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**REPORT OF THE  
MINIMUM WAGES ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
FOR PLANTATIONS**

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MINIMUM WAGES ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
FOR PLANTATIONS.**

This Committee was constituted by Government Notification L1-4915/53/DD dated 3-10-1953 to hold enquiries into the conditions prevailing in Plantations and to advise Government in revising the minimum rates of wages in such employments.

**A. TERMS OF REFERENCE.**

The original terms of reference to the Committee were as follows :

1. The Dearness Allowance portion in the minimum wages for Plantations is linked to the cost of living index for Ernakulam. This was done at a time when there was no cost of living index prepared for Munnar and the neighbouring areas. These figures are now being prepared. A comparison of the figures for Ernakulam and Munnar reveals that when there is a rise in the figure for Munnar, there is a fall in the figure for Ernakulam, so much so, the dearness allowance paid has no relation to the real state of affairs in Munnar. The point for consideration is whether the dearness allowance portion of the Minimum Wages may be linked to the cost of living index for Munnar.

2. In estates following the time rate system, the rates work out at less than the rates which the piece rate worker would get even where the minimum production fixed in the Notification alone is obtained. This has led to a demand from labour, especially in the rubber estates that the time rate system should be substituted by piece rate system. The question to be considered is whether in such cases where minimum production under a piece rate system is assured, the time rate should be higher or whether time rate system should be allowed to continue at all in rubber estates.

3. Payment of equal wages for men and women for the same type of work in estates where equal rates were being paid before the minimum wages were introduced.

4. Subsequently another issue also came up for the Committee's consideration.

The fixation of the same piece rate for rubber latex and rubber scrap collected by the tappers, it is alleged, led to an increase in the proportion of scrap to latex collected by the tappers, because the tappers have no incentive to wait till all the latex is allowed to drip into the shells. As the price of sheet rubber which is made from latex is about 25% higher than that of the scrap rubber, the estates incur a loss on this account and the question is what steps could be taken to prevent this loss.

## B. PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE.

The Committee held a preliminary meeting on 19-12-1953. They visited representative estates in the Vithura, Kaliel and Trichur areas for collecting evidence. The final meeting of the Committee was held at Ernakulam on 31-5-1954 when the Report was adopted.

## C. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. *Adjustment of dearness allowance in Munnar to the cost of living index for that area.*—The Committee investigated the question of disparity between the cost of living index at Ernakulam and Munnar which was pointed out in letter No. C. 8021 dated 23-3-1953 from the Labour Commissioner, to Government. It is true that there was a tendency to a rise in the cost of living in Munnar and a fall in the cost of living in Ernakulam in 1952. The rise in the prices of staple commodities in Munnar in 1952 was perhaps due to the unstable nature of prices in the adjacent Madras areas following the decision of the Madras Government to decontrol prices. But this tendency was soon arrested. On an examination of the cost of living index in Munnar in 1953 it is found that there is a definite downward trend in prices. The cost of living index in Munnar fell from 325 in January to 304 in November. During the same year, the Ernakulam index has gone up from 389 in March to 394 in October. At present the cost of living in Munnar is the lowest in the State. Thus the contention of labour that the workers in Munnar are adversely affected because the dearness allowance portion of the Minimum Wage is linked to the cost of living index for Ernakulam is not justified. The Committee considers that the present arrangement of linking the dearness allowance portion of the minimum wage to the cost of living index for Ernakulam is quite satisfactory and does not call for any alteration.

2. *Time Rates versus Piece Rates.*—By the Minimum Wages Notification for Plantations, time rates as well as piece rates have been fixed for both plucking and tapping. While plucking is being done on a piece rate basis practically throughout the State, tapping is being done on time rates in some estates and piece rates in others. The present schedule of piece rates gives ten per cent premium over the time rates even when a worker reaches the minimum standard output for the estate. This has been done with a view to give an incentive to piece rate workers to maximise productivity. The Committee considered the question whether it would be possible to give an enhanced time rate where the productivity of the workers is relatively high. But we have come to the conclusion that it is not practicable to give differential rates to time rate workers on the basis of their productivity. Further, as time rate workers include good, bad and indifferent labourers, it is also not possible to raise the time rate to a level with that obtained by piece rate workers who reach the standard out-put.

With regard to the question whether the time rate system should be allowed to continue at all in rubber estates, the Committee collected evidence from a fairly representative number of estates following the time rates. It is found that estates which have adopted time rates are generally those where the yield is very low or where the size of the estate is small. When the yield is very low, as is the case with old rubber, it is often found that the average daily output of a tapper is below three pounds which is the minimum standard output for Class I rubber estates to ensure minimum wages to workers. If an estate with a lower output than this minimum were to adopt piece rates, the management would be obliged to revise the rate per pound almost every month in order to enable the workers who reach the average output for the month to get the minimum wage. In this process, both labourers and employers would suffer. Labourers who fall short of the average output of the estate would fail to get minimum wages. Employers also would suffer a loss because they have to pay the minimum wage to workers who reach the average output of the estate (which will be lower than the minimum standard output of three pounds on the basis of which piece rates have been worked out) and pay extra to those tappers who bring over-pounds. Therefore, the Committee is of the view that piece rates are impracticable in estates where the average output per tapper per day is less than three pounds of rubber.

The size of the estate is also a factor to be taken into account. Several employers in small estates have expressed the apprehension that the introduction of piece rates would lead to the slaughtering of the trees by the tappers in their attempt to get more latex. This argument loses all its force when we take into account the fact that the majority of estates in the State having the best type of rubber follow piece rates. However, it points to the need for better supervision of tapping. The introduction of piece rates necessitates employment of a larger staff for supervising tapping, for measuring the Dry Rubber Content of latex and for calculating the wages for each worker. This would involve heavy overhead charges, which small estates can ill afford to bear. We consider that estates with a tapping area of less than 100 acres are generally uneconomical in size for the introduction of piece rates.

Our enquiries into the working of time rates have revealed the disadvantages of that system from the point of view of productivity. Tappers in all estates following time rates appear to be discontented. They have invariably given evidence before the Committee that they are not doing their best and that they will be able to show much better results, given the incentive to do better work. A go slow policy appears to be the uniform pattern in tapping on time rates, especially after the introduction of minimum wages. The system of time rates is therefore seen to retard productivity. It is, therefore, desirable to enforce piece rates wherever practicable. Our conclusions may be summed up as follows :

(i) It is not possible to have differential time rates for different sets of workers; nor is it advisable to raise time rates to a level with the wages obtained by piece rate workers who reach the standard output.

(ii) The time rate system cannot be abolished. It must be allowed to continue in estates where the average productivity of the tapper per day is less than 3 pounds, or where the area for tapping is less than 100 acres.

(iii) Piece rates should be enforced in estates with a tapping area of over 100 acres where the average productivity of a tapper per day is 3 pounds of rubber or more.

3. *Equal wages for men and women engaged in the same type of work.*—The principle of equal pay for equal work is one which is generally adopted by all wage regulating bodies, to day. This principle was strongly put forward by labour before the Minimum Wages Committee for Plantations. The Committee, however, found that "in the case of Plantations, it is seldom that men and women are employed in the same job on time rates, for example men alone are employed for jobs involving heavy manual work such as pruning, while women are generally employed as pluckers, weeders etc. Therefore the system of differentiation in rates for men and women in the Plantations does not necessarily violate the principle of equal pay for equal work." (Report of the Minimum Wages Committee for Plantations, Para 63 Page 31). Labour has now represented to the Committee that in the case of tapping, men and women are engaged in the same job on time rates in several estates particularly in the Trichur area.

During the course of the Committee's factual enquiries, it was found that men and women are employed as tappers in several estates. But the proportion of women employed is negligible in the southern areas whereas it is considerable in the Trichur area; eg. in the Mariapuram estate (Vithura) there are only 2 women tappers as against 28 men tappers and they are paid equal wages. In the Nooraker estate in the same area there are 6 women tappers as against 24 men tappers. The women tappers are paid at the rate of Re. 1-6-6 even though their Minimum time Rate is only Re. 1-3-3. In the Kaliel area, some estates like new Ambadi, Shivalokam and Vaikundam employ a small number of women tappers also but as piece rates are prevalent in these estates, the question of discrimination between men and women does not arise.

In the Trichur area, the proportion of women tappers to men is found to be much higher than elsewhere. In the Vellankkara estate for example, there are 63 women tappers as against 142 men tappers. Time rates are in vogue in some estates and the practice in the above estate before the fixing of minimum wages has all along been to pay equal wages to men and women tappers. The problem of discrimination between men and

women has come to the forefront after the Minimum Wage notification, because men tappers are now paid at the rate of Re. 1-9-6 while women tappers get only Re. 1-3-3 though they are doing the same kind of work. Workers and labour representatives examined by the Committee have strongly urged the equalisation of women's wages with that of men. They contend that the practice of paying equal wages to men and women tappers, which was prevailing for over a quarter of a century is an unmistakable proof that the management considered the efficiency of women tappers as equal to that of men.

The Committee considers that the principle of equal pay for equal work is perfectly sound. The question, therefore, is whether women tappers can be considered to have the same efficiency as men tappers. On a scrutiny of the books of the Vellanikkara Estate, it is found that there is little difference between the productivity of men and women, so far as tapping goes.

But employers are generally of the view that women tappers are less efficient than men. Several employers, especially in the southern districts have stated that very often a woman tapper completes the round of trees in the block allotted to her with the help of men (husband, son etc.) and the women do not carry the latex to the weighing centre, though transporting the latex is considered an integral part of the tapping job. Further, the employers have put forward several reasons why they are unable to pay women tappers, the same time rate as is paid to men. Firstly they contend that women tappers are intermittent in their work so that the employer is obliged to keep a larger reserve of tappers and substitution of tappers in blocks for short periods results in lower productivity. Secondly, while employers did not mind equal wages when the level of wages were low, they think that the estates would be adversely affected; if equal wages are given at the present level of men's wages. The employer's view seems to be that if the time rate for women is made equal to that of men, they would be obliged to eliminate women workers, in course of time.

It is difficult for this Committee to assess the relative efficiency of women tappers as a class to men tappers. The best manner in which the principle of equal wages for equal work could be implemented is, therefore, by adopting a system of piece rates. It is not unlikely that some estates which employ a large number of women tappers are averse to the introduction of piece rates because they can exploit women labour by paying them their minimum time rate while getting them to do a man's job. Our previous recommendation that piece rates should be enforced in all estates having a tapping area of 100 acres or more, where the average productivity of a tapper is not less than 3 pounds of rubber per day will go a long way to solve the problem of women tappers. In estates where piece rates are impracticable either because of their uneconomic size or their low productivity, we recommend that the time rate for women

tappers should be higher than the Minimum wage fixed for ordinary unskilled women workers. In fixing minimum piece rates in rubber estates, tapping has been treated as essentially a man's job. When women are employed for tapping, they should therefore, be paid higher time rates than women employed in occupations which are generally considered women's jobs. Considering the handicaps of women tappers in working in hilly tracts and in transporting latex to the weighing centre, their efficiency cannot be considered to be on a par with men. The fixing of equal time rates for men and women is, therefore, likely to have adverse effects on the employment opportunities of women in rubber estates. It has come to the notice of the Committee that several women tappers are tolerated by the employers because they happen to be the wives of men tappers with a long service in the estate. Another factor which has to be taken into account is that tapping is a more arduous job than other occupations generally done by women and requires a considerable degree of training. Taking all these factors into consideration, the Committee recommends that the minimum time rate for women tappers may be fixed at Rs. 1-6-6 in estates where the piece rate system is impracticable.

4. *Proportion of Scrap and Latex.* The Committee collected evidence from representatives of employers and employees from several estates in the Kaliel area and Nedumangad, regarding the proportion of scrap to latex collected by the tappers. The main problem that was presented by the employers in Kaliel area was that tappers were bringing scrap in the form of lump deposited in the shells. This obviously, shows that the latex was dripping even after collection and accumulated in the shells. The employer's contention is that sufficient time is not being given for all the latex to drip, because the labourers get the same rate for latex and scrap. Our factual enquiries, however, have led us to the following conclusions :

- (i) The problem of lump scrap has long been there in some of the South Travancore Estates with high yielding budded rubber and it is not the result of fixing uniform piece rates for latex and scrap.
- (ii) We were not able to get sufficient evidence to show that lumps are formed because tappers are collecting latex before the normal time. Some trees continue to drip even after the normal time allowed for collection.
- (iii) The managements have failed to produce any evidence from records to prove that the proportion of lump scrap has increased for even that the proportion of scrap to latex has increased after the minimum wage notification.

In the circumstance, the Committee does not think it necessary to make any revision in the prevailing piece rates in rubber estates.

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### DEFINITION OF TAPPING.

The Minimum Wage Notification No. L 1-9632/51/DD. dated 30th June, 1952, says that the term "tapping shall be understood to mean the jobs under that head that are customarily done in the localities concerned." The Industrial Relations Committee for Plantations has subsequently attempted to define the customary items of work associated with the tapper's job, but could not reach agreement on the matter. The Association of Planters of Travancore has brought to the notice of this Committee that there has been some unrest among tappers in some estates regarding the items of work they are expected to do and has requested that this Committee may be pleased to consider this matter and devise some means of settling the question. In view of the importance of the issue, the Committee in the course of their enquiries, has investigated this problem also and collected evidence from the estates they visited. The enquiries conducted, though of a limited nature, have shown clearly the great disparity in the customary items of work done by tappers in different areas. A definition of customary jobs applicable to the whole State can, therefore, be attempted only after a state-wide enquiry. Further in view of the wide divergences in custom, from one area to another, it will be better if a definition which is acceptable to all parties is arrived at by agreement rather than by being imposed by Government. The Committee, is therefore, of the view that the matter may be considered by a Tripartite Conference and a further attempt made to arrive at an agreed definition.

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