation in giving him Rs. 150/-. The Anglo-Indian has a natural aptitude for certain classes of work for which they have been trained by tradition and upbringing. It is not a case of racial discrimination.

"May I take it therefore that the main criterion in selecting recruits is whether a man has the aptitude or not?—That is one of the criteria. An Anglo-Indian will not come for a lower rate; at any rate, a suitable type of Anglo-Indian will not.

"If the work is worth Rs. 150/- is it not fair to pay that sum to both the Indian and the Anglo-Indian doing similar work?—Not indiscriminately. In all services we have Indian officers getting precisely the same pay as Anglo-Indian and European officers.

"Is it that the standard of life of the Anglo-Indian and European is higher than that of the Indian and therefore you give the European and the Anglo-Indian Rs. 150/- and the Indians Rs. 80/-?—It is rather more than that; I understand that they do not do the same work.

"You have two men with the same qualifications doing the same work. One is put into one class and the other into another, the difference being pay and nothing else?—It all depends on the expression "the same qualifications". They do not do exactly the same work; the Anglo-Indian can be put in charge in the staff at once while the Indian cannot."*

"In your memorandum you say that the cost of a daily diet consisting of certain articles of a good quality in Calcutta would be about six annas. Where did you get the figure?—We had to work it out ourselves.

"How did you prepare this budget?—It is not very scientific.

"Might there be a variation of a couple of annas?—Yes

"If you take the case of a man, his wife and two children, regarding that as being equivalent to three adults if you allow six annas per day for each adult,

*I *ibid.*, pp. 357, 358.

that would come to one rupee and two annas per day for food?—I have not worked this out on any scientific basis ; it is only a very rough estimate. Though you may say a man requires six annas, most people would not have more than three or four annas and yet they live.

“ If I take the figure of four annas that would come to 12 annas for the family and that would not provide for such luxuries as ghee or milk. Again I find from your memorandum, that there are wages of Rs. 9 rising to Rs. 11 per month, Rs. 11 rising to Rs. 16, Rs. 12 rising to Rs. 17 and Rs. 13 rising to Rs. 17. If you take the cost of food as four annas per adult, how is it possible for a man to live and support his wife and two children on wages of Rs. 11, Rs. 12 or Rs. 13 per month?—But he does live.

“ Yes, but have you ever considered how he lives?—That is connected with the general economic position of the country.

Whose duty to Provide a living wage “As an employer of labour, do you not think the duty devolves upon you to find out exactly what is living wage?—What is the meaning of that expression of “a living wage”? If I went to Italy and asked an Italian labourer what a living wage was and what he was getting, I should discover a very great disparity.

“ When you give a European Rs. 150/- a month and an Indian Rs.80/- you do it on the basis that you are giving them both a living wage. Has it ever occurred to you to consider whether you are giving these other people a living wage?—What we try to do is to give a wage for which we can get our labour, a wage relative to economic conditions generally. If I gave every labourer one rupee extra that would mean six lakhs of rupees a year. If I do that, in a little while I should not be in a position to pay any body because I should go into liquidation.

“ What profit did you make last year ?—Eleven lakhs.

“ So that you would not go into liquidation if you pay every labourer another rupee?—But I might be asked to give two or three rupees and I might also be required to build more houses and that sort of thing. We have to cut our coat according to our cloth.

“ Do you think the coat could be cut at the top?—If I reduced the salaries my efficiency would be reduced.

“ *The point is that so far as the Agent, the Deputy Agent and superior officers are concerned, they draw high salaries while take it there are thousands of your workers who are living on a wage less than Rs. 40,000 On less than Rs. 25/- a month?—There are 40,000 on less than Rs. 30 a month.*”*

*I *bid.* pp. 358, 359.

And now let us look at the living conditions of these workers.

Here is an estimate worked out for a husband and wife, which—according to the statement made by one Railway Union before the Royal Commission on Labour—represents minimum expenses “just to provide the bare necessities of a life little above an animal existence.”

			Rs.	a.	p.
Atta	...	...	4	0	0
Ghee	...	...	5	0	0
House	...	...	0	0	0 (Allowed free).
Barber	...	...	0	8	0
Washing	...	...	2	0	0
Kerosene Oil					
(for light)	...	...	1	0	0
Clothing	...	...	3	0	0
Milk	..	...	3	0	0
Fuel	...	...	2	0	0
Washing soap					
and oil	...	...	1	0	0
Dal and vegetables	...	..	3	0	0
Sugar	...	...	1	0	0
Unforeseen expenses	...	...	1	0	0
		Total	26	8	0

And this is what the memorandum submitted by the Union added in regard to this budget:—

“In estimating the lowest amount indispensably essential under each head of the vital necessities of life, we have not taken into consideration social and education requirements of the worker or his family if any; and it should also be noted, that medical expenses are not included.

“It is obvious, that the worker gets an amount nearly half of what would just suffice to provide two meals a day (a meal consisting of **How the workers** bread chapatees and dal only). It is manifest that the present **starve** minimum wages fixed by the railway administration are an offence against the ordinary ethics of humanity.”*

On the basis of the minimum wage of fourteen rupees per month fixed by the railway administration, when we take into consideration this budget, we realise that the worker must go without all the following items: |

	Rs.	a.	p.
Ghee	...	5	0 0
Washing	...	2	0 0
Milk	...	3	0 0
Sugar	...	1	0 0
Vegetables	...	1	0 0
Toilet	...	1	0 0

The result is that the average life period of an Indian is only 25 years.

Now, another method that is resorted to by the Railway Administration in keeping the wage level low of the working classes is to provide different grades in various establishments of service, which if put together would comprise a bulky volume. In every grade there are a limited number of vacancies, and workers remain in these grades on their maximum salaries, sometimes for over 10 years, without any prospect of advancement, with the result that a vast majority of the employees retire in the first or the second grade after putting in 30 years of service.

Taking the case of goods clerks by way of example, we find that their grades are only four in number :—

Grade I	...	Rs. 33-3-60	p. m.
Grade II	...	66-4-90	p. m.
Grade III	...	100-5-140	p. m.
Grade IV	...	150-10-190	p. m.

The total number of vacancies against each grade in 1927-28 was :—

Grade I	...	1,313
Grade II	...	168
Grade III	...	43
Grade IV	...	7

1,531

When a statistical analysis is made of these figures, it is clear that 0.45 per cent. of the goods clerks recruited will have the opportunity to rise up to Rs. 190 p. m., 2.8 per cent. to Rs. 140 p. m., 10 per cent. to Rs. 90 p. m., and that the rest of the 85 per cent. must inevitably retire on Rs. 60 p. m. This is a typical case that I have quoted, but a similar state of affairs prevails in almost every branch of the service.

What is required obviously is a living wage to begin with, without any bars or hinderance placed in the way of the worker to his reaching a decent maximum. In this connection, it is interesting to note, category by category, how in many branches of the service, up to 100 per cent. of those serving railways have no chances for promotion.

Take the case of the Permanent-Way Inspectors. On the higher scales of pay, cent per cent. of them are barred from promotion. In the lower categories of Permanent-Way Inspectors, 97.5 per cent. are debarred from promotion. Foremen in Grade I, in which the majority comprises Indian Foremen, 76.1 per cent. are debarred from promotion. Over 91.2 per cent. of the booking clerks and over 90 per cent. of the train clerks suffer from the same injustice.

This is how the workers serve with no chance of promotion.

Here is a watchman, Fazil Khan of Ruk Junction, whose pay is **Life Histories** Rs. 15 p.m. His family consist of a wife, one son and two daughters. His expenditure is as follows:—

	Rs.	a.	p.
Flour	...	7	0 0
Rice	...	8	0 0
Dal	..	2	8 0
Spices etc.	...	0	8 0
Clothes	...	2	0 0
			<hr/>
Total	...	20	0 0
			<hr/>

Net deficit Rs. 5 p. m.

Fazil Khan put in an affidavit in which he says:-

" I, Fazil Khan, solemnly, declare that I am passing a miserable existence. I and my family members have never tasted meat, vegetables or milk etc., unless some Babu is kind enough to favour us with some from his own house on account of my obedience and willingness of work."

Gobind Ram, Luggage Clerk at the same station, declared on oath that:—

" Fazil Khan, Watchman of Ruk Station is in a miserable condition. One day I saw his son on the Station Platform. The child had boils on his legs and was very much troubled by the flies. Fazil Khan was requesting the vendor to give him a loan of anna one, which the vendor was hesitating to do. When I saw this I at once threw two annas pieces to Fazil Khan and said to him that he might go and buy oil out of it and apply to the legs of the child."

Here is the case of a coolie, Sanwal, No : 1,733, working in the Sukkur Carriage & Wagon Shops. His wages are twelve annas per day, and after deductions for holidays and sundays, is in receipt of Rs. 12/- p.m. His family consists of himself, wife, mother, sister and three sons, aged 4, 6 and 8 years. His total expenditure is as follows :—

	Rs.	a.	p.
Flour	...	15	0 0
Rice	...	5	0 0
Rent	...	4	0 0
Ghee (Vegetable)	...	5	0 0
Vegetables, dal, etc.	...	7	0 0
Other expenses, fuel etc:	...	5	0 0
Clothing	...	5	0 0
Total	...	46	0 0

And he owes three hundred rupees to various money-lenders ;

In an affidavit, Sanwal solemnly affirmed that on account of low salary, he and his family members did not get sufficient food. "There are several things" he said "like mutton, sugar, etc. which we use on *Idd* and such holidays only. I cannot afford to send my children to school. The period of pay days is very troublesome to me, for several banias threaten me with Civil proceedings and all other sorts, for I am unable to pay for my living expenses, what can I do to redeem the debt which goes on increasing every day."*

The North Western Railway Administration fix wages under no hard and fast rules, but generally, according to them, on economic considerations of supply and demand etc. The administration was asked whether it would not be better and more human to fix the wages not upon the law of supply and demand but by laying down a minimum living wage. The representatives of the administration replied that in practice it would be impossible. They made a statement to the effect that the lowest paid worker on the Railway was getting Rs. 16/- p.m. ; so little was the knowledge possessed by the representatives of this administration in regard to the wages paid by them. They forgot that boys engaged on the railways start at Rs. 10/- p.m. and that gangmen start on Rs. 13/- and go up to Rs. 17/-p.m.

The following question was put to the Railway Board in regard to the principle of the fixation of wages:- " You are at present making an enquiry into the wages paid to the lower paid workers. In this matter you are going to take into account at least a living wage?" And the answer given by the Railway Board was : " Yes." Yet, although this reply was given nearly a year and a half ago, it is only on paper that schemes have been prepared to effect an amelioration of the conditions of this lower paid staff. Far from giving effect to the promise, schemes of retrenchment have been brought into existence under which this very

*I bjd, p. 389.

staff of low-paid men have had their ranks disbanded by thousands upon thousands most of whom are wandering about the streets, unemployeed and hungry.

In 1920, certain statistics were collected regarding the maximum and minimum monthly salaries paid on the Railways and it was discovered that, whereas on the Danish State Railways, the maximum was Rs. 900/-, the Swedish Rs. 1,387/- and the Japanese Rs. 1,020/-, on the Indian State Railways, the maximum was Rs. 3,500/-, and that, whereas the minimum on the Danish State Railways was 73/-, on the Swedish Rs. 63/- and on the Japanese Rs. 46/-, on the Indian State Railways it was Rs. 7/-. The proportion of maximum and minimum in these countries is as follows:-

**Comparative
Statistics**

Danish	...	...	1 : 12
Swedish	...	...	1 : 22
Japanese	...	...	1 : 22
Indian	...	...	1 : 500. (1)

One witness made the following charge:— "As the higher officials draw unusually high salaries, allowances and other privileges for themselves, they are interested in keeping the lower employees down on low wages and pay. Whenever an attempt is made on behalf of the lower staff to give them a living wage, an excuse is put forward by the officials that if an increase be allowed to the men, the ratio of working expenses would go up. No such objection is raised anywhere when the emoluments of high officials are proposed to be increased, as was lately done when their already high salaries were increased under the recommendations of the Lee Commission."(2)

This year the Railways through the slump have been faced with a serious drop in revenue and such is the consideration shown by the Railway Board to its employees that without examining any alternative proposals, it decided to discharge 70,000 workers i.e., nearly one in every ten employed on the Railways in India. As there is no provision of unemployment insurance in India and as men who have worked on the Railways for many years are obviously unfit to undertake any other class of suitable employment, this action of the Railway Board meant that 70,000 families representing a quarter million human-beings would have to wander about the streets jobless and hungry. The total net savings which the Railway Board would have effected as a result of this policy was reckoned to be three crores of rupees a year. Alternative proposals suggested to the Railway Board that the large sums which they pay as a contribution to the revenues of the Government of India should be stopped, that retrenchment in expenses should be made and that wasteful and extravagant schemes of adminis-

(1) I bid, p. 435.

(2) I bid, p. 435.

tration should be abolished. Nay, it was pointed to the Railway Board that not long ago certain special concessions were given to a large proportion of 7,000 officers employed by the Railways in India known as the Lee Commission concessions by which an extra expense of rupees three crores a year had to be borne by the Railway Administration and that it was but just, proper and honest that these concessions should be withdrawn and 70,000 workers saved from starvation. The withdrawal of the Lee concessions it must be noticed, would have given the Board the exact same amount namely rupees three crores a year which the Railway Board would have saved by starving 70,000 workers. Unheeded the Railway Board went ahead with their plan until the workers unions threatened a general strike and thus forced the Railway Board to stop further retrenchment, the Board having already brought under reduction 33,000 workers on the Railways. As one instance of the great care and regard shown by the administration for the well being of the workers, it should be noted that although 10,000 workers were discharged arbitrarily by the Agent of the North Western Railway, which is one of the biggest systems in India, yet not one single officer had been brought under reduction.

(After pressure by trades unions 100 officers were discharged on the State Railways long after the reduction of the lower-graded staff).

Disaster cannot be far off if the system of administration remains callous, hide bound and autocratic in its working. The interests of **Starvation facing a quarter of a million** the nation and the interests of nearly four million human-beings, who derive their subsistence through the employment of the family head on the Railways, demand democratic control of the Railways in India.

What is needed is a Charter of Liberty and a guaranteed minimum living wage for the workers, an overhauling of the cumbrous and expensive system of management, the destruction of the citadel of autocracy and finally the organization, control and administration of the railways, with a view to secure the interests of the workers on the one hand and of the State on the other.

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