

INDUSTRIAL LABOUR IN INDIA

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BY

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PREFACE

The author believes that no apology is needed for the publication of the following pages after the issue of the report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India. Although it is one of the best of the numerous reports that have been compiled so far by various Government Committees and Commissions, it was circumscribed by the terms of reference that were laid down for the guidance of the Labour Commission. Moreover, many parts of the report, from its very nature, are too detailed and technical for the ordinary reader. Further, it was unnecessary for the Commission to provide in the report much of the historical and theoretical background that is necessary to the average reader for a proper understanding of the industrial labour problems. Finally, the Commission itself stated that it was conscious that exigencies of time and space prevented it from making full use of all the material supplied to it and that, whatever the value of its report, the volumes of evidence which accompanied it provided a source which for a long time could supply a wealth of information, not available elsewhere, for the study of the problems of Indian industrial labour.

The books on Indian industrial labour written before the appointment of the Labour Commission have now lost much of their utility because the Commission's work has thrown much new light on the subject. Of the two books written on the subject after the issue of the Commission's report, one, although well-written, is too sketchy and meant to be more popular and readable than critical, and the other is too partisan and entirely unbalanced. The author of the present work believes that the best interests of the country cannot be served either by condemning all employers as profit-grabbers and exploiters of labour and proposing the nationalisation of Indian industries or by condemning labour as

ignorant, conservative and apathetic and doomed to inefficiency, low wages and a fixed low standard of living.

The aim of the following pages is to show that the main obstacle to the industrial and economic progress of India is the absence of an efficient, steady and contented labour force: that it can be largely overcome in a few years by the adoption of certain measures: that the true interests of the Indian community, the employers and the workers are common: that their strength and prosperity are interdependent: that the workers are rapidly becoming more and more conscious of their power and of new needs and desires: and that there is a growing appreciation in the country of the vital importance of these considerations. Although the author has endeavoured to make the fullest use of all the available written material, he has not relied entirely upon it. For several years he has had good opportunities of studying first hand labour conditions in a number of industries, and the following pages are as much the result of his personal observations as of his study of the observations of others as recorded by them. In this study he has received the generous help of many persons, too numerous to mention here, and he takes this opportunity of expressing his gratitude to them. He also acknowledges his indebtedness to the University of Bombay for the substantial financial help it has granted towards the publication of this work.

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CHAPTER I.

Industrial Progress in India.

[From ancient times right up to the end of the 18th century, in spite of many political vicissitudes caused by foreign conquests, wars etc., Indian cottage industries enjoyed a high degree of eminence in the world, Indian handicraftsmen enjoyed a world-wide reputation for their artistic skill and their products were exported in large quantities to various countries of the Asiatic and European continents.] The rivalry between various European commercial companies trading with India during the 17th and 18th centuries was for the purpose of exporting Indian industrial products to Europe. Cotton, woollen and silk textile industries, metal industries, turning out brass, copper and bell-metal wares and arms of various kinds, iron, ship-building, stone, sandalwood and marble carving, gold and silver thread, glass, paper, fine embroidery, perfumery, leather and enamelled jewellery industries were specially noted for their excellence.] But from the end of the 18th century these industries began to languish rapidly, the people became progressively dependent upon agriculture for their subsistence and the country thus lost her economic equilibrium.

The most important cause of this development was the Industrial Revolution in England, which was ushered in by the inventions of machinery driven by steam power and which swept away the English cottage industries and created in their place factory industries, with complex division of labour, large-scale production, elaborate organisation and improved transport and communications. The products of these English industries began to be exported to India in increasing quantities and the Indian cottage industries could not withstand the competition of these cheaper machine-made goods. The development of roads and railways in India opened out many

even of the interior parts of the country to the imported goods and this, combined with the development of posts and telegraphs, the construction of the Suez Canal and the reduction in the steamer freight charges intensified the competition and quickened the decay of many Indian cottage industries.]

The decline of these industries was further hastened by the policy of the East India Company and Parliament, at first dictated by self-interest and fortified later by the doctrine of *laissez faire*, of treating India as a dependency taking the place of the lost American colonies, supplying raw materials and foodstuffs to England and providing an expanding market for the English manufactured goods. Thus, while the products of Indian cottage industries were shut out of England by prohibitory decrees and heavy import duties, which remained in force till the Indian industries were altogether crippled by the middle of the 19th century, the import of British goods into India and their distribution throughout the country and the export of raw materials and food from the country were facilitated by enforcing on India a policy of free trade and of low railway charges for the transport of goods to and from the ports. The disappearance of the patronage of Indian courts and nobility and the preference shown for imported English goods with their different forms and patterns by English officials and merchants living in India and by the growing number of educated Indians who were much influenced by the standards of the rulers, were also factors that contributed to the decay of the Indian industries.

In England and other Western countries also the new mechanical inventions created much economic disturbance by displacing labour from cottage industries, but the adaptability and organizing capacity of the people enabled them to transfer their labour and capital to the new factory industries after a short period of suffering and to establish a new economic equilibrium on a more stable footing, leading to increased urbanisation and a new era of unprecedented prosperity and power. [In India a similar adjustment was rendered impossible, not

only by the operation of the forces mentioned above but also by the people's deficient adaptability, poor powers of organisation, lack of scientific knowledge, and great shortage of capital. The whole internal economy of India was therefore seriously upset and a substantial proportion of the artisans, driven away from cottage industries by the growing imports of factory-made goods and unable to turn to any factory industries, were compelled to become cultivators, thereby increasing the ruralisation of the country.

The industrial decline of India reached its worst stage during the seventies of the last century.* But from the eighties there has been a slow but steady industrial progress as shown by the facts that the exports of manufactured goods have increased more rapidly than those of raw materials and food, and that the imports of raw materials have increased faster than those of manufactured goods and by the growth of towns.† British industrialists and merchants began to appreciate the scope given by the plentiful and varied raw materials, abundant and cheap labour and the wide market for finished goods in India, for the development of large-scale industries, and British capital and enterprise began to flow to India in increasing quantities. Organised industries established by them at first took the form of tea, coffee and indigo plantations but later other industries also were established. The example of European business men roused the enthusiasm of Indian commercial classes, especially in Bombay.

Moreover, since the eighties of the last century, and to a larger extent since the beginning of this century, the industrial backwardness of the country has attracted the attention of a growing number of politicians and economists who have regarded it as responsible for the famines which periodically devastate large parts of the country and for the extreme poverty of the people of which the famines are an indication. The Famine Commissions

* Cf. Ranade, *Essays on Indian Economics*, p. 119.

† Cf. Pillai, *Economic Conditions in India*, p. 31 and Gadgil, *Industrial Evolution of India*, Chapter X.

of 1880 and 1901 expressed the opinion that the lack of diversified industries was the principal cause of recurring famines and recommended industrialisation of the country as the chief remedy for preventing their occurrence. The educated section of the Indian people began to feel that India, possessing as she did certain great advantages for industrialisation, need not depend upon the Western countries for the manufactured goods required for her civilised life, and that the rapid industrial advance of Japan, under the guidance and active help of the Government of that country, was a great contrast to the industrial stagnation of India largely owing to the apathy of the British Government. Till the beginning of this century all that the Government in India did was to make a little half-hearted provision, which proved altogether inadequate, for technical and industrial education and the collection and distribution of commercial and industrial information, to support the holding of a few industrial exhibitions and to publish a few pamphlets on some industries.

During the opening years of this century two Provincial Governments mapped out programmes of industrial development and began to experiment with two or three industries for the purpose of establishing them on a sound commercial footing and then handing them over to private management. These attempts were condemned by the Secretary of State who, in accordance with the *laissez faire* policy, laid down that the state should not go beyond making known to the Indian people those improvements in the methods of production which modern science and the experience of Western countries had evolved, and that the demonstration of the commercial benefits that could be secured by the adoption of these improvements must be left to private enterprise.* The attempts, therefore, had to be abandoned by the Provincial Governments concerned. The succeeding Secretary of State was ready to allow the Government of India to pursue a rather more advanced industrial policy and to supply demonstration machinery and financial and

* See the Report of the Industrial Commission, p. 78.

technical assistance to new industries, but the Government of India felt that it could not do anything of the kind owing to the lack of the necessary organisation and equipment, which it was not prepared to build up.

The continuing poverty of the people and the absence of industrial careers for the educated Indians, resulting from this industrial stagnation, produced serious economic discontent, which soon allied itself with the political discontent. Both were immensely strengthened by the Partition of Bengal and expressed themselves in the Swadeshi movement and the boycott of British goods. Industrial progress, which had been very slow till then, received a sudden stimulus and a number of new industries were brought into existence. But Government made no attempt to use this national awakening to bring about the industrial regeneration of India, by removing the anomaly of high railway charges for the transport of raw materials and the finished products of Indian industries, by creating protective tariffs, by giving financial and technical help, by purchasing output or by any other means, partly because it continued to cling to the *laissez faire* creed, but largely because the Swadeshi movement was combined with the Boycott movement. For this reason and also owing to the lack of practical training and business experience on the part of the sponsors, most of the new industries failed disastrously.

Thus, up to the War, industrial development in India was slow and uneven and the industries were few in number, consisting of textile factories for cotton, jute and wool, cotton gins and presses, jute presses, railway and engineering workshops, coal, manganese, gold and mica mines, paper, oil, rice and flour mills, sugar, tea, coffee and leather factories, and iron and steel works which were started by the Tata Company in 1912. Of these, the cotton mill industry of Western India, the jute industry of Bengal and the coal-mining industry of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were the only large industries on a stable footing. The others had not attained stability. This was due, in addition to the apathy of Government mentioned above, to the

(shortage of capital, banking ^{habits} facilities), skilled labour and properly trained and experienced entrepreneurs, inefficiency of labour, and the uneven distribution and slow exploitation of coal and iron resources.* Moreover, a large part of this industrial development even was brought about by foreign capitalists and foreign entrepreneurs who have appropriated a large part of the newly produced wealth. The cotton textile industry has ✓ been the only industry to be developed from the first entirely with Indian capital and enterprise.] The jute industry has been controlled from the beginning entirely by foreign capital and enterprise and in the development of other industries also they have played a prominent part. Further, while many concerns owned by Indians have been managed by Europeans, the management by Indians of concerns owned by Europeans has been rare and exceptional.

The War opened the eyes of the Government and the people to the great danger of India's dependence upon foreign countries for the necessaries of civilised life. The stoppage of imports from the enemy countries, Germany and Austria-Hungary, and the large reduction in imports from the Allied countries, owing to the concentration of their productive energies upon the prosecution of the war, provided excellent scope for a rapid expansion of Indian industries. But India found herself incapable of utilising it to any large extent, owing to the great difficulties of importing machinery, mill accessories and supplies which she could not produce at home, the scarcity of skilled labour, the shortage or complete lack of technical experts and the scarcity of railway waggons and ships and was therefore compelled to allow the U. S. A. and Japan, which had already made rapid industrial progress, to seize this favourable opportunity. Moreover, the war brought about a clear realisation of the military importance of developing Indian industries, because it was seen that India's supreme efforts to help the Allies in the prosecution of the war were much handi-

† Cf. Jathar and Beri, *Indian Economics*, Vol. I, p. 182 and Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries*, p. 22.

capped by her industrial backwardness. "It has been left for the war to bring out fully the need for advance in the industrial sphere . . . we can see no reason for hesitating to move forward boldly in a matter in respect of which, considerations of military security, political expediency and economic advantage are coincident and are in agreement also with the interests of the Empire as a whole."*

This led to the appointment of the Indian Industrial Commission in 1916, to suggest means for accelerating the industrial progress of India, and its report published in 1918 emphasised the great importance of active help by Government, financial, technical and otherwise, to achieve this aim. To enable it to give this help satisfactorily it was necessary that it should possess an efficient administrative equipment and the services of reliable scientific and technical experts. It therefore recommended the creation of Provincial Departments of Industries, Industrial and Chemical Services and state-aided industrial banks. But the Indian Munitions Board had already been established by the Government of India for the purpose of developing Indian industrial resources for helping in the conduct of the war, and for reducing the demand on shipping, which had become scarce owing to Germany's submarine campaign, and the transport needs of the war. The Board promoted the creation and development of a number of industries, partly by the purchase of manufactured goods, partly by the diversion to Indian manufacturers of orders for goods placed by merchants in India with manufacturers in foreign countries, by refusing to grant priority certificates without which the goods could not be imported, and partly by helping Indian manufacturers to import machinery, industrial accessories, technical experts and skilled labour and by helping them with commercial and industrial information and expert advice. This showed what Government could do to foster industrial progress by abandoning its long-cherished *laissez faire* creed. After the end of the war Departments of Industries were

* Montague-Chelmsford Report, para 340.

established in the Provinces, and the Munitions Board was merged into the Department of Industries and Commerce of the Government of India.

With the end of the war, the stimulus it had given to Indian industries by means of Government purchases of military supplies, the stoppage of imports from enemy countries and the reduction in imports from other countries also came to an end, and Indian industries were exposed once more to the full force of the competition of foreign industries and were unprotected by any tariffs except those which had been imposed for purposes of revenue. [Therefore the old demand of the educated section of the Indian people for tariff protection to Indian industries became redoubled. The authors of the Montague-Chelmsford Report and the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill of 1919 supported the view that the people of India should be allowed to determine their own tariff policy and this suggestion was later accepted by Parliament. Thereupon the Indian Fiscal Commission was appointed in 1921, and it recommended in 1923 a policy of discriminating protection to be carried out through an expert Tariff Board.] This was accepted by Government, and on the recommendation of the Tariff Board, fiscal protection has been granted to the iron and steel, cotton textile, paper, sugar and match industries.

The proportion of the Indian population employed in industries is still far smaller than that engaged in agriculture. [According to the census of 1921, 10½% of the population was engaged in industries, including plantations and 1½% in transport and mining. But of the 10½% a large proportion was engaged in the supply of personal and household necessities and the simple implements of work and only 1% was shown as engaged in organised industries.] Thus, to obtain a figure for the total proportion of industrial workers in India for comparison with similar figures in the Western countries we should take 1% employed in organised industries, 1½% in transport and mining and 3% in unorganised industries,

giving us a total percentage of $5\frac{1}{2}$ only. According to the census of 1931 the percentage comes to $5\frac{1}{2}$. However, $5\frac{1}{2}\%$ of the enormous Indian population numbering 350 millions is itself a large figure, and a recent writer has mentioned the very striking fact that Indian industrial workers outnumber the entire population of Spain.* The existence of over 20 million industrial workers in India has entitled her to be listed by the International Labour Organisation as one of the eight most important industrial countries of the world, and has given her a place on its governing body,† because, as pointed out by the India Office in its memorandum to the League of Nations, the most important test of a country of chief industrial importance is the number of workers likely to be affected by the decisions of the International Labour Office.

A quickening of the pace of industrial development has been demanded most emphatically by public opinion in India, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it will provide additional employment to the masses, reduce the pressure of population on agriculture, increase the national dividend and enable the masses to improve their standard of living, which will increase their efficiency and capacity to produce wealth. Wages and profits are generally found to be higher in industries than in agriculture. Secondly, it will restore economic equilibrium to the country by redressing the present excessive dependence upon agriculture and providing diversified employment to the masses, and will reduce substantially the frequency and intensity of famines. Thirdly, it will remove the intellectual torpor that is generally associated with excessive dependence upon agriculture, and by providing outlets for a diversity

* See India in 1927-28, p. 132.

† See India in 1929-30, p. 168-9. According to the memorandum of the Government of India to the Labour Commission, the India Office mentioned 20 millions as the number of Indian workers engaged in industries, including cottage industries, mines and transport. See Labour Commission, Evidence Vol. II, Part I, p. 160. The list of the eight most important industrial countries framed by the International Labour Conference in 1919 did not include India. Thereupon the India Office protested to the Council of the League of Nations in 1920 and the criteria on which the selection had been made and the list framed were re-examined. In 1922 the Council granted India's claim to representation on the governing body of the International Labour Office.

of talents and aptitudes it will help to build up a vigorous national character, in which India has been deficient and which she needs most urgently at the present juncture in her history. Each nation is a living organism with diversified tastes, inclinations, wants and resources. The territory occupied by each nation has also diversified soils and climates. India therefore needs industrialisation for national self-assertion and to satisfy her own desire to live as a nation the highest possible life. It has also long been felt that the too literary education in India has not been producing a type of mind which has a sufficiently practical grasp of affairs, and industrial training will supply the much needed corrective.

(Fourthly, the more concentrated profits of industries are more likely to be available for the creation of new capital, which is an essential element in the increase of the national dividend, than the scattered profits of agriculture.) The joint-stock organisation of modern industries and the prospect of obtaining large profits from them will also provide opportunities, as well as stimulus, for the investment of small individual savings which would otherwise be hoarded and lie inert. (Fifthly, by increasing the national dividend, it will increase the taxable resources of the country, yield larger revenues to the State, and enable the State to carry out several nation-building projects) that have been held up owing to financial stringency. It will also make taxation more elastic because, while agricultural wealth can be taxed only through land revenue which can expand very slowly, the profits of industries are taxed through the income tax, and after distribution among individuals, through the customs, both of which respond quickly to an increase of wealth. Finally, it is necessary for India's military and political security which depends upon economic self-sufficiency in vital matters. It will also be a great source of strength to the Empire.*

A quickening of the pace of industrial development in India is not only urgently needed but is also thoroughly practicable. We have seen above how Government

* Cf. The Indian Fiscal Commission Majority Report, paras 42-50.

has recently abandoned its long-standing apathy towards industrial development and has begun to make constructive efforts to foster it along proper channels,* and the country is capable of making a much quicker industrial progress in the near future as soon as the existing world economic depression comes to its end, if her immense industrial potentialities are effectively dealt with under more active guidance from the State. Her natural resources, vegetable, animal and mineral as well as forest wealth are unparalleled in the whole world, and are now being exploited more rapidly. As regards power, although the supplies of coal, wood-fuel and oil are limited, the scope for the cheap generation of hydro-electric energy from the numerous large rivers and water-sheds is immense. Indian capital was scarce in the past, but the great success of Government loans and the flotation of a large number of joint-stock companies since the war, as well as the growing investment of it in sterling securities, show that it is increasing rapidly in recent years, and the extension of banking facilities that is being planned will make it available for industrial development. The removal of the long-standing handicap on Indian industries in the shape of high railway freight rates has already commenced with the adoption by the State of the policy of taking over the management of Indian railways from the hands of the English companies, and the handicap will soon disappear completely when the existing contracts with the remaining companies expire and the management of all the railways is undertaken by the State. Central and Provincial Road Boards have been established for improving road communications. The country also provides a wide and expanding home market for the products of industries, which therefore need not depend for their expansion upon the capture or nursing of foreign markets.†

* For detailed information read Clow, *The State and Industry*, published with the approval of the Government of India.

† Compare this with the following :—

“ For both the procuring of raw materials and the disposing of manufactured articles, Japan depends upon foreign countries. Due to this dependence

Continued on page 12.

In spite of these great advantages, a programme of rapid industrial development cannot succeed unless two difficult problems are properly tackled. One is the adequate supply of efficient entrepreneurs who are scarce in the country at present. Such men can be properly trained only in factories in the atmosphere of industry, and until this atmosphere is created in India, she, as Japan very successfully did, will have temporarily to get managers from other countries and to send her own selected men to these countries to obtain the industrial training and experience.* It is not the purpose of these pages to go into any details of the solution of this problem. The other difficult problem is an adequate supply of efficient, steady and contented labour. "No industrial edifice can be permanent which is built on such unsound foundations as those afforded by Indian labour under its present conditions. The human being remains the most important machine in the production of wealth and in industrial development."† The following pages will be devoted to a critical examination of the more important aspects of this problem with a view to suggesting means for its solution.

Even after one is convinced of the urgent need and thorough practicability of a rapid industrial development in India, the question arises whether it should take the form of large-scale organised industries or of cottage industries. Some writers believe that the former is neither possible nor desirable. In their opinion it is not possible, because Indian social institutions like the caste and the joint family are opposed to it, and because some of its requisite conditions, such as industrial leadership and concentration of capital, are deficient in India. It is also not desirable because in the Western countries

on foreign countries, Japanese industries lack stability both in prices and in demand for the manufactured articles. Foreign markets are easily disturbed by competition, by the appearance of substitutes, changing fashions, the financial policy of the government and political disturbances." "The dependence of economic life upon foreign countries deprives Japan of industrial stability and threatens the maintenance of security of employment and of wages."—Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, pp. 6 and 274.

* Cf. Jathar and Beri, *Indian Economics*, Vol. I, p. 475.

† Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1918, para 236.

it has been responsible for the creation of a number of social and economic evils. These writers, therefore, desire India to keep herself apart from Western Industrialism and world commerce, to develop her village life and to recreate and revivify her handicrafts and cottage industries.*

It is, however, difficult to accept this view. The caste and the joint family are already breaking up rapidly.† As seen above, the difficulties of leadership and capital can be overcome in the near future. As we shall see later, the evils of the factory system can be removed or at least largely mitigated. Western methods of production are without doubt far more efficient, and India should adopt them wherever possible. Other forces are also operating in the favour of their adoption by India, a prominent force being the Swadeshi movement actuated not only by the desire to develop Indian trade and industry independently of Europe but also by the desire that India should secure once more a front rank, as she did before, though now in altogether different circumstances, in world commerce and commercial life. It is true that one aspect of the Swadeshi movement lays stress on the need for the promotion and revival of cottage industries and handicrafts, and a return of all to mediæval economic conditions. But there is also a keen and widespread desire, that is often voiced by a large number of national leaders, for a progressive and modern industrial policy.

This desire inspired the demand in 1920 that India should be recognised by the League of Nations as one of the eight most important industrial countries of the world. Moreover, in the present world it would be impossible for a great nation to withdraw itself from the general economic life of the world, to adopt an economic policy totally different from that of other nations and to live in happy self-sufficiency. The introduction

* Radhakamal Mukerji's *Foundations of Indian Economics* is a plea for such a development. See also Chatterton's *Industrial Evolution in India* and Rabindranath Tagore quoted by Read in *From Field to Factory*, p. 16.

† See Wadia and Joshi, *Wealth of India*, pp. 129 and 133.

of modern industrialism is established as a part of the evolution of a nation in the present age. Although the social possibilities of the great mechanical inventions have not been properly understood and have been mis-directed in the Western countries, they have provided world-wide opportunities, and in all countries thinkers are now considering why the immense increase in human powers brought about by inventions has not led to the emancipation of mankind and are devising schemes for utilising the powers for its liberation and uplift.

The world-wide influence and the excellent work of the International Labour Conferences since 1919 are a happy augury for the achievement of this aim in the near future. The important Conventions that the Conferences have passed from year to year, and the far reaching results that have already accrued from their ratification in many countries show that men belonging to different countries are to-day realising more clearly than before the evils associated with Western industrialism and civilisation, and that the public conscience in these countries is now recognising that the removal of these evils is a matter of vital and urgent importance, not merely to individual nations, but to the whole human race.

The problem for India is not whether she can move off in an isolated direction and plough her lonely furrow, but it is whether she will courageously make use of the opportunities that are placed before her and adopt a progressive economic policy. The fact that modern industrialism is not yet identified with the general life of her people gives her a far better opportunity than is open to the Western countries to avoid blundering in the use of the new industrial powers, and even to give a lead to these countries in adopting a line of policy that will raise the social and moral standards of the human beings whom modern industrialism uses for its own working.* Hitherto the industrial progress of a country has often been spoken of as if it consisted of production and export, and it has often been forgotten that the real aim of this

* Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, pp. 58-59.

progress should be the welfare of the community of human beings. It is now dawning upon the public conscience in India as in other nations that the progress must be towards a gradual realisation of full human life for all sections of the community, and that even if this be a distant goal, it must be a commanding goal if the human race is to rise to its fullest height. ✓

But the solution of the industrial labour problem needs expert knowledge and goodwill and the solution must not be delayed. If evolution by goodwill is delayed, the dangers of revolution by violence will become serious. The warning which Mr. N. M. Joshi, the Indian workers' delegate, sounded at the International Labour Conference in 1929 is most significant. "Just and humane conditions are still in India a far-off ideal and if evolution is too slow, the attractions of revolution are great."*

All this, however, need not mean the complete extinction of all small industries in India. Even in the industrialised countries of the West such as Great Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland, a number of small industries continue to flourish to this day and form an organic part of the economic structure of these countries. Cottage industries still occupy a prominent position in India and some of them have large possibilities of expansion in the near future. Artistic and luxury goods, which have to be produced in a great many varieties to satisfy popular tastes, and the producers of which need an intimate knowledge of the consumers' requirements and therefore proximity to markets, cannot be turned out under the system of standardised mass production in factories. Moreover, the increasing production of hydro-electric energy has remarkably reduced the cost of power in recent years for small concerns, so that the small user of power in many cases need not forego any important external and internal economies and is in a much better position to compete with the large user than he was formerly. Further, many of the necessities of modern civilised life have brought into existence many small establishments to

* Quoted by Margaret Read in the *Indian Peasant Uprooted*, p. 22.

ensure their continuous supply, such as numerous mechanical repair workshops in the wake of the development of motor transport.

Therefore, those cottage industries, whose position is intrinsically sound, which possess inherent vitality and which therefore would not mean economic stagnation or weakness for the country should be strengthened by all possible methods, especially as they enable the craftsmen to work under comparatively healthy conditions in their own homes and in the midst of their families, and to take a greater interest in their work and to obtain the pleasure of artistic creation owing to the fact that such industries give them far better opportunities for self-expression than factory industries can do.

Moreover, while the crying need of India at present is for a diversity of occupations and more employment, it cannot be met adequately for a considerable time by her large-scale industries even if the rate of their progress is much accelerated, and small industries can be most helpful in satisfying the demand. Finally, some of the cottage industries have provided spare-time occupation to many villagers who are compelled to remain idle during a substantial part of the year, and such complementary occupations are being encouraged even in the Western countries as they lessen the effects of the fluctuations in the demand for labour in single occupations.*

* See Pigou, *Economics of Welfare*, p. 467.

CHAPTER II.

The Demand for and Supply of Industrial Labour.

The extent of industrial progress differs much from province to province. It is therefore necessary to consider the demand for industrial labour in each province and the ways in which the supply is forthcoming to meet it.*

From the view-point of the number of industrial workers,† Bengal is the most industrialised province employing nearly 6½ and 2 lakhs, men and women. Among the organised industries, jute presses and factories are the most important, situated along the river Hooghly in the vicinity of Calcutta and giving employment to nearly half of the men and more than one-fourth of the women engaged as industrial workers in the province. Next comes the tea industry, located in and at the foot of the Himalayas, in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts, and employing 15 per cent of the men and 57 per cent of the women industrial workers. Mining employs 6 per cent of the men and 7 per cent of the women, and the metal industry and railway workshops 9 and 5 per cent of the men but no women. The rest of the industrial workers are employed in oil and flour mills, brick and tile factories and printing presses. More than half of the industrial establishments and the workers are located in Calcutta and its neighbouring area.

Nearly one-third of the workers belong to the province itself, the majority of them belonging to the very districts in which they work. The remaining two-thirds are immi-

* The first half of this chapter is based mainly on the information contained in the 1921 and 1931 Census Reports for the different provinces. See also Chap. IV of Broughton's *Labour in Indian Industries*.

† The phrase, industrial workers, is used in these pages to signify workers in establishments which are defined for census purposes as places where 10 or more persons are employed on separate wages in manufacture, whether using power or not.

grants from Chota Nagpur, Bihar, Orissa, the United Provinces and Madras. Of the skilled workers, two-fifths belong to the province, mostly to the districts in which they are employed, and the rest come from the United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa. Bengal is thus a labour-receiving and not a labour-supplying province, and the shortage of local labour, unskilled as well as skilled, is striking. The scarcity of local unskilled labour has been due to the fact that the Bengal cultivators have been more prosperous than their fellows in other parts of India owing to more fertile soil, plenitude of water and the monopoly of the valuable jute crop. Consequently, the demand for agricultural labour has been large, and comparatively high wages have ruled for this labour.* Further, in the western and central parts of Bengal the ravages of malaria have been serious and have made a large proportion of the people unfit for the heavy and trying work in factories and mines. In East Bengal, the majority of the people are Mohammedans, and as the joint family system has been less powerful among them than among the Hindus, they have found it difficult to make arrangements by which some members of the families can take up industrial work leaving the other members in the villages to cultivate the ancestral lands.

The scarcity of local skilled labour has been caused by the fact that although education has spread more among the lower middle class in Bengal, known as Bhadralog, than in other parts of India, it is too literary and has made the members fit only for clerical work in offices and for the learned professions, and also made them till recently look down upon manual labour. Moreover, the system of land tenures prevailing in Bengal has been such as to give most of them proprietary rights in land from which they obtained substantial incomes in the past by farming out these rights permanently.

However, these conditions are now changing. Most parts of Bengal are already densely populated, and yet the pressure of population on agriculture has been increasing rapidly in recent years. Consequently, unskilled

* *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, part I, p. 3 et seq.*

Bengali labourers are now becoming more and more willing to take up industrial work provided that the conditions of work and housing are fairly satisfactory. Also, owing to growing sub-infeudation, which means a lengthening of the chain of intermediate tenure-holders between the actual cultivators of the land and the landlords who pay revenue to Government, the landed incomes of the Bhadralog class have been dwindling and the economic pressure caused thereby is increasing their readiness to take up skilled industrial work and to become fitters, mechanics, etc.* The Bengali workers are more intelligent, industrious and temperate than the immigrant workers, and their superior standard of living will make them work better in order to obtain wages adequate to maintain it. Employers have already begun to realise the truth of the maxim that poorly paid labour is seldom cheap and to prefer Bengali workers. It is, therefore, incorrect to assert, as has been done, that industrial development in Bengal will not benefit the Bengalis much.

The workers in jute presses and factories are composed chiefly of Mohammedans known as Jolahas, Hindus belonging to the Tanti, Teli, Goala and Kahar castes and to the depressed Chamar and Muchi castes. Aboriginal tribes, such as Santals and Bauris, do not generally take to jute mills but are found in large proportions among the workers in mines and tea estates. They provide strong muscular men and women who are ready to do rough and heavy work. The work on the tea estates is done also by a large number of other castes.

Bombay is second to Bengal in respect of the demand for industrial labour and gives employment to nearly $3\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 lakh, men and women. Cotton gins, presses and mills are the most important industries, providing employment to two-thirds of the men and over four-fifths of the women engaged as industrial workers in the province. More than half of them are employed in Bombay city and the rest in the mills of Ahmedabad and Sholapur

* For a fuller explanation of this point, see my *Wealth and Welfare of the Bengal Delta*, p. 220.

and in the gins and presses located in the cotton-producing districts such as Khandesh, Broach, Surat and Dharwar. The metal industries and railway workshops located in Bombay, Dohad, Karachi and Sukkur come next. There are also many engineering, motor repair and electric works, iron and brass foundries, chemical concerns and printing presses.

Bombay is much more self-sufficient than Bengal as regards industrial workers, as more than four-fifths of them belong to the province itself, although the majority of them come from districts of the province other than those in which they get work. The remaining workers are immigrants from the United and Central Provinces, Baroda, Rajputana, Hyderabad and Madras into the cities of Bombay, Ahmedabad, Karachi and Sholapur. The cultivating and labouring castes preponderate among the skilled and unskilled workers and are also almost equally divided between them, showing that although they do not have any training beforehand, they can quickly acquire skill after engagement.*

The supply of labour in Bombay city is very unstable. Firstly, it consists of men and women coming from several parts of India. About half of them come from other districts in the province such as the Konkan districts of Colaba and Ratnagiri where holdings are very small and land far from fertile, the Deccan districts of Poona, Satara, Nasik and Ahmednagar and the Gujerat districts where rainfall is precarious. Less than one-fifth of the workers were born in the city, the proportion has steadily declined at each census, and the remainder come from the U. P., C. P., Rajputana, Hyderabad and Madras. Moreover, the majority of the outsiders come without their families and do not settle permanently in the city largely owing to the difficulties of housing, the proportion between the two sexes being 2 to 1. Ahmedabad and Sholapur, however, have a fairly stable labour supply; three-fourths of the workers in Ahmedabad were born in the city and of the remainder rather

* Cf. Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries*, p. 81.

less than half come from the neighbouring districts and rather more than half from other provinces, chiefly Rajputana. Most of the workers have their families with them and the sex disparity is small. Conditions in these respects are even better in Sholapur than in Ahmedabad.

The province of Bihar and Orissa stands third as regards the demand for industrial labour and gives employment to nearly 2 and $\frac{1}{2}$ lakh, men and women. Coal, mica, iron and manganese mining is the most important industry and gives employment to more than half of the men and nearly four-fifths of the women working in industrial occupations. Most of this labour, skilled as well as unskilled, is local, a small portion being supplied by the Central Provinces and Bengal. The iron and steel industry and its subsidiary industries located at Jamshedpur are next in importance. Nearly two-thirds of their unskilled labour is supplied locally, the remainder coming from the Central Provinces and Bengal, but less than half of the skilled labour is provided locally, the rest being drawn from the U. P., Bengal and the C. P. Then there ~~are~~ a railway workshop at Jamalpur, two or three engineering works and cigarette factories and a few oil, rice and flour mills. Their labour requirements are also largely supplied locally. The bulk of the workers in mines belong to the cultivating castes and forest and hill tribes. The artisan castes are found in a larger proportion in the other industrial occupations. The province supplies more labour to other provinces than it obtains from them. The reasons for this, so far as the aboriginal tribes of Chota Nagpur are concerned, are that they are rapidly increasing in numbers, that their methods of cultivation are primitive and inefficient and that they know little or no thrift. Others emigrate in large numbers to Bengal, Assam, Burma and even to Fiji, British Guiana and Mauritius, because population has been increasing fast, holdings, which were already small, have been getting smaller, and there is a large proportion of landless labourers.

In the United Provinces the demand for industrial labour is much less than in the three provinces consi-

dered above, and not only is the demand met almost entirely from within the province, but a very large proportion of the workers have also to migrate to Bengal, Bombay and Bihar and Orissà in quest of work. The textile industry is the most important, and metal industries, tanneries, leather factories, flour and rice mills, sugar factories, oil mills, breweries, tobacco factories, glass factories, printing presses and railway and engineering workshops also exist, although the numbers engaged in them are not large. Most of these industries are found in Cawnpore, which is the chief industrial town and which, possessing exceptionally good railway facilities, has developed rapidly in recent years. Other industrial centres are Lucknow, Allahabad, Benares, Agra, Bareilly, Saharanpur, Etawah, Aligarh, Mirzapur and Moradabad. The Mohammedans work mainly in textile and leather factories, the Chamars in tanneries and several cultivating and artisan castes in the other factories. The migration of large numbers to other provinces is due to the very heavy density of population, small holdings, uncertain rainfall and the agricultural tenure known as tenants-at-will under which tenants can be driven away by the landlords from their holdings in favour of others who are willing to pay higher rent.

The remaining provinces are not at all important industrially, and their demand for labour, except in the case of the Assam tea industry, is met almost entirely from within their own boundaries. Madras is handicapped by the high cost of power owing to the necessity of getting coal from a great distance, and this handicap will continue until it produces hydro-electric energy for which large sources are available. The textile and allied industries are the most important. Cotton gins and presses are situated at Bellary, Coimbatore and Ramnad and cotton spinning and weaving factories at Madras, Coimbatore, Madura, Tinnevely and Malabar, but the numbers engaged at each of these places except Madras are less than 3,000 and those at Madras are about 12,000. Next in importance are the tea and coffee plantations in the Nilgiris, Malabar and Coimbatore. Then come

the metal industries and rice, flour and oil mills, but the numbers engaged in them are comparatively small. The labour for these industries is supplied mainly by the depressed classes, the important agricultural castes and Indian Christians. There is considerable migration of Madrasi labour, male as well as female, to Ceylon, Burma, Assam, Bombay, Mysore, Travancore and Coorg and even to the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States owing to the pressure of population on the soil, small holdings, the existence of large bodies of landless agricultural labourers and their ability to underbid local labour in other provinces owing to their very low standard of living.

The principal industries in the Central Provinces are the textiles, mines and quarries, flour mills and railway workshops, but they employ comparatively small numbers. Nagpur, Wardha, Akola and Amraoti are the industrial districts and the coal mines are worked in Narsinghpur, Chanda, Chindwara and Betul districts. In spite of the small amount of industrial employment and the fact that in parts of the province agriculture yields a precarious living, the number of immigrants, mainly from the United Provinces, is substantially greater than that of emigrants. In the textile factories and mines, nearly one-third of the workers are Mahars. Mohammedans generally work in textile factories and railway workshops. The other workers belong to the different labouring castes.

In Assam tea is the only industry, but it employs nearly 3 and $2\frac{3}{4}$ lakhs, men and women. Its mineral wealth in the shape of coal and petroleum has not yet been much exploited owing to the lack of communications and the shortage of labour. It is thinly populated, additional land for cultivation has been available, and the local people are lazy and unenterprising, so that the tea plantations have to depend almost wholly on labour migrating from Chota Nagpur, Bihar, the United and Central Provinces and Madras. The plantations are situated in the districts of Sylhet, Cachar, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhmipur.

The industrial backwardness of the Punjab has been due to the fact that the rapid expansion of agriculture brought about by extensive canal irrigation, and the Indian army, have provided sufficient employment to most of the available labour. So the only industries are a few cotton and woollen mills at Lahore, Amritsar and Dhariwal, carpet factories at Amritsar, railway workshops at Lahore and Rawalpindi, salt mines at Khewra and a few scattered brick factories. The labour in them is mostly local, a small proportion coming from the United Provinces and working chiefly in the railway workshops and cotton mills. But the province is likely to undergo a rapid industrial development in the near future, as it has important sources for the production of hydro-electric energy and petroleum, as the expansion of agriculture is yielding much wealth which will need profitable investment and as the people have good physique, intelligence and ambition, the Punjabi skilled workers already enjoying a high reputation in other parts of India.*

The above survey shows that in the large industrial towns, the workers are bewilderingly heterogeneous. They come from different parts of the country, differ fundamentally in race, caste and creed, have varying standards of living, and speak different languages and dialects which cannot be understood by each other. Nevertheless, they are herded together during the day time in the indiscriminate uniformity of factory life and spend the rest of the time in the crowded tenement houses of the congested industrial quarters.

We may now turn to an examination of the main characteristics of the migration of labour, which has also been seen in the above survey as an important element in the supply of industrial labour. The most important characteristic is that the migration is temporary and that the Indian industrial workers, unlike their fellows in the Western countries, maintain a more or less close touch with agriculture and the villages and continue to regard the villages as their homes. They are born in the

* Cf. Mukhtar, *Factory Labour in the Punjab*, Introduction and Chap. IX.

villages, their childhood is spent in them, they keep their families in them and return to them as frequently as they can, the frequency and duration of the holidays being determined by the available funds, the demands of the village money-lenders, illness or urgent family matters. They give up industrial work, if remunerative work can be secured in their villages, or if conditions of life and work in the industrial areas impair their health seriously, and in any case they earnestly hope to retire there permanently. It is only in Ahmedabad, Nagpur and Madras that a portion of the industrial workers is permanent and it consists of classes whose connection with land has always been negligible, *viz.* Mohammedans and depressed class Hindus.

However, it is no longer correct to regard the industrial workers, except those serving in seasonal industries, that treat agricultural products in the raw condition after they have been gathered, and in coal mines, as consisting of a mass of agriculturists prepared to perform industrial work only during a part of the year.* They are not mere birds of passage but continue to work in the industries for a considerable period once they join them.

The causes of this migration are complex. The pressure of population on agriculture has been continuously increasing in most areas and the pressure is now being felt still more severely owing to a slight improvement in the standard of living of many rural areas. Moreover, a fairly large class of landless agricultural labourers has long been in existence, obtaining a somewhat precarious living even in good years and subjected to serious hardships in bad years. The loss of land owing to the accumulation of debt, the eviction of tenants due to the desire of a landlord to increase his own cultivation, quarrels and the deaths of tenure-holders have been increasing this class. The inadequacy of a holding to maintain those dependent on it, owing to an increase in their number, rent or debt, also compels the agriculturists to migrate in search of industrial work.

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 8 and Vol. V, Part I, p. 358.*

Moreover, many rural areas yield sufficient to the people in normal years but not in years of inadequate or excessive rainfall, thereby compelling a portion of them to take up industrial occupations. Even the craftsmen in the villages, who formerly produced goods for self-sufficient village units, have now to face outside competition owing to the spread of communications and industrial development, and many of them are compelled to abandon their ancestral handicrafts and to migrate to industrial areas in quest of work. Further, Hindus belonging to the lower and depressed castes find that they receive far better social treatment in industrial centres than in villages and are spared much humiliation, as industrial employment tends to break down social and caste distinctions. A kind of serfdom has also prevailed in certain rural areas of the country, and the only avenue of escape from it has been migration to a town. Finally, those who want to be free from family troubles or to avoid punishment imposed under the law or punishment decreed by the village or caste elders for social or moral offences, are tempted to take shelter in some industrial centre.*

Now, what are the causes of the temporary nature of this migration and the maintenance of close touch with agriculture and the villages? The most important cause, as pointed out by the Labour Commission, is that the impelling force in migration is supplied only by the village end of the channel and that the emigrants are not attracted by the pleasures of town life or by any ambition beyond obtaining the primary necessities of life.†

Secondly, when the workers have migrated owing to the insufficiency of land or the uncertainty of income from it and not to the want of it, it pays them to

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. III, Part I, p. 140.*

† Report, p. 16. Conditions in industrialised Japan even are very similar. "The factory system has been precipitated upon the nation without the gradual upbuilding of a factory population. Labour in Japan has been agricultural. The farms are over-populated, but the people are attached to the land and labour is reluctant to enter the factory. The workers have come most unwillingly and only under pressure. The recruiting of labour has been a necessity."—J. E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, p. 340.

maintain contact with the land and to secure whatever income it can yield. Thirdly, owing to the difficulty of securing work for women and children in industrial centres, they are very frequently left behind in the villages, where they can live cheaply and more healthily and can obtain some work now and then. Fourthly, the joint family system keeps the emigrants connected with their ancestral villages. Fifthly, village life is essentially a community life and the more or less individualistic life that is inevitable in an industrial centre is repugnant to them. Finally, the striking contrast between the conditions of work, life and health in villages and towns in favour of the former makes them most reluctant to settle permanently in the latter and eager to return as frequently and as long as possible to the former.

The contrast is certainly very remarkable. The individualism which modern industrialism has developed in the West does not exist at all in Indian villages, and the heaviest loss that the villagers turned industrial workers have to bear is the loss of community life. In their villages they belonged to a caste and had a definite place in it, and the caste had an important place in the village life. They were surrounded by members of their family and caste with their mutual claims for moral and material support. Family and religious festivals celebrated with other members of the family or caste played an important part in their life.

All these familiar aspects of their life disappear in the city slums, and they get bewildered by the heavy traffic, the continual jostling by strangers of different languages, religions and castes and the misery of the slums. Although they have been accustomed to irregular work in the quiet of the villages broken by long and frequent periods of rest and the cheerful clamour of the market and the festival, they find themselves caught within great walls, and stupefied by the clang and whirl of machinery, have to toil continuously for long hours.* They had been accustomed

* "Talk to a factory worker who is lethargic and heavy, doing mono-
Continued on page 28

to usages which, though arbitrary and unreasonable in some cases, were in conformity with their habits, and which were enforced by those whom they had known from birth, but now they find themselves subjected to a strict discipline, and ordered by complete strangers to do things which they cannot understand, and stormed at and taken to task if they misunderstand or disobey them, and this discipline produces a heavy strain on their body as well as mind, causes them serious distress and impairs their efficiency. Their entire unfamiliarity with industrial work lowers their efficiency still more. It is therefore not surprising that an appreciable portion of them find it impossible to adjust themselves to the change, become home-sick and return permanently to their villages. Serious economic pressure, however, compels the majority to battle against this feeling and gradually to become used to the changed environment.

Moreover, the health of the recruits, whose families have lived in the same villages for ages and who therefore are very sensitive to changes of climate, is liable to be adversely affected by the different climate of the industrial centres to which they migrate and by their transfer from the open fields and fresh air of the former to the congested areas and vitiated atmosphere of the latter. Their health is further endangered by the change and deterioration in diet that are compelled by the higher cost of living in towns. Instead of the fresh meals cooked by their wives and ready for them in their huts or brought to the fields, they have now to subsist on stale, coarse and dreary meals, which are cooked by strangers and for which heavy charges, varying between Rs. 10 and Rs. 15 per month, have to be paid. Such food tempts them to go to small and cheap restaurants and liquor shops, where the food served is spicier but less nourishing and where the habit of drinking liquor is begun or strengthened.

Their insanitary habits also prove to be far more

nous work among noisy machinery, of his village and his face lights up, and though there is sadness and the look of an exile in his face, it is obvious where his heart and most of his thoughts are."—Read, *From Field to Factory*, p. 35.

dangerous to health and far more productive of illness and disease in congested towns than in open villages. Their ill-health is further augmented by the fact that the vast majority of them have to leave their wives behind them in the villages, and being deprived of the healthy pleasures of family and village life, they are liable to succumb to the temptations of prostitution, alcoholism and gambling that abound in all industrial centres.* The disintegration of homes in a country in which family life is predominant in its civilisation is bound to lower social standards and to produce other evil results.

Further, the usages and customs to which they had been habituated in villages as well as the bonds, that make village life corporate and organised, weaken considerably when they settle in towns, and they find themselves in the midst of a language, a mode of life and a culture that is foreign to them; it is difficult for them to create new bonds and their life perforce becomes more individualistic.

It thus becomes clear why a continual change goes on among the workers of industrial concerns. The difficulties that the managements have to contend with in working with a fluctuating labour force are considerable. There is no security that workers will return to the establishments that they left when going back to their villages. Many of them are always quite new to particular establishments and to the machinery and methods of work and this impairs their own efficiency as well as that of the managements. It also hampers the development of personal and friendly relations between the workers and their employers and the promotion of the spirit of co-operation among them. Moreover, when the workers return to towns after a holiday in their villages, there is often no employment awaiting them, and they are compelled to bribe the overseers to get it just when their financial resources are exhausted.

But the temporary character of the migration has its advantages too. The connection with the villages enables the industrial workers to maintain better health

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence* Vol. III, Part I, p. 143.

than could be enjoyed by permanent residence in towns and the periodical holidays in villages enable them to recoup the health of body and mind that gets weakened by residence in towns. Moreover, the village homes provide a shelter, whenever the workers get into difficulties owing to illness, epidemics, strikes, unemployment, debility or old age, and the assurance that this shelter would always be available is a great source of strength and hope to them.* The towns in their turn with their industries provide reciprocal insurance to the villages against the risks of agriculture. The life in the towns also increases the mental alertness of the workers and widens their outlook on life. Further, they spread in the villages the wider knowledge and new ideas of freedom and independence which they imbibe in the towns. Thus they become willing to accept suggestions for the improvement of their agricultural production and unwilling to be treated as virtual serfs or untouchables and to accept the retrograde views of their caste fellows.†

The adoption of policies calculated to create a permanent industrial labour force altogether separated from villages has often been advocated in the past. But this is a superficial view, because, as pointed out by the Labour Commission, the workers' connection with villages is very beneficial.‡ Therefore, far from attempting to sever or even to check it, the object of all concerned should be to promote and regulate it. With proper regulation, the lines of which will be considered in a later chapter, it will be possible not only to remove its defects or at least to reduce them considerably, but also to augment its advantages that have been mentioned above.

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 7.*

† Cf. Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries, p. 116.*

‡ Report, p. 20 ; see also *Evidence Vol. V, Part II, p. 208.*

CHAPTER III.

Labour in Textile Factories.

Of all the factories in India, the cotton ginning and pressing factories and the cotton spinning and weaving factories are by far the most important, the most widespread and the most interwoven with the economic life of the country, providing employment to 1,37,000 and 3,38,000 workers respectively. The ginning and pressing factories are usually independent of the spinning and weaving mills, and needing little machinery, are scattered over the cotton growing districts in or on the outskirts of small towns and are strictly seasonal, working from 2 to 7 months of the year. The labourers are obtained from the surrounding villages, many of them return at night, and are usually engaged directly by the manager. Work in these factories often serves as an intermediate stage leading ultimately to work in the textile factories of cities, agriculturists unable to obtain a sufficient living from agricultural work taking up work in these seasonal factories, before they can venture to try the bolder and far more serious experiment of moving to cities, and taking up regular work in the perennial textile factories there. In ginning factories the majority of the workers are women, and boys are employed for sweeping and odd jobs.

There may be 2 or 3 ginning sheds and a press in the same compound. The gins are located in long two-storied slight buildings of corrugated iron on wooden frames. The lower storey consists of a shed into which the cotton seeds drop steadily as they are separated from the lint. In the upper storey, a bench runs along either side broken at each exit to the platforms which run out from openings in the walls. Cotton is piled on these benches, and in front of it the workers, with pieces of cloth tied over their mouths, sit cross-legged,

having the gins, consisting of oblong boxes in which rollers revolve, at their feet. They feed these boxes with handfuls of cotton from the piles, and move it right and left within the boxes with their hands and sticks with which they are equipped, to keep it evenly distributed so as to prevent clogging. The seeds are pressed out by the rollers, after the fibres are scraped from the seeds by moving knives. While the seeds pour into the ground floor shed, the lint is pushed upwards over the edges of the gins and collects on the floor, from which it is carried and packed into the bags that hang from the outer platforms.

The gins are operated from below, by means of belting passing up to each machine. This belting and the fly-wheel must be properly guarded, but while the former is usually guarded, the latter is not, although the loosely clad workers are apt to climb over it to take their seats. The work is not heavy, but it is very monotonous, the hours are often long, usually there is much noise and heat, there is constant vibration, and most ginneries do not have any apparatus for carrying away the dust and the fluff. These drawbacks and the low level of the wage, *viz.* 4 or 5 annas a day, offset to a considerable extent the advantage that the work is seasonal.

Some ginning factories consist of one storey only, the seeds dropping into hollows under the gins. In these factories the vibration is much less, as the workers remain on the ground level, as the machinery runs along the roof, and as the building must be strong enough to bear its weight. But in such cases the danger of accidents owing to the breaking of the overhead belting is greater.

The pressing and baling are done by men, and the presses and the storage godowns stand apart from the ginneries. Several types of presses are in use, a common type consisting of a central machine on ball bearings and three pits. Cotton is thrown into the pits and stamped down by the packers with their feet till it reaches the top. The machine then turns round, collects and presses the contents of the three pits into one bale, binds it and throws

it into a wheelbarrow. Much dust and fluff are produced and the men have to cover their mouths and noses with pieces of cloth.

The employers in these seasonal factories, owners or lessees, usually work with a small capital and are eager for quick profits. They have no control over the price of the raw material, so they try their utmost to keep the cost of labour as low as possible. The workers are entirely at the mercy of the employers, because they want work in the immediate neighbourhood of their villages, and are ignorant of their rights under the Factory Act and of bargaining for better conditions. In years of poor harvest, when sufficient work is not available to keep all the factories running at full pace, the employers in each local area form a pool to protect their own interests, work such a number of factories only as can be kept running throughout the week, shut up the remaining factories, pool the profits of the running factories, and distribute them among all the owners in the entire local area. The closing of some factories throws some of the workers out of employment, and the remainder are sweated in the factories that are kept running.*

Moreover, the nature of the industry makes it necessary for the factories to work their utmost while the short season is on and to earn profits while they can, and as most of the workers are unskilled and engaged daily, the employers have little consideration for their comfort. The owners, therefore, are eager to work their factories as many hours as possible each day, and most of the owners of the larger factories apply to the Provincial Governments for exemptions from the weekly and daily limits of hours, the weekly day of rest, and the daily intervals that are laid down by the Factory Act, and take varying advantage of the exemptions that may be granted from time to time.

Further, many of the factories are too small to be brought under the operation of the Factory Act, and while the others are large enough for this purpose, it is difficult for the factory inspectors to visit them frequently

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 48.*

and for local public opinion to make itself bear upon their working, as they are scattered and frequently occupy out-of-the-way positions.* Hence, many of the owners disregard the provisions of the Act, and observe them, only when they know that the factory inspector is in the neighbourhood. The workers suffer much, because, although they are overworked, their wages remain the same. Several prosecutions have been launched in different provinces for this overworking, but the difficulties of bringing the offenders to book have been found to be considerable. Similar conditions exist, but to a smaller extent, in other seasonal factories also.

Cotton manufacture began in the sixties of the last century in Bombay city and was confined to it till the eighties, as it possessed the largest business enterprise, the best capital and credit facilities, the cheapest and quickest communications, and a geographical advantage for trade with China, which began to take up increasing quantities of Indian yarn. From the eighties, however, manufacture spread to centres like Nagpur, Ahmedabad and Sholapur, as their natural advantages, *viz.* production of cotton in the neighbourhood, cheap and abundant labour, and the proximity of centres for distributing cloth were made effective by the development of railways. Till the end of the century spinning was more important than weaving, owing to the large demand for Indian mill-made yarn from China and from the Indian handloom weavers, who quickly appreciated the greater uniformity of this yarn. Since the turning of the century, however, weaving has expanded, partly at the expense of spinning, chiefly owing to the loss of the Chinese market for yarn, resulting from the disturbance of the exchange with China caused by the abandonment of the silver standard by India, from the capture of the market by Japan, and from the growing production of yarn in China itself.

In recent years the Indian mills have endeavoured to increase the production of the finer varieties of cloth by mixing the short-stapled Indian cotton with the long-stapled American, Egyptian or Uganda cotton. But

*Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 67.

progress in this direction has not yet been substantial, owing to the high cost of the foreign cotton and of the more elaborate machinery that has to be installed for this purpose. So the Indian production still consists largely of the coarser varieties, and plain and fancy shirtings, plain, fancy and bordered cloths for men's and women's garments, sheets, towels, counterpanes, tents and cheap cotton blankets made out of cotton waste are being manufactured in increasing quantities. The finer varieties are still supplied largely by England and to a less extent by Japan.

The war stimulated the industry a good deal by creating a need for clothing large armies in the Eastern war theatres and by reducing the imports from England. But since 1922 it, especially the part located in Bombay city, has been passing through a period of depression, partly owing to the world economic depression, and partly owing to the keen competition of Japan, which enjoys the fair advantages of a better climate, somewhat more efficient labour, greater employment of cheap female labour, and highly organised purchases of the raw material, but which enjoyed till July 1929 also the unfair advantage of the refusal to ratify the Labour Conventions of the Washington Conference regarding the hours of work, and the prohibition of the employment of children and of women during the night, and which more recently has enjoyed the unfair advantage of depreciated exchanges.*

Although the industry has been given tariff protection of 25 and 20% import duty on non-British and British goods respectively, or $3\frac{1}{2}$ annas per lb., whichever is greater, and of free import of machinery and mill stores, it has not yet got over the depression.† Nevertheless, the industry has made substantial progress since the

* See the Report of the Textile Tariff Board, pp. 54, 57, 58.

† In October 1931 as an emergency revenue measure, an additional surcharge of 25% on these duties was imposed, and the specific duty also was raised, so that on certain kinds of goods it amounted to as much as 40%. Since September 1932, to meet the further depreciation of the Japanese exchange, the duty on non-British imports has been raised to 50% *ad valorem*, or $5\frac{1}{2}$ annas per pound, whichever is higher, till October 1933.

beginning of this century. This is seen from the facts that whereas in 1901 nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of the cloth consumed in India had to be imported from other countries, the imports have now been reduced to slightly over $\frac{1}{3}$, and that the number of workers has more than doubled during this period.

(Bombay city is still the chief centre of the industry, and gives employment to 1,18,000 out of 3,38,000 workers. Ahmedabad comes next with 70,000 workers. The other centres in the Bombay Presidency are Sholapur, Surat, Broach and Jalgaon, employing 44,000 workers altogether. The remaining 1,06,000 workers are spread over Madras, Madura and Coimbatore in the Madras Presidency, Nagpur in the C. P. and Cawnpore in the U. P. In recent years, the industry has been extending to smaller towns in the cotton producing districts to take advantage of the vicinity to labour, cotton and cloth markets, and to the Indian states such as Indore, Gwalior, Baroda and Mysore, to take advantage of the milder factory regulations prevailing there.)

The industry is largely owned and managed by Indians. In several mills many Englishmen, brought out chiefly from Lancashire, are still employed as managers, or heads of departments, but in many mills the management is entirely Indian. The management is usually in the hands of a firm of managing agents, consisting of 3 or 4 partners generally related to each other. This system has a number of defects. Firstly, the ownership of the firm is a heritable asset, and so management may pass into the hands of inefficient descendants. Secondly, managing agents are sometimes interested in securing employment for their relatives and friends in the concerns managed by them, and may thus be tempted to sacrifice efficiency and ability. Thirdly, managing agents in some cases get the raw materials and mill stores of the concerns managed by them supplied by their relations and friends at prices higher than the market ones, thereby unnecessarily raising the cost of production.

Fourthly, not being directly interested in the fixed capital of the companies that they manage, managing

agents may not properly protect the interests of the shareholders. Sometimes they run concerns controlled by them into voluntary liquidation, and form new companies to take over the assets of these concerns at abnormally low prices. In other cases they may turn their loans to the mills into debentures, and as the claims of debenture-holders rank prior to those of shareholders, the ownership of the concerns may practically pass into their hands, and the shareholders may lose their capital invested in the undertakings. Fifthly, some of them till recently charged their commission on production, usually at the rate of 3 pies per pound, or on sales, generally at the rate of 3½ per cent. However, both these systems have now been largely replaced by the system of commission on profits at a rate varying between 7½ and 12½ per cent.* Sixthly, a few of them, besides managing mills, trade and speculate, and the resulting weakness in their position is apt to affect adversely the financial position of the mills, causing banks to withdraw their cash credits. Finally, they cannot have that intimate contact with the investing public, which is possessed by banks, and their own financial resources are limited, so that they are frequently unable, especially in periods of financial stringency, to supply all the funds that the concerns managed by them require.

This managing agency system is a special feature of India and prevails in a number of other industries also. Everywhere the dual existence of the system and the banks has caused a divorce between banking and industry, and thus resulted in a drag on industrial progress. The agents tend to work in a groove, their outlook on industry tends to become narrow, and frequently new industrial schemes are not given sufficient attention by them. All this reacts unfavourably on the conditions of industrial labour in India, and there will be general agreement with the view of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee that attempts should be made to make industrial enterprises in India less dependent on this

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part II, p. 301.*

system for future development.* Further, wherever the system has to continue, it must be radically overhauled for the purpose of creating a better identity of interests between the mills and the agents.

The cotton industry, chiefly the part located in Bombay city, has also other defects. Firstly, many mills are now handicapped by the over-capitalisation of the boom period caused partly by the issue of bonus shares and extravagant expansion, and the Textile Tariff Board stated in 1927 that those mills which had not increased their capital during the boom period were in a strong position.† Secondly, many of the mills distributed most of their profits in dividends in order to send up the market value of their shares and have not sufficiently strengthened their reserves.

Finally, the central organisation of the industry is weak. The Japanese and English cotton industries, the chief competitors of the Indian industry, have Central Associations whose members have to supply them comprehensive and up-to-date particulars and figures punctually at stated periods, so that prompt action can be taken. The organised control exercised by the Associations over their members extends from the buying of the raw cotton to placing the finished goods in the hands of the consumers. New styles and patterns that appeal to purchasers are produced and delivered quickly. Policy with regard to buying, selling, spinning different counts and manufacturing different types of cloth is promptly laid down, and concentration is brought about in the different processes, so as to obtain the best results. The Indian industry has nothing of this nature although it has Millowners' Associations. These defects largely explain the demand of the industry for protection, although it has existed for nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a century, possesses raw material at its door, an abundant and cheap supply of labour and a very wide home market, while these advantages are not enjoyed by its Japanese and English rivals.

* Central Banking Enquiry Committee Report, p. 280.

† Textile Tariff Board Report, p. 79.

The majority of the cotton mill buildings belong to one of two types. One type exists in cities where land is scarce and dear, and consists of a long, straight narrow building of 2 to 5 storeys, with the later addition of a large weaving shed having a single storey and a saw-tooth roof. This type is similar to the buildings in Lancashire. The second type exists in small towns where land is abundant and cheap, and consists of a series of single-storey buildings. Often the building is surrounded by a large compound, in some cases well laid out with shading trees, in other cases a mere waste.

A third type of mills is also in existence, *viz.* old-fashioned rambling mills, starting on a small scale and expanding somehow with the growth in the demand for piecegoods, although there is little space for expansion. But the successful working of such mills is very difficult, and they are diminishing in number. If they are managed by one of the big managing agency firms, they will soon be rebuilt according to one of the first two types. If they are managed by independent persons, they may cease to prosper, and may be bought up and rebuilt by one of the big agency firms. The buildings are usually solid structures of brick or stone and fitted with automatic sprinklers and fire-proof doors.

Till recently the machinery was almost always British owing to its reputation for durability, the Indian manufacturers, unlike their Western competitors, especially the Americans, being unwilling to abandon old machinery till it was worn out. In recent years, however, German, Swiss and American machinery is being increasingly imported, especially as the Indian manufacturers have now become alive to the need of adopting new methods and processes.* In the older mills the machinery is often overcrowded, and an abundance of belting darkens the rooms. In the new mills, however, there is generally plenty of space, and the belting and shafting are very much less. The engine rooms in most

* Cf. Mathesan, *Indian Industry*, p. 32,

cases are well-built, spacious and clean.*

General cleanliness varies much from mill to mill, and some of the Bombay and Ahmedabad mills even are not kept quite clean. It is true that it is very difficult to keep some departments clean, but the fact that several mills in different parts of India are kept scrupulously clean shows that all the mills can reach a high standard in this respect. One difficulty of keeping them clean is the workers' habit of spitting anywhere after chewing betel nut and leaves. But those mills are found free from this nuisance, where the managers prohibit spitting except in spittons which are supplied, or in certain authorised spitting corners, which are daily cleaned, and impose a small fine upon the jobbers concerned if any parts of the mills are found spoiled by spitting.

As regards the processes of manufacture, first of all the solid blocks of cotton in the form of bales must be broken up and the fibres must be loosened and freed from dirt. This is done by passing the cotton through the opener and the scutcher in which it is dashed against grids. Then the carding machine guides the fibres to lie parallel to each other and to overlap, so that the natural spiral curve will help one fibre to link itself to another, spreads the lap into a gossamer web, and gathers it up into a thick braid called a sliver, about an inch wide. This sliver coiled into round cans is taken to drawing frames, in which six slivers are gradually drawn out till they come out as one, of the same size as each of the six. This is repeated thrice to obtain an even thickness in the final sliver. This is then put into the slubbing machine, and, after being drawn further and slightly twisted, emerges as a soft loose cord. It is drawn and twisted more on the intermediate and roving

* "Taking the factories from the point of view of height of the rooms, space and ventilation, they are at least equal to the factories of Europe. The machinery is, with very few exceptions, of the latest and most up-to-date type, and whilst there was abundant evidence that, taken generally, European conditions were not being reached, we saw many concerns, where, in every respect, the conditions were equal to the best European mills." Quoted from the report of the Delegation of the International Federation of Textile Workers visiting India in 1927, in Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 390.

frames and then undergoes the final processes of spinning in which the yarn is drawn and twisted still further, and finally the yarn for weft is wound around spindles, and the yarn for warp around bobbins.

Yarn for warp must be stronger than yarn for weft as, running from end to end of a piece of cloth, it is subjected to greater strain. Yarn for the weft, covering the larger part of the warp, must have softness, lustre and even colour. Yarn also varies in thickness. Thin yarn is said to be of a high count and thick yarn, of a low count. The count is the number of hanks of yarn that weigh a pound, a hank being 840 yards. The thinner the yarn, the larger is the number of hanks required to make up the count. Superior varieties of cloth can be manufactured only out of yarn of a high count *i.e.* thin yarn. The counts generally spun in Indian mills vary from 12 to 40. The lower counts are spun out of short-stapled Indian cotton, and the higher counts, by mixing Indian cotton with the long-stapled American or Egyptian cotton.

If a spinning mill is not combined with a weaving mill, the yarn is reeled into hanks and packed for transport to weaving mills or handloom weavers or for export. But if a weaving department is attached to a spinning mill, the yarn is taken there, and the first process is to wind the yarn for warp off the bobbins on to the weaver's beams. The yarn is then taken to sizing machines, where it is dipped into a thin paste to enable it to stand friction at the time of weaving. The sizing operation is apt to be trying for the workers, owing to the damp and steamy atmosphere, the nasty odour and the solid particles of sizing material floating in the air. After the yarn is sized, each thread has to be drawn through a frame known as the heald. The beam is then ready for attachment to the loom and the cloth is woven. The weaving department is generally close, hot and full of moisture, and the noise is terrific. The final processes are those of examining the cloth for defects and of calendering, folding and bund-

ling it for sale. Some mills have also dyeing departments for colouring cloth.

Artificial humidification has to be employed in these factories, to prevent the breaking of yarn during some of the processes of spinning and weaving, and factory inspectors have to pay much attention to the installations erected for this purpose, because a high degree of humidity may cause serious discomfort to the workers. On the other hand, humidification is not an unmixed evil, because during the hot weather it may be secured by means of a cold spray instead of steam, so that the factories are kept cooler and pleasanter than the outside atmosphere. Moreover, experience shows that both the extremes of weather can be overcome by these means, if the managers are prepared to pay special attention to this problem, and temperatures varying between 75° and 95° F. during different seasons can be maintained inside the factories, while outside they vary between 70° F. or less, and 120° F.*

In this respect there has been much improvement in many factories in recent years, and the Labour Commission has suggested that strong action should be taken under the Factories Act against the management of those factories in which conditions continue to be unsatisfactory.† The Chief Inspector of Factories for Bombay has stated that "it has been generally realised that expenditure on ventilation and cooling apparatus means a more contented labour force, increased earning power to the operatives, and often increased profits to the concern."‡

Many managers supply curtains or different kinds of glass for the mill windows, or have adopted different systems of roof lighting, for the purpose of reducing the heat and the glare of the sun. Many of them have also established the tunnel system of ventilation, consisting of underground channels through which damp and cool air is driven, or carrier plants on the American model, or

* Cf. Mathesan, *Indian Industry*, p. 34.

† Report, p. 59.

‡ Annual Factory Report of the Bombay Presidency, 1928, p. 8.

propeller fans driven from the loom shaft and attached to the loom rail, or the system of having jets of water play on the roofs. Thus, it is seen that as regards the building and equipment of cotton mills the impression prevailing in Europe and the U. S. A., that factory conditions in India are bad and must be condemned, is incorrect, and that these conditions are not much below those found in the Western countries. India's best in this respect may not be just as good as England's or America's, but her average approaches theirs. It should not, however, be understood from this that either abuses or deficiencies do not exist or that there is no large scope for further improvement.

It is when we turn to the human factor in the factories that great difficulties arise. These, however, will be examined in later chapters. In most Western countries and Japan the number of women operatives exceeds that of men in cotton factories.* But in India, 77 per cent of the cotton mill workers are men, 19 per cent are women and 4 per cent are boys and girls, the number of boys being 4 times as large as that of girls. Some factories do not employ any women. Women are generally employed in reeling, winding, waste-picking and sweeping, and rarely in spinning, but occasionally men are employed in winding. The machinery in the winding and reeling departments, where the majority of the women work, is not heavy or cumbersome, so that ventilation, light and floor space are generally the best in these departments, and these parts of the factories are also the most cheerful.

Next in importance to the cotton industry is the jute industry. The jute factories provide employment to a slightly larger number of workers than the cotton factories, *viz.* 347,000. The jute presses, on the other hand, employ less than 1/3 of the workers engaged in the cotton ginneries and presses, namely 37,000. Jute is grown in the very fertile and easily flooded lowlands

* In Japan 50 per cent of the factory workers and 80 per cent of the textile factory workers are women. See Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 120.

of Bengal, and is a monopoly of this region, as it cannot be grown cheaply anywhere else in the world. The dried fibres made into bundles are purchased by traders from peasants in the latter's homes or in local markets. Presses, in which the bundles are made into bales, are scattered in the jute growing districts and are also located in Calcutta. The former are seasonal, working from 5 to 7 months of the year, the workers doing agricultural work during the rest of the year. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of the workers are agriculturists from the neighbouring villages, and return to their village homes every evening after the day's work is done. The remainder are obtained from Bihar and Orissa and the U. P., and are provided with quarters free of rent, near the presses.

All the labour is employed and paid by contractors, who do the work of jute pressing at a certain rate per bale. Labour is attracted by a system of advances, the local labour being recruited directly by the contractors and the outside labour through sardars. The Calcutta presses work intermittently during the whole year, but they also are seasonal to some extent as they have busy and slack seasons. A large majority of the labourers come from Bihar and Orissa and the U. P. and may be divided into three groups, carriers of jute bundles and bales employed by the labour contractors through sardars, sorters of different qualities of jute employed by the balers who lease the presses, and the press workers employed by the owners of presses. The carriers are paid time wages fortnightly by the contractors, the sorters are paid piece wages by the balers in the form of vouchers for work done, which the workers can cash whenever they like, and the press workers are paid time wages per month by the press owners.

The manufacture of jute, like that of cotton, commenced from the sixties of the last century, but progress was slow and the export of manufactures was small during the first thirty years. From the nineties, however, the industry developed more rapidly, largely owing to a growth in the volume of trade in agricultural products throughout the world, jute sacks being needed

for the movement of agricultural products in internal and international trade. The War gave a substantial stimulus to the industry, because sand bags for the trenches, tent cloth, tarpaulins, waggon covers, etc. were needed in large quantities in the theatres of war. Owing to the world economic depression this industry also has been somewhat depressed recently, but much less than the cotton industry, as its position in international trade is much stronger, largely owing to Bengal's monopoly of jute production, but also partly owing to its more efficient organisation under the Jute Mills' Association, through which the millowners can take prompt and joint action to safeguard their own interests whenever and wherever necessary.* It has to face little foreign competition and is comparatively free from the fluctuations and difficulties that burden the cotton industry. ✓

The jute industry offers a contrast to the cotton industry in three other respects also. Firstly, while the cotton industry is scattered in the country, the jute industry is concentrated in a small area, 60 miles long and 2 miles broad, on both the banks of the Hooghly and on both the sides of Calcutta. Secondly, most of the jute mills are managed by Europeans mainly under the managing agency system.† Lastly, most of the jute mills are far larger in size than the cotton mills. A little more than 1/3 of the jute crop is exported, chiefly to supply the jute mills at Dundee in Scotland. The remainder is spun into yarn and woven into hessian cloth or made into sacks in the Hooghly mills, and is partly used in India and partly exported to various countries.

The jute mills are large one storey buildings, with long lines of godowns parallel to them, and surrounded by large compounds well laid out with gardens, trees, etc., so that the mills have a green and pleasant setting. Extensive quarters are provided within the compounds for

* Cf. Pillay, *Economic Conditions in India* p. 175.

† Of the 86 mills, only 5 are managed by Indians, 2 by Americans and the rest by the British,

the European staff and their families. Each mill consists of a single gigantic room, into which the raw material enters at one side, and from which the finished product emerges at the other. Working conditions in these mills compare favourably with those in similar mills at Dundee. Each mill is, on the whole, kept clean, although the air is dust-laden in some parts of it. The machinery is usually properly guarded, ventilation and lighting are fairly adequate, and although no special steps are taken, the temperature inside does not rise above 96° F. in summer, although it may be substantially higher outside.* It is true that the machines are often installed close to each other, but this is done to reduce the carrying work, and in other parts of the mills there are greater space and quiet. Jute is a heavier and rougher material than cotton, and work on it is regarded to be more exacting. But the compensation is that it does not need artificial humidity in the process of manufacture as cotton does.

The first process in a jute mill is that of opening the bales and loosening the jute fibres by means of the machine called the opener. The jute is then taken to the batching shed where fibres of different qualities are selected and mixed, so as to prepare standard batches. The next operation lubricates the fibres in the softener, which is a long machine with a moving feed-table and several pairs of fluted rollers beyond and pipes above, from which oil and water drop on the fibres as they pass between the rollers below. The softened and oily jute is then taken to the breaker carding machine, and spread evenly on an inclined and moving feeding sheet which leads up to the rollers. The breaker card splits and combs the fibres and removes dirt and knots from them. The finisher card places the fibres parallel to each other and starts the drawing process. The slivers emerging from the finishing carding machine are subjected to doubling, drawing and twisting in the first and second drawing frames, and finally the roving frame

* See Matheson, *Indian Industry*, p. 52 and Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part 1, pp. 283-4.

makes the jute ready for spinning. The final processes of spinning, weaving and finishing are similar to those in the cotton mills. Lastly, there is the sewing of the sacks. Certain kinds of sacks are sewn by machines on the sides and have only to be hemmed round the mouth. Others are fully hand-sewn. The part of the mill in which this is done is the brightest, the most airy and the most spacious.

In each mill from 3,000 to 5,000 men, women and children are employed. Taking all the mills together, it is found that 78% of the workers are men, 16% women and 6% children. The women generally work in the batching and preparing departments and the sack-sewing department. Among the children, the number of boys is 16 times as large as that of girls. They work only in the spinning department, changing the bobbins, as in the cotton mills.

But these are not the only children in the mills. Working women are permitted to bring their babies and little children with them, and a visitor is astonished at seeing the latter playing about and running in all directions, and the former sleeping in all sorts of places, on the floor, on bundles of jute, on bobbins and on sacks. At the end of the mill, where the finishing work is done and sacks are sewn, there is little machinery, noise or dust. But they are extensive in the earlier stages of manufacture where women are mainly employed. Here infants are found lying about covered with dust and fluff which they have constantly to breathe. The question of children is equally serious. Running about in the midst of elaborate and massive machinery, they run a considerable danger to life from accidents, and the Factory Inspectors' reports show that every year accidents do occur among them, a few proving fatal. A few managers have attempted to provide creches, but the mothers have shown much reluctance to use them. This is said to be due to their conservatism and differences of race, language and religion among them.* But the main reason seems to

* Cf. Matheson, *Indian Industry*, p. 53.

be the willingness of the managers to allow women to take their infants and children with them into the mills. They have naturally a strong desire to keep their children with them, and they cannot understand the risk to health and life attendant upon keeping their children inside the mills.

CHAPTER IV.

Labour in some Non-Textile Factories.

Among non-textile factories the most important group consists of engineering and metal workshops, employing nearly 3,00,000 workers and composed of various types of factories. Of these the most important are railway workshops, employing 1,36,000 men. Railway carriages and waggons are manufactured in some of the bigger shops, but the majority are confined to the work of repairing and maintaining them. These workshops have been the pioneers of engineering enterprise in this country. While the equipment and methods of some of the older ones are not quite up to date, those of the newer ones are the finest and the most efficient.

The older shops are situated in the immediate neighbourhood of provincial capital cities such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lahore and Lucknow, but the newer ones are located in towns such as Khargpur, Kanchanpara, Dohad and Trichinopoly, which derive all their importance from them. More than half of them, employing 78,000 workers, are managed by the State. In addition, the railways are large customers of many private engineering and metal workshops. Many of the mills also have their own machine shops, which produce a substantial part of the equipment needed by them. General engineering shops turning out various kinds and sizes of castings, bridges, pillars, railway sleepers etc., those for the maintenance and repair of tramways, telegraphs, motor cars, lorries and shipping, and electrical engineering and generating works are scattered over the country, and their number has been steadily increasing.

The bigger shops have very elaborate plant, often on the American model, make extensive use of automatic machinery, are perfect mazes of vast tin-roofed sheds, warm tanks, stores, odd railway lines etc., and are full of

dust, heat and gloom. Darkness, over-crowding and bad arrangement of machinery are noticeable in many of the smaller workshops. Many of them, however, have been recently established and have been steadily endeavouring to improve their arrangements. These are better in the larger and older shops, but here risks and accidents are greater. The workers must be skilled, and a considerable proportion of those of the larger shops have to be recruited from long distances. They obtain their training partly under a system of apprenticeship and partly from the village metal trades to which they may belong by birth. They turn out good mechanics, but several managers say that they have to be supervised more than their fellows in Europe.*

This brief account of labour in the engineering industry naturally leads to that in the iron and steel industry. Although it is a basic industry of great national importance, it did not exist at all in India until the Bengal Iron and Steel Company was formed in 1874. But until the turning of the century, this company hardly earned any profits, and the production of iron was small. Its efforts to produce steel caused a large loss and had to be abandoned, as the pig iron produced by it was of a poor quality, as it had to import most of the industrial supplies needed for converting pig iron into steel, and as the price of imported steel was appreciably lower. A new era in the history of the industry, however, dawned with the formation of the Tata Iron and Steel Company which began to manufacture pig iron as well as steel successfully from 1913.

This industry also received much stimulus from the war owing to the demand for rails and sleepers for constructing military railways in the Eastern theatres of war. A big scheme of extension was evolved by the Tata Company after the war, and since 1926 a new plant has been turning out new steel products such as plates, sheets, sheet bars and sleepers in addition to rails, bars, beams, angles and fish-plates that are being produced by the old plant.

* Cf. Mathesan, *Indian Industry*, p. 63.

Encouraged by the success of this company, three other companies, two in Bengal and one in Mysore, have come into existence for the manufacture of iron and steel, and when all these schemes are completed, it is estimated that India will annually produce $1\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 million tons of pig iron and steel respectively. In fact, India has already become almost self-supporting in pig iron, and the imports have now become small. Export in it has already commenced, mainly to Japan. Although she has yet to depend much upon imported steel, this dependence is steadily diminishing. Since 1924 the industry has been receiving a substantial amount of protection, and it is hoped that, in spite of the depression through which it, like other industries, has been passing, the need for further protection will disappear by 1934 when the Steel Protection Act will come to an end.

The gigantic works of the Tata Company are located at Jamshedpur in Bihar and Orissa near the sources of the needed raw materials, coal and iron ore, and employ 28,000 workers. Until 1907 the locality was nothing but a jungle. Now there is a beautiful and model town, housing nearly 1,00,000 people, because a number of subsidiary industries have been established in close proximity to the Tata Works. At present there are 130 Europeans on the staff of the works. But their number will progressively diminish in the future, as the company is running a good engineering school for Indian and Anglo-Indian apprentices. As contracts made with the European members of the staff expire, they are not renewed if apprentices having finished training are available and are regarded as fit to take the places of the Europeans. The apprentices receive a three years' training in the classrooms, laboratories and workshops.

The workers come from all parts of India and are of all castes, creeds and vocations. Those from the Punjab are mainly to be found doing mechanical work; and in some of the operations of straightening and testing, the keenness of the eye of the workers belonging

to the semi-aboriginal tribes of the neighbouring hills and forests, is found very useful. Reliable statistics of engagement, promotion, departure and dismissal of the workers have been maintained at the works, and from these it is seen that about $\frac{2}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the skilled and unskilled workers work continuously throughout the year.* Thus the labour turnover is substantially less here than in most other Indian factories, and prolonged absence on the part of the workers is also less common. Most of the workers leave the cultivation of their ancestral village lands to relations, and keep on working till they have collected an amount sufficient to enable them to take up some less exacting occupation nearer their homes. They are encouraged to adopt this policy by the good housing, medical, sanitary, educational and welfare facilities, which are afforded to them by the management, and which are among the best in India. The management, however, has not yet provided housing to an appreciable portion of its workers. Workers also complain of the high cost of living in the town, owing to profiteering which the Company does not appear to have succeeded so far in stopping.

No outside recruiting of labour is needed, and an employment bureau is maintained by the Company, where skilled and unskilled workers are registered and employed as vacancies occur. However, the labour needed for loading and unloading waggons with raw materials is recruited by and employed under two contractors, as this method is found more economical and expeditious.† Very similar labour conditions prevail in the factories of the Indian Iron and Steel Company at Burnpur near Asansol, manufacturing pig iron and coke.‡

Calcutta and Bombay are the main centres of the printing industry, providing employment to approximately 30,000 and 20,000 men respectively, who work as compositors, linotype workers, type casters, monotype

* *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 146.*

† *Ibid.*, p. 149.

‡ See Vol. V, Part I, pp. 197-99.

men, pressmen, readers and binders. All of them are skilled workers, and are recruited mostly from neighbouring areas by means of direct applications to the managers, and the labour turnover is very small. The presses coming under the Factories Act are usually housed in decent buildings, have fair ventilation on the whole, and use electric or steam power, but many of them have to depend partly on artificial lighting, the compositors being placed in well lighted rooms and the presses in dark rooms. Some of the small presses, exempt from the Factories Act, are housed in unsuitable residential buildings without proper ventilation and lighting, and all of them use hand and foot machines only. The provision of water, latrines and urinals is fairly satisfactory in large presses but often unsatisfactory in small ones. The general conditions of the workers are fair on the whole, excepting the facts that an appreciable proportion of them appear to be suffering more or less from lead poisoning,* and that the sedentary nature of the occupation and a disinclination for physical activity in leisure hours adversely affect the health and physique of a proportion of them.†

The growth of the match industry dates from 1922 when a revenue duty of Rs. 1½ per gross, that varied between 100 and 200 per cent *ad valorem*, was imposed on imported matches and began to give substantial protection to the home industry. Before that year small factories were established from time to time, but they soon closed down owing to unsuitable location, insufficient capital or faulty management. The revenue duty has been converted into a protective duty since 1928, and there are now approximately 30 factories in India excluding Burma, located mostly in the cities and suburbs of Calcutta and Bombay and giving employment to 16,000 workers. Some of them are owned and managed by the Swedish Match Company, others by Indians. Besides, a large proportion of the match boxes are turn-

* *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 37-38 and 226.*

† *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VII, Part I, p. 264.*

ed out by workers in their cottages on piece rates. The industry is yet a somewhat strange mixture of antiquated and latest methods, some factories using modern machinery for some of the processes, but primitive methods for others, and some other factories trying to get on altogether without any complex machinery; but they are now gradually disappearing, because their cost of production cannot be brought down to the level of that of larger factories.

The workers in the Calcutta match factories come mainly from Bihar and the U. P. and those in the Bombay factories from the Deccan districts. The processes of manufacture are simple and readily learnt by the workers who, in spite of low wages, have shown a substantial improvement in efficiency since 1922.* The conditions of work in the larger factories are fairly satisfactory, but in the small factories the rooms are often small, hot and insanitary, and adequate steps are not taken against the danger of fire and explosion. It is believed that this industry will expand much in the near future and give employment to a much larger number of workers, as the raw materials and labour needed by it are abundant and cheap, and as it has a very wide home market which hitherto has been supplied to a very large extent by imports.

India has always produced large quantities of hides and skins, which are the by-products of her agriculture, and which before the war were exported in large quantities to Germany, Austria and the U. S. A. The tanning industry as a domestic industry, using local tanning materials and producing inferior leather to satisfy local demands, has long been in existence in India, but in recent years the industry has been in the process of emergence from being only a cottage industry, and large factories using considerable machinery have been established in Cawnpore and on the outskirts of Bombay and Madras cities. This development has been much stimulated by the army demands for boots and leather

* See Indian Tariff Board Report on the *Match Industry*, p. 7.

accoutrements of various kinds during normal times, and to a far greater extent during the war. The Cawnpore factory is managed by Europeans and those of Bombay and Madras by Indian Mohammedans. As the handling of hides and skins is objectionable to most Hindu castes, the workers are depressed class Hindus and very poor Mohammedans and Indian Christians, recruited mostly from neighbouring areas.

The work in these factories is regulated by the Factories Act, so that the sanitary arrangements are fairly satisfactory, the hours of work are not excessive, and there is little employment of young children. But all other tanneries, scattered in several parts of India, working on a small scale and not using any machinery, are free from the regulations of the Factories Act, and the working conditions in most of them are far from satisfactory. Sanitary arrangements and drainage are generally inadequate, the floor is frequently full of stinking heaps of refuse and pools of dirty water, and often there are no latrines and washing facilities. The tanneries thus become more offensive than they need be according to the nature of the work. In such unhealthy surroundings the labourers have to work daily for 12 hours and more, and even tender children, 8 or 10 years old, have to work equally long hours. The workers have even to eat their food in such filthy surroundings.

They are specially helpless and incapable of improving these conditions owing to their poverty and the fact that they are at the bottom of the social scale. Further, their progress is impeded by their fondness for alcohol. They are attracted to the tanneries by the payment to them of advances of Rs. 60, 80 or even 100 to pay their village debts and to meet special family expenses, chiefly in connection with marriages. This system of advances to men who can hardly earn Rs. 15 per month virtually means binding them to the tanneries for a long time, and is thus the industrial counterpart of a species of serfdom that has prevailed in the rural areas of some Indian provinces. For all these reasons

it is most essential that the workers in this industry should be given the protection of the Factories Act.

The rice milling industry is widespread in India as rice is the chief food of a large proportion of the Indian people. There are as many as 1,350 rice mills under the Factories Act, giving employment to 36,000 workers, of whom 16,500 and 12,500 are employed in the Madras and Bengal Presidencies respectively. Rice milling is the main factory industry in Burma, which, however, is outside the scope of this book. Besides, there is a large number of small and unregistered mills which do not come under the Factories Act. All these mills are neither strictly seasonal nor perennial, *i.e.* working throughout the year, their running depending upon the demand for polished rice, which fluctuates from time to time according to trade conditions. They are not large concerns and employ on the average less than 50 workers. Many of them are old, not kept in proper repair, dark, overcrowded and rather dirty, but others are new, well-equipped, well-ventilated and fairly clean.

Their operations are as follows. The paddy is soaked in water and steamed until the husks burst. It is then dried in the sun, the husks are removed, and the rice is polished and cleaned and put into bags ready for the market. The men conduct the machine operations and do the heavy work of weighing and bagging. They are recruited through overseers, called maistries, who maintain the machinery. They move from one mill to another as work becomes available, and return to their village homes at harvest time, or when work cannot be secured. Women do the work of soaking and drying the paddy and of winnowing the husks. They are in a majority and come from neighbouring villages. No children are employed. All the workers are paid time wages, daily or weekly. Many of the workers have a somewhat higher social standing than workers in most other industries and their standard of health appears to be higher.* In Madras owners hire out

**Cf. Mathesan, Indian Industry, p. 66.*

their mills to rice merchants, who engage the workers and prepare their own paddy for the market.

There are 125 factories for splitting and cutting mica situated in Bihar and Orissa, which do not come under the operation of the Factories Act, as they do not use power machinery. Many of them are large establishments, and some of them employ as many as 800 workers. Nearly 1/3 of the workers are children, some of them as young as 6 or 8 years old. Parts of the factories are often overcrowded, and although the hours of work, generally speaking, are not excessive, they are so to the younger children who have daily to walk several miles between the factories and their homes in the neighbouring villages.

The bidi (Indian cigarette) making industry has extended in all parts of India. In rural areas it is a cottage industry, but in towns and cities it is carried on in small workshops, most of which are dark, crowded, ill-ventilated, lacking in adequate sanitary arrangements and having damp floors on which the workers have to sit all day long. Wages are paid according to piece rates, and as these rates are small, the workers have often to work unduly long hours. Moreover, there is no regular recess and no weekly day of rest. But the worst feature of the industry is that in many of the workshops very young children, no more than five years old, are employed. They are kept at their work for unduly long hours, even for 10 or 12 hours, without any holiday or regular recess, by strict discipline and even by slapping or beating, and yet are paid miserably low wages, viz. 2 or 3 annas per day. Parents, having received advances from the employers of their children, are often forced to agree to this treatment. The magnitude of the evil is already considerable, it will become serious with the growth of the bidi habit among the people, and remedial measures are urgently needed.*

* Cf. *Labour Commission Report*, p. 96.

CHAPTER V.

Conditions of Employment in Factories.

Indian industries were handicapped by a scarcity of labour in the past, for three reasons. Firstly, the plague epidemic at the end of the last century and the beginning of this century and the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 swept off a substantial proportion of the industrial workers. Secondly, the industries had to depend upon limited areas for their labour supply, and the inadequacy of communications and of contact between villages and towns stood in the way of a regular and easy movement of labour from the former to the latter. Finally, the conditions of employment in factories were far less satisfactory than they are now.

But factories are now at the beginning of a period of an ample supply of labour. Communications and contact between villages and towns are gradually improving, the pressure of population on the land is increasing, and the conditions of employment in factories are steadily getting better. This change is increasing the power of the employers over the workers and is at the same time depriving the latter of their principal bulwark against any tyranny of the former. Moreover, the employers have begun to demand higher efficiency on the part of the workers, and the latter will not only have to respond to the demand but also to develop self-dependence and unity.

Owing to the scarcity of labour, contractors of labour had to be persuaded by employers, by means of offers of commission, to go to distant villages and to bring workers for the factories. This was the earliest method of recruitment, and although it is still used to some extent to obtain labour for industries that are located at great distances from the sources of the supply of labour, the practice is decreasing. The contractors

were sent out to get over the conservatism of the villagers. The poverty, indebtedness and periodical bad harvests of the cultivators assisted them in their work, but in addition they often resorted to misrepresentation of the benefits and enjoyment that awaited the villagers in towns.* The basis of the method was the payment of advances to prospective labourers to help them to overcome their financial difficulties, and the contractors later recovered the advances at high rates of interest. The employers usually did not deal directly with the labourers recruited by the contractors, but paid the latter a lump sum, out of which they paid the labourers and retained a portion for themselves as their commission. The rapidly diminishing importance of this method has been due firstly to the growing abundance of labour, and secondly to the fact that the payment of advances has become risky since the repeal of the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act.†

But although the employers now get their labour at their own factory doors, they have not undertaken responsibility for the engagement of the workers, this task being still performed by middlemen, known as jobbers, sardars, mukadams or maistries in different parts of India.‡ These are all-pervading and perform a number of important functions. In a large factory there are jobbers, head jobbers, and women jobbers known as naikins or mukadamins in charge of women workers.

* See Read, *From Field to Factory*, p. 33. This evil still prevails in Japan also. "Recruiting of country labour is sufficiently difficult to cause some of the agents to make promises that are not fulfilled by their factories and otherwise to use false inducements. So great is this abuse that the Government in 1924 passed regulations for the recruitment of workers by which it forbids the hiding of the true facts of employment from the worker through exaggeration or false statement by the recruiter. But despite regulations recruits are often misled." J. E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, p. 341. "The recruiting agents visit peasants' homes; make presents; speak of the charm of city life; show pictures of factories which look magnificent; and advance money." Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 122.

† See *Labour Commission*, Evidence Vol. II, Part I, p. 163. This method of recruitment is disliked by organised workers, because it prevents direct contact of workers with employers, and makes it troublesome to determine the liability for compensation for accidents. Cf. Evidence Vol. IV, Part I, p. 108.

‡ See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 279 and Vol. VII, Part I, p. 89.

Selected from the ordinary workers after a long experience of factory work, they are responsible for the supervision of the work of the operatives, for an adequate amount of work by them, and for minimising, as far as possible, the fluctuations in the supply of labour. They have to serve as assistants to the factory mechanics, and to help them to keep the machinery in proper order. They have to engage the workers, to give them some training, to provide them housing and funds when they are in debt, and they can also dismiss them or promote them to better paid jobs. In the past the workers have regarded them as the protectors of their rights against vague and unknown powers, as a security against arbitrary dismissals, and as an institution without which they could hardly get on with their work.*

The employers are dependent upon them to obtain knowledge about the grievances and desires of the workers, and also for conveying to the workers the need and nature of any changes that they may desire to introduce in the work of the factories. They thus perform some of the functions which are discharged by trade union officials in the West; at the same time, in many cases, they are still an absolute wall of partition between the employers and workers, greatly delay reforms that might otherwise have been carried out, and sometimes act even as leaders of strikes. As they possess the power of engaging and dismissing workers, they extort an unauthorised commission called *dasturi* as the price of engagement, or re-engagement after a term of absence, and a smaller commission every month, out of the wages of the workers.† They have to pay a share of these bribes to the head jobbers, to the pay clerks, and in some cases even to the supervising staff. The extent of the bribery can be realised from

* The extraordinary hold that jobbers have over the workers is seen from the fact that if a jobber is dismissed, he invariably takes a certain number of workers with him, and a large number of small departmental strikes have taken place owing to the dismissals of jobbers. See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 10 and Part II, p. 327.*

† A worker earning Rs. 20 per month has to pay from 2 to 4 annas per month as commission. Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part II, p. 172.*

the fact that while they get wages varying from Rs. 50 to 70 per month, their commissions range from Rs. 100 to 300 per month. One result of this system is that the overseers recruit not necessarily the most efficient men, but those who are willing to pay them the largest commissions, or in whom they are otherwise interested.* This evil is bound to increase as labour becomes more plentiful in the near future.

These intermediaries frequently increase their power over the workers by making them advances against their wages, and often cheat them of a substantial part of their wages, as the latter cannot calculate how long it would take them to clear off the debts complicated by interest. Their only redress is to go to another mill, but they find it difficult to do so without the help of the intermediaries, because they are ignorant of the ways of towns are easily intimidated by threats, and feel constitutional reverence for the intermediaries.

These intermediaries enjoy greater power over the workers when the managers of factories are Europeans, because the latter's knowledge of the different vernaculars is often very defective, and because they have to be frequently away on furloughs for the sake of their health.† Many of them are at first eager to understand the difficulties of the workers and to improve the conditions of their employment, but gradually they become accustomed to accept the domination of the jobbers over the workers as inevitable, and become afraid that interference with it may lead to labour difficulties.‡

While women workers share with men the domination of the intermediaries, they are more liable to be oppressed by them; the intermediaries have also ample opportunities for showing favouritism. Widows and women deserted by their husbands are more liable to be

* Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 9.

† Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 102. A jute worker, for instance, cannot ordinarily get into touch with the manager without passing through the hands of firstly the line sardar, secondly the head sardar, thirdly the Babu, fourthly the European overseer, and fifthly the European assistant manager. The result is that he can seldom get through them all to the manager.

‡ Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 153.

bullied and oppressed than other women workers, as usually they have none to protect them. Sometimes, the attention of the overseers is even more troublesome than their hostility. When the women workers are many, they are frequently supervised, especially in cotton mills, by women overseers known as naikins or mukadamins. In most cases these have proved even more rapacious and oppressive than the men overseers, as they have found the women workers more helpless and more submissive. Many of them are women of low character, and several managers have found it difficult to get good workers to accept the position, in spite of its better pay, because it is not regarded as respectable. When the wrath of naikins is aroused against men, some of them are known to have hired ruffians to give a severe thrashing to their enemies.

A substantial improvement in the conditions of employment in factories is impossible so long as the domination of the overseers continues. It is, therefore, essential to break it gradually, and the Labour Commission has suggested that in all factories the engagement and dismissal of workers should be handed over to educated, labour officers appointed specially for this work and directly responsible to the managers.* All workers should be engaged by the labour officer after ascertaining labour requirements from the heads of the various departments of the factory, and all dismissals should be carried out either by him or by the manager after obtaining his opinion. If he possesses sincerity, energy, a good knowledge of the languages of the workers, and a capacity to understand their points of view readily, he will soon secure their confidence, and will come to be regarded by them as their friend.† He will provide the personal element, which to the Indians is everything, but which is hardly ever present in an Indian factory. The industrial processes tend to dehumanise the workers, and they attempt to remain human by returning to their villages if they can. The value of

* Report, p. 25.

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 233 and 257.

human relations is therefore great in Indian industries, and the personal element will go a long way in making the workers contented and steady, and in coping with their inefficiency.*

The jobbers are likely to oppose this reform and to mislead the workers regarding its nature and aim, but the opposition can be overcome, if the employers in an industry adopt a common policy in this matter and stick to it. If it is not practicable in any factory to appoint a full-time labour officer, all engagements and dismissals should be carried out either by the manager himself, or by some responsible officer under him. If women workers are numerous in a factory, their engagements and dismissals should be controlled by an educated woman officer of the right type, who should be responsible to the labour officer and, if he does not exist, to the manager. Further, well-organised unions can be very helpful in checking the corruption of overseers, by making the workers conscious of their rights, by taking up all cases of corruption that come to their notice, and by preventing the overseers from becoming their members.† The overseers can form their own unions. Finally, in England and Japan experience has shown that trained women supervisors get much better work from women workers and maintain much better discipline than men supervisors, and therefore special attention has been paid to the training of forewomen, and India should do the same.

The employers should also use the services of the labour officers for compiling records of wages, turnover, time-keeping, accidents and dispensary attendance of their workers, and for conducting enquiries suggested by periodical examination and analysis of the records, as this would enable them to obtain a much better knowledge of the conditions and needs of their workers. The labour officers, enjoying the confidence of the workers, would be able to collect the necessary information without causing any annoyance to them. Thus, if the

* Cf. Read, *From Field to Factory*, p. 70.

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 10.

earning of high wages by some of the workers had been due to their discovery of some easy and quick method of doing their work, the method would be found out and made known to the other workers. If low wages are due to defective machinery or some slight incapacity of the workers, these defects would be found out and rectified. The causes of high labour turnover would be discovered and dealt with, and the castes of workers who stay the longest, and the localities from which they come, would be noticed, and the knowledge should be used for future recruitment. An analysis of time-keeping of the different departments would reveal those in which the strain and fatigue are excessive. The dispensary record would supply useful information regarding the health of the workers and the healthiness or otherwise of the different departments. A study of the accident record would suggest measures for the avoidance of accidents.*

Discipline among the workers is maintained by fines, which generally are not excessive, and occasionally by dismissals. In addition, some physical punishment is sometimes unofficially resorted to outside the factories, if any workers have managed to offend their overseers. But the workers have now become very sensitive about this, and are exceedingly annoyed if they are 'beaten', a word used to denote anything from a slap to a thrashing.† Although the workers are on the whole reasonable as regards matters of discipline, and are prepared to admit the employers' right to punctual and fair work, they enjoy a good deal of latitude regarding the discipline under which they work.

In most factories, elaborate rules are framed to regulate entrances to and exits from the various departments, but they are often ignored by the workers, who are inclined to spread their work over a long period of time, working in a leisurely fashion throughout, and taking intervals of rest, when they feel disinclined for

* Cf. Miss Broughton's article on Labour Records in Factories in the *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, February 1922, and her *Labour in Indian Industries*, p. 187.

† Cf. Mathesan, *Indian Industry*, p. 37.

further exertion: It has been estimated that out of the 10 hours of daily work, about 8 or $8\frac{1}{2}$ are devoted to actual work, and that the remaining hours are spent in smoking, drinking water, visits to latrines, resting, eating meals, or simply loitering. This is due partly to the long hours, partly to the unfavourable climatic conditions during part of the year, and partly to the illiteracy, the irresponsibility and the low standard of living of the workers. The continuous working of machinery is secured by employing up to 10% of extra labour, and by such a manning of the factories as will enable a worker to attend to his neighbour's machine in addition to his own, while the latter has gone outside.

In most factories the rate of labour turnover is high. The new workers employed every month are at least 5% of the total number, so that in less than 2 years all the workers are new. But most of these have worked before in the same centre and frequently in the same factory. The percentage of absenteeism shows a seasonal variation and is highest in the monsoon months and the festival and marriage seasons.* Most of the employers have hitherto made no endeavours to register their workers, and to keep in touch with those who go back to their village homes on a holiday. The prevalence of bribery and the domination of jobbers have much to do with this turnover, and the jobbers are largely responsible for the restlessness and movements of the workers.

As holidays are periodically needed by the workers, their employers should induce them to apply for particular periods of leave, with a promise to allow them to take up their old work, if they return as soon as the leave

* Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 164, Labour turnover is high in Japan also. "There is a constant and heavy labour turnover in all Japanese industries that prevents the development of any great body of skilled industrial workers. In textile mills, it is not unusual for the labour turnover to range from 40 to 60 per cent of the force per year. According to the Government Bureau of Social Affairs, the labour turnover for 1925 was 58 per cent in textile mills, 42 per cent in engineering, 35 per cent in the chemical industry and 65 per cent in miscellaneous industries." J. E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic position*, p. 345. See also Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 129.

granted expires, and may even find it practicable and profitable to give them small leave allowances.* This would give them a better security of tenure and a sense of loyalty to particular employers, improve their discipline and efficiency, reduce their sickness and absenteeism, and help to transform them from a restless and migratory mass into a permanent and contented body. The granting of leave to the workers would be facilitated, and the inefficiency resulting from absenteeism be substantially eliminated, by the extension, as suggested by the Textile Tariff Board,† of the system already in force in a few Bombay mills, under which about 10% extra workers are engaged and kept ready as a reserve. Men, who are familiar with the conditions and machinery of a mill, will be far more useful than men casually taken up on the days on which they are needed.

Workers usually cannot rise higher than the posts of jobbers, all higher posts, in contrast to the practice of other industrial countries, being filled by outsiders. This is an evil from the workers' point of view, as they are deprived of the stimulus to energy, efficiency and ambition. Moreover, as the jobbers have little chance of securing higher posts, they are naturally tempted to make the most of their position. If, on the other hand, they had opportunities for rising higher, a better type of jobbers would come into existence. It is an evil from the industry's point of view also, because its vigour in India cannot be fully developed, as it has been in Western countries, by the promotion of selected workers to the supervisory grades, and because the gulf between the workers and the supervising staff has proved to be a serious handicap. The supervising staff cannot combine efficiency with sympathy unless they have been workers previously.

The supervising officers in the past were largely Europeans. But now Indians are being substituted,

*The Bombay Strike Enquiry Committee of 1928 drafted such leave rules and recommended them for adoption to the Bombay Mill-owners' Association.

†Report, p. 135.

and schemes of apprenticeship are being evolved for their training, as the prejudice of educated Indians against manual labour is being swept away by changing social ideas and customs and by growing unemployment, as increasing facilities for receiving technical education are enhancing their opportunities for obtaining the supervisory posts, as public opinion in favour of the Indianisation of industries is rapidly growing, and as the expenses of the European supervisors are found very heavy. But in some industries, especially the textiles, this substitution has not proved quite satisfactory, because the supervisors have had no previous experience as workmen. It is essential in every industry that supervisors should not be appointed unless they have served a period of apprenticeship, and that the apprentices should have some preliminary technical education in trade schools, which should be established jointly by Government and the industries concerned.

The oppression of the jobbers and the exclusion of the workers from the supervisory grades have been largely due to the absence of education among the workers. The fact that 247 out of the 271 million inhabitants of British India are illiterate necessarily constitutes a very serious obstacle to the economic development of the country. This grave drawback, which does not prevail in any other industrial country, is primarily responsible for the low wages, poor health and inefficiency of the workers, and for a number of other disabilities from which they have been suffering.

The schools provided by some of the employers may be divided into four groups. Firstly, there are small schools conducted energetically and imparting the elements of reading, writing and arithmetic, and a certain amount of technical training, mainly to the sons of overseers, mechanics, clerks, etc. Secondly, schools are provided near the dwellings of a proportion of the workers. Both these types of schools are on such a small scale that they touch the lives only of a small minority of the children of the workers. Thirdly, there are the schools, which exist merely to keep children till

they become old and healthy enough to be certified as fit for industrial work by medical officers, and in which there is little real teaching. Lastly, there are the schools, which have no pupils during most of the year, and which exist mainly for accommodating uncertified and under age children workers, when the visits of factory inspectors are expected and until they are over.*

However, praiseworthy experiments in elementary education are being made by a small number of employers such as the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras, the Currimbhoy Ebrahim and Tata groups of mills in Bombay, who, having realised that even a small amount of education appreciably improves the efficiency of the workers, are making energetic efforts to impart a sound elementary education, combined with an elementary practical technical training in weaving, smithery, carpentry, etc. to the children of workers and to half-timers, and are even paying monthly stipends of half or one rupee to the pupils to overcome their and their parents' indifference to education.† The results, however, in most cases have been rather disappointing so far, because half-timers, who have to labour in a factory for 5 or 6 hours daily, cannot have much energy left in them to study properly in a school, because they return periodically to their villages, and because even if they manage to learn something they are apt to forget it soon.‡ Moreover, in many industries the number of children workers is small, and in others too it has been steadily falling off. Workers' children, who have not to earn their living, can of course profit much more from these schools, but they also return periodically to their villages, and most of them are compelled by poverty to start work at an early age. •

Nevertheless, if employers can provide, as a few of them have been doing, schools for such children at a comparatively small cost, they will not only serve the

* Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 213.

† For an account of the nature of the special facilities which are being provided in each province for the education of the workers and their children see *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 196-7.

‡ See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 44.

country, but will also benefit themselves later, by helping to create a new generation of better workers. It would, however, be unfair to make the employers primarily responsible for providing education to the children of their workers. The main responsibility in the matter must rest upon the local self-governing bodies and the Provincial Governments.

So far, Compulsory Primary Education Acts have been passed in seven provinces, but the Municipalities and District Boards have hesitated much in giving effect to them, owing to the fear that their members may not get re-elected, if they impose additional taxation to finance the working out of the Acts. This fear, however, is now gradually dwindling, and compulsory primary education is steadily expanding. Till 1929 compulsion had been introduced in 138 municipalities and 2,962 rural areas. Some of these municipalities, however, have not applied compulsion to wards inhabited largely by factory workers, on the ground that they are backward and therefore unsuitable for compulsion.* But municipalities should consider such wards as specially needing and entitled to the introduction of free and compulsory primary education. Moreover, the legal upper age limit for it should be raised from 11 to at least 12, which is the minimum age for the employment of children in factories.†

The provision of educational facilities for the benefit of adult workers cannot give encouraging results, because not only does factory labour exhaust all their energy, but in addition adults have to put forth greater efforts than children to learn the three Rs. However, it will certainly be worth while for the employers to provide simple education during factory hours to a few selected workers, as this will enable them to obtain suitable men for the lower supervisory posts from among their own workers. If employers belonging to the same industry combine in each important centre to maintain a part-time school for selected workers, the cost per employer will be small especially if the school receives a grant-in-aid from

*See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. III, Part I, p. 176.*

†*Cf. Labour Commission, Report, p. 29.*

Government, as it deserves to do. Further, if employers and the Government Departments of Industries co-operate in drawing up technical pamphlets in the vernaculars, containing simple instructions with illustrations regarding the proper use and care of machinery, as has been done in the West, an appreciable portion of the workers will be able to profit much from them.*

The large and quick turnover of labour and the expansion of organised industries have in the past protected workers from unemployment. In recent years, however, owing to an increase in the supply of workers, the adoption of new rationalisation schemes and economic depression, unemployment has arisen in several centres and industries. The insecurity of employment, caused by vicissitudes of trade, and changes of processes, products and tastes of consumers, is one of the causes of the present discontent among the workers, who also feel that, while they are not allowed to participate in the gains of lucky booms, they are compelled to submit to lower wages in periods of depression.†

As the workers come to towns from villages in response to a demand for their labour, and are not permanent inhabitants of towns, one remedy for unemployment is to prevent the number of the workers in towns from being augmented by workers from villages, for whom no work is available in towns. The suggestion made above regarding the registration of the workers and the grant of leave to them periodically will go a long way in giving security of tenure to those whose labour is needed, and in preventing those, whose labour is not needed, from coming to towns. The most effective remedy for unemployment, however, can be provided only by a steady expansion of industries, which can safely be expected if non-economic, particularly political, impediments do not arise. But if industrial expansion is handicapped by political turmoil, it will be most difficult to protect workers from unemployment.

*Cf. *Textile Tariff Board Report*, p. 143.

†Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. III, Part I, p. 67.

Until a few years ago, if there happened to be unemployment in an industry, it was due, not to any falling off in tradé, but to an increase in the efficiency of the workers, enabling fewer workers to turn out the same production as before. Without such an increase in efficiency, the wages and standard of living of the workers, low at present, cannot be substantially raised. Usually, however, it is brought about gradually, and the high rate of labour turnover makes a reduction in the number of workers feasible without any dismissals and hardships. But occasions arise when a substantial diminution in numbers has to be carried out, owing to a great need for retrenchment arising from a reduction in trade, and at such times the dismissed workers have a right to relief, which may take the form of joint unemployment insurance by the employers concerned. The theory that they can return to their village homes and obtain subsistence there is not valid with regard to a considerable proportion of them, because either they have no homes to return to in the villages, or the village homes cannot provide them even with a bare subsistence.

However, insurance of workers against unemployment in organised industries, on a national scale, is impracticable at present, owing to the high rate of labour turnover and the lack of a settled and stable industrial population. At the same time the State cannot be absolved from responsibility in the matter, and the methods of famine relief, which have proved so successful in rural areas, will prove more valuable in dealing with unemployment in urban areas than any system of national unemployment insurance, as developed in Western countries.* The methods are to keep programmes for the construction of small test works and large relief works ready, for providing employment at subsistence wages to the unemployed, to start the construction of the test works if the prevalence of unemployment is suspected and, if these attract a large number of people, to start the construction of the larger relief works. The urban areas provide great scope for the previous

*See *Labour Commission, Report*, p. 36.

preparation of programmes for the construction of roads and drainage and for the clearance of congested areas. The cost of test works would not be heavy, and they would show whether the starting of relief works would be necessary.

Proceeding to the conditions of actual work in factories, it is found that the sanitary conditions are, as a rule, satisfactory in the larger factories, and considerably in advance of the conditions in the homes of the workers. It may even be said that they have learnt the first principles of sanitation and hygiene in these factories. But this cannot be said of the smaller factories. In many of these, the annual lime-washing of the walls, ceilings, passages etc. required by law is not carried out; the cleaning of floors is neglected; rubbish and debris are allowed to collect; drains carrying waste water and sewage are not properly constructed, or connected with the main drains of the towns, or flushed regularly; and the latrine accommodation is neither sufficient nor clean, the waste water being allowed to accumulate and to produce a nasty smell, and the pans being worn out and not cleaned regularly. The workers naturally object to use filthy latrines, so that the surroundings of the factories become insanitary. It has been found, however, that they are quite willing to use them, if they are kept clean, and if sufficient and separate accommodation is provided for men and women.

The supply of drinking water is not always satisfactory. Tap water becomes warm during a large part of the year. If well water is supplied, it is liable to be polluted, as small pools of dirty water often collect round the well. When the water supply is not continuous, factory rules compel a storage of drinking water on the basis of one gallon per head per day. This is insufficient and should be 2 gallons. Moreover, there is often a good deal of scrambling around the water supply, and as women workers usually suffer from it, factory inspectors should be empowered to compel employers to make separate arrangements for women wherever necessary.*

*See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part II, p. 234.*

All these shortcomings can be removed by more effective and stringent factory inspection, and health departments of municipalities should co-operate with factory inspectors in this work.

In many factories, and particularly in certain manufacturing processes concerned with cotton, jute and wool and in cotton-ginning factories, a large amount of dust is produced, and as arrangements for removing it are still defective, the health of the workers, especially of women and children, is endangered. The cost of mechanical devices such as exhaust boxes, pipes and fans is still prohibitive for many factories. But factory inspectors, by using their powers more extensively and insisting on regular cleaning of the floors and walls, periodical white-washing of the walls and ceilings and better ventilation, can do much to reduce the dust nuisance to a minimum. It is true that attempts made in the past to induce the workers to put on nose and mouth masks have failed, but they are likely to succeed now if they are made with persuasion and sympathy, because the workers are already in the habit of covering their noses and mouths with pieces of cloth, and have shown themselves ready to accept suggestions that are shown to be practical and are impressed on them sympathetically. It is also true that during winter months they often close the windows or stuff them up with cloth or cotton, but they do this because, with windows open, they have to shiver in the cold owing to the lack of woollen clothing. This defect can be removed by persuasion and an improvement in their standard of living.

In many factories the temperature during the warm months is higher than that of the air outside and the air movement is less, making physical exertion specially trying. But even a moderately dry temperature and a regular supply of fresh air are not sufficient for the health, comfort and efficiency of the workers. Fresh air, to be effective, must be in motion and produce changes in the temperature of the body. It has been proved that there is a definite relation between the condition of the air and the health and efficiency of the workers who

breathe it. Experiments made in this country have shown a reduction in the efficiency of workers during the warm months in a badly ventilated factory to be 20%, while that in a well-ventilated factory was only 7%.* The installation of fans is, therefore, most desirable wherever practicable. Where it is not so, owing to heavy cost or some other reason, compromises can be made such as the provision of inexpensive metal plates attached to overhead shafting and moving with the revolution of the shaft, or of canvas sheets so hung on overhead bars that they can move freely, or of circular metal fans worked from the central engine. The white-washing of roofs and the spraying of water on roofs can also be carried out without much cost to lower the temperature.

Some employers have already adopted one or more of these methods and have found that they have made the workers more contented, more attentive to work and more efficient.† So there is no doubt that their wider adoption will prove very beneficial both to the workers and their employers. But if the employers are not prepared to do this willingly, factory inspectors should be invested with the power to compel them to adopt reasonable measures. In this connection the Labour Commission has suggested that in every province, whenever the Chief Inspector of Factories finds that the cooling power in a factory is so inadequate as to cause great discomfort to the workers, and that it can be improved by measures whose cost would not be very heavy, he should be empowered to order the owner of the factory concerned to carry out particular measures within a definite period, an appeal against such an order, however, being allowed to tribunals appointed by the Provincial Governments.‡

The proportion of the number of accidents to the number of workers has risen considerably during the

*Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 129.

† Cf. the remarks of the Chief Factory Inspector, Bombay Presidency, regarding Ahmedabad textile workers, in his annual Report for 1927 quoted in Read's *The Indian Peasant Uprooted*, p. 28.

‡Report, p. 58.

last ten years. This increase is largely due to better reporting of accidents, although reporting is still not quite satisfactory. Factory owners try to suppress news of accidents in spite of warnings and fines, and are helped in this matter by the workers' habit of returning to the villages if they suffer serious illness. The strength of the inspectorate in some provinces has not been adequate for the detection of unreported accidents, and the fines imposed for failures to report them have been usually too small to act as deterrents. The recent improvement in reporting is supplemented by the growing realisation by the workers of the need of immediate treatment even of slight wounds, thereby increasing the figures for minor accidents. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the risk run by the workers. An increase in production per worker coupled with the 'speeding up' of work is bound to cause an increase in the incidence of accidents per worker. Secondly, the recent progress in the use and complexity of machinery and scientific processes has been quicker than the progress in the intelligence of the workers. Finally, the steady expansion of industries has necessitated the employment of a larger proportion of unskilled and inexperienced workers, among whom the incidence of accidents is bound to be high until they get used to the machinery.*

Thus, imperfect guarding of machinery and inadequacy of safety devices are not the only causes of accidents. These are due to an appreciable extent to the ignorance of the workers regarding the risks that they are running while doing particular kinds of work, to their carelessness or that of their overseers or employers, and to long hours and overwork which destroy the alertness of the workers.

The need of doing everything possible to prevent accidents is urgent, not only because human life is most precious and sacred and employers are morally bound to protect the lives of their workers, but also because prevention is a business proposition to the employers.

*See *Labour Commission*, Report, p. 60.

There is saving in compensation payments for death or disablement, the workers become more efficient owing to a better sense of safety, and interruption and dislocation in the work of the factories are minimised. However, no quick prevention of accidents is possible. So far as they can be prevented by official regulation, the provisions of the Factories Act and the elaborate rules framed thereunder are already adequate.* The Inspectors of Factories also have in recent years given great attention to this problem and have made persistent endeavours to secure the proper guarding of machinery, the enforcement of safety regulations, and the education of the workers in safety-first ideas by means of posters with vernacular captions, and some employers have rendered valuable co-operation in this work.†

But much more still remains to be done. Better and more widespread education, better health, greater discipline in factories and the development of a permanent factory population will prove very useful in the prevention of accidents. Employers should also frame safety-first rules and enforce them rigorously. If they themselves disregard these rules, the workers will do the same. In the enforcement of these rules the co-operation of the workers should be enlisted through safety committees. In each factory an energetic and capable supervising officer should be appointed as a part-time safety inspector, and he should launch and guide a safety movement on the lines of the movement which has proved so successful in Japan, organise safety days or weeks, and by means of posters, lectures, magic lantern shows etc., stress upon the workers the importance and methods of preventing accidents. First-aid lectures and rescue demonstrations should be given periodically, and notices should be put up in all conspicuous places in a factory warning the workers against the dangers of machinery.‡

The Factory Act empowers Inspectors, in cases of

*See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 198. et seq.*

†See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. 1, Part I, pp. 48-9.*

‡Cf. Mukhtar, *Factory Labour in India*, pp. 54-5.

danger from factory buildings owing to their being weak from the beginning or not strong enough to bear the strain of machinery or structural alterations, to adopt measures needed for eliminating danger. But not being engineering experts, it is often difficult for them to discover sources of danger. The Provincial Governments, therefore, should demand the production of a certificate of stability for a factory building from a competent authority before working is commenced in it or if structural alterations are carried out in it.

CHAPTER VI.

Labour in Transport.

Among the transport services in India railways are the most important, extending over 41,000 miles and thus having a total mileage greater than that in any other country with the exception of the U. S. A. They are the largest employers of labour in India, giving employment to 800,000 workers. Of these, rather more than $\frac{1}{3}$ are employed in the transportation and commercial departments, $\frac{1}{3}$ in the engineering departments for the maintenance of the permanent way, and $\frac{1}{3}$ in the workshops of the mechanical departments. At present 72 per cent of the railway mileage is owned and 45 per cent is managed by the State, the rest being owned or managed by companies which, except in the case of branch railways, are domiciled in England. The State-managed railways are administered through Agents by the Railway Board, which is responsible to the Government of India, and which is composed of 5 members, one of whom is in charge of labour matters. The Board has delegated wide powers to the railway Agents who have full control over the appointment, pay, promotion, dismissal and leave of all the workers occupying the subordinate and lower posts. The Agents of company-managed railways possess similar powers, but are responsible to their Boards of Directors located in England. Although the Railway Board has to sanction the budgets of the company-managed railways, it has little control over their labour problems and all that it can do in this respect is to suggest reform to them.*

The conditions of labour vary from railway to railway according to its length, traffic, earning capacity, the climatic and racial characteristics of the territory

* *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 3.*

through which it passes, and the facilities for the recruiting of labour afforded by the educational and economic development of the people inhabiting this territory. But the unifying forces are the co-ordination of the Railway Board and the Indian Railway Conferences, and the demand of the workers on the other railways for the extension to them of the facilities and concessions that may be given to their fellows working on a particular railway.

The attractiveness of railway work has been growing in recent years, so that not only are better workers becoming available, but the supply generally exceeds the demand. Temporary labourers for the construction of new lines or for open line works are obtained locally, or imported by contractors to whom the work may be given on contract. But these labourers are only a small percentage of the total number of railway workers. The engineering departments provide employment to unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers who make up 1/3 of the total labour force. The unskilled workers, viz. the gangmen, are agriculturists and, being recruited locally, are apt to go away during the busy agricultural season to cultivate their lands. The semi-skilled and skilled workers have little or no connection with agriculture and are regular workers throughout the year. All these workers are engaged by the permanent way inspectors who have often to be bribed to secure employment. To eradicate this practice the Labour Commission has suggested that up-to-date registers of the appointments and dismissals of all the workers should be maintained and should be periodically examined by the labour officers in order to find out whether the labour turnover is needlessly large. *

The workers in transportation and commercial departments viz. porters, pointsmen, signalmen, station, running and shed staff, and fitters and cleaners in the locomotive sheds, are appointed by traffic inspectors or other senior subordinates, who also have to be frequently

* Report, p. 139.

bribed. To avoid favouritism and bribery, the Labour Commission has recommended that these workers should be appointed by selection boards and that registers of their appointments and dismissals should be kept and examined. Facilities should also be given to relatives of railway servants to acquire training for taking up work in these departments.

The unskilled workers in mechanical workshops viz. locomotive, carriage and waggon shops are selected by the foremen. After they have obtained some skill and experience, many of them are promoted to the ranks of semi-skilled workers, and a few become skilled workers. Other skilled workers are obtained from outsiders who have received training elsewhere and from apprentices trained in the workshops. The system of appointment of workers by selection boards has been inaugurated in a few workshops and, as it is proving satisfactory, it should be extended to other shops also. The Commission has also suggested that all workers should be given printed instructions regarding their duties and rights and should be warned that they will be dismissed if they are found to have given or received any bribes.*

Discharges, turnover and absenteeism of these workers are found to be greater than should be the case in well-organised concerns. This is inevitable to some extent, as a large proportion of the workers are agriculturists and return to their lands during the busy agricultural season. But unauthorised absence is an important cause of this large turnover. Much can be done to reduce this by issuing, and acting upon, instructions to workers that they will be regarded as leaving railway service if they absent themselves without leave, or if they overstay their leave except in cases of proved illness, by keeping proper registers of their appointment, dismissal, attendance and service, and by giving them security of service.

Recently, insecurity of service has been a great grievance of railway workers who complain that their

* Report, p. 141.

service is liable to be dispensed with at any time without giving any reasons and without a right of appeal to the higher railway authorities. But the Railway Board has pointed out that as railways are a business department, the railway authorities must have the power to dispense with the services of workers for reasons of inefficiency or if a reduction of establishments becomes necessary, owing to a falling off in traffic, or a simplification of the methods of work, but that the right must be exercised with consideration and justice.

The railway trade-unions stated to the Commission that young and inexperienced officials were empowered to discharge at their will workers with many years of service, without the necessity of any enquiry or the right of appeal to higher authorities, that several workers were victimised by means of discharges because their union, strike, or other activities were not liked by the authorities,* and that when workers were fined, discharged or dismissed, they were at the most presented with a charge sheet and were never shown the evidence against them. Moreover, it should be realised that insecurity of service not only causes great worry to the workers, but is also opposed to the efficient working of the railways. Therefore, it is in the interests of the railways as well as their workers that the former should assure the latter that steady and efficient work and good behaviour on their part will give them permanency, and that if their work or behaviour falls below a certain standard, they will be allowed to offer explanations, and will not be dismissed or discharged without proper investigations and a right of appeal to the superior authorities.

In this connection the Commission has suggested that all workers should be made to enter into an agreement, providing for a probationary period of a year, confirmation after a year's satisfactory work, and termination of service after one month's notice for conviction by a court, serious misconduct, gross neglect of duty, unsatis-

**Cf. Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 416 and Part II, pp. 97, 136, 166, 303, 420.*

factory work, or reduction of establishment.* Before a worker's services are terminated, he should be provided with a charge sheet, which would contain the reason for his proposed discharge or dismissal, and which must be returned by him with his explanation within a week. A superior officer, not lower than the grade of a district officer, should then conduct an enquiry, giving to the worker concerned an opportunity of appearing before him. If the officer's decision is in favour of a discharge or dismissal, the worker should have a right of appeal first to the head of his department and then to the Agent, and finally to the Railway Board only if the dismissal means the loss of his provident fund bonus. The procedure should be the same, when, in less serious cases, disciplinary action takes the form of a lowering of grade, stopping increments of pay, or a fine, with this difference that the right of appeal need not extend beyond the departmental head.

If need arises for the reduction of an establishment, it should be met as far as possible by the working of short time, the abandonment of further recruiting, normal wastage, the retirement of the workers who are very near the age of retirement, and the transfer of workers to other departments and railways, and not by the discharge of workers. But if this discharge cannot be avoided, it should be based on the principle of seniority. The greatest care should always be taken in framing schemes of maintenance and construction, so as to avoid as far as possible all need for the discharge of workmen with the great sufferings that it causes to them.†

Petitions of workers for the redress of their grievances are dealt with by the executive officers on some railways, by works committees composed of representatives of the authorities and the workers on other railways, and by the Agents themselves on still other railways. Uniformity of procedure in this respect, on all

* Report, pp. 161-2.

† The heavy slump in the railway income led to the discharge of 35,000 Railway workers in 1931-2.

the railways, is desirable, and in all cases workers' grievances should be examined by works committees with the help of establishment and personnel officers, and the recommendations of the committees should be considered by the relevant railway authorities.

These committees have been set up on some of the railways during the last ten years or so, owing to the growth of trade-unionism among railwaymen and their resort to strikes on account of the economic disturbances produced by the war, and in accordance with a general scheme that has been advocated by the Railway Board, under which, ultimately, each district of a railway would have a works committee, composed of equal representatives of the railway administration and the workers, for the ventilation and redress of the grievances and the promotion of the welfare of the latter, the recommendations of the committees being acted upon by the authorities, and their work being co-ordinated by a central council on each railway. These committees, with the help of establishment and personnel officers, have been doing useful work on some of the railways in spite of the opposition of railwaymen's trade-unions, which regard them as rival and undemocratic institutions, and therefore similar committees and officers should be established on other railways also as soon as possible.

Another grievance of the railway workers is in connection with leave. Their leave has varied between 6 and 30 days for a year's service from railway to railway, from one department to another of the same railway, from grade to grade, and from monthly to daily wage payment. Moreover, owing to the absence or shortage of reserve workers and the condition that the grant of leave must not involve any extra cost to the railway administrations, many workers have not been able to obtain leave that has been due, and many workers have never obtained any leave, although they have worked most regularly for several years. Very recently leave rules for the workers on state-managed railways have been revised, provision has been made for full-pay leave,

graduated according to service, for all workers who have served for 3 years at least, and for a certain amount of half-pay leave on medical certificate, and the condition that the grant of leave must not impose any extra cost on Government has been withdrawn, but the leave cannot be accumulated. However, the leave rules need further liberalisation, and it is necessary to maintain reserves of workers sufficient to meet their leave requirements as distributed over the year.

Yet another grievance of the workers has been in respect of racial discrimination. They have asserted that hitherto on all railways and especially on company-managed railways, Anglo-Indians have been preferred to Indians as regards appointments to and promotions in the better paid subordinate grades, that some of these grades have been practically reserved for them, and that if Indians are taken up for similar work they are given lower pay. Enquiries show that there is substantial truth in these assertions.* Against this, it has been claimed on behalf of the Anglo-Indians that they need a better start and quicker promotions, as their standard of living is superior, that they have contributed the most to building up the railways and bringing them to their present state of efficiency, and that they should be given protection for a period sufficient to enable them to equip themselves to compete equally with Indians.

The Government of India, on the one hand, has laid down a policy of avoiding racial discrimination. On the other, it has declared itself in favour of giving adequate representation to all minority communities, which include the Anglo-Indians, in the public services, and of avoiding all measures likely to dislocate violently and suddenly the economic conditions of the Anglo-Indian community. The continuance of racial discrimination in recruiting and promotions, that was stressed by the Indian trade-unions in their evidence before the Commission, subjects the railway authorities to the accusation that they are trying to discredit Indians by

* *Yide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part II, pp. 353-8.*

considering them unfit for the higher posts. However, it is most important in the interests of the workers, as well as of the efficient and economical working of the railways, that this potent cause of discontent, bitterness and strife should be removed by the adoption of measures calculated to bring about the total extinction of all racial discrimination in a few years.

As regards labour in ocean transport, about 60,000 and 35,000 seamen are annually engaged in Calcutta and Bombay respectively for work on ocean-going steamers as deck, engine-room and saloon crews. They are recruited only at these two ports, steamers at other parts obtaining all the labour that they require from them. The deck and engine-room crews are supervised by serangs, who are responsible to the Chief Officers and Chief Engineers respectively of the steamers, and the saloon crews work under butlers who are responsible to the Chief Stewards. The seamen recruited in Calcutta are mostly Mohammedans from East Bengal. The deck crews recruited in Bombay are Hindus as well as Mohammedans from the West Coast. The engine-room crews are Mohammedans from Northern India and the saloon crews Goans from the Portuguese territory of Goa.

Until 1929 the seamen were recruited through licensed brokers, the serangs and butlers being selected by the ship's officers concerned, and the crews by the serangs and butlers, subject to the approval of the officers. The Seamen's Recruitment Committee found that this system had produced serious abuses, especially bribery. Therefore, since 1929 the serangs and butlers must be recruited directly by the shipowners, or through the Government Shipping Office, without the intervention of brokers, and preference has to be given to men who have been unemployed longest. In the recruiting of the crews, although the brokers have not been done away with as recommended by the above committee, their operations have now been reduced, as applicants are brought by the serangs and butlers in excess of the crews needed and are selected by the ships' officers. Thus, the

brokers now supply men only when vacancies unexpectedly arise just as a steamer is on the point of starting on a voyage.

Another improvement has been in respect of the advances paid to the recruits. Formerly, the brokers paid them at the time of recruitment an advance of half a month's wage in cash and gave them promissory notes for the other half month's wage payable after they had sailed, so that men in need of immediate cash had to discount the notes at heavy rates with the money-lenders. This system has now been abolished, and the recruits have to be paid in advance a full month's wage in cash.

Although the employers and the workers have thus been brought into closer touch with each other, another cause of bribery still remains *viz.* unemployment. During the war the supply of seamen increased to a very large extent in response to an increase in the demand for them, but although since the end of the war the demand has fallen off very considerably, there has been little or no reduction in the supply, and no measures have so far been adopted for reducing unemployment. Consequently seamen have to give bribes to serangs and butlers and sometimes even to ships' officers in order to secure work.* There are no restrictions on the registration of candidates, and the extent of unemployment can be seen from the fact that in Bombay and Calcutta employment is available approximately for $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{4}$ only of the number of candidates whose names have been registered. The difficulties of the situation have been intensified by the adoption of the principle of rotation, under which seamen are given employment for a time in turn, so as to bring about a fair distribution among them of the available employment. This principle, if fully worked out, would mean that every seaman would get employment only for one out of every three or four years and is opposed to the best interests of the shipping industry as well as the seamen, because it would

* See Bombay Social Service League Pamphlet (1928) on Seamen in Bombay, pp. 14 and 20.

place a discount on careful and assiduous work, and promote inefficiency and starvation of the workers.*

The only way to reduce unemployment is to remove gradually the surplus supply of the workers, although this process is bound to create some hardship. The Labour Commission has, therefore, recommended that for one year the Shipping Masters should not give any new discharge certificates to candidates, unless they are convinced that employment is available, and that suitable men already in possession of such certificates are not available for it, that thereafter they should give such certificates only to those for whom employment is available, and that they should be authorised to strike off the registers the names of all seamen who have not been in employment for three years, this period to be steadily reduced in consultation with the representatives of the shipowners and seamen. However, in engaging their crews the shipowners should have freedom of choice from among men who have been employed under them at any time within a period of two years, this period also to be steadily reduced in consultation with the representatives of the employers and the employed. But if this liberty of choice does not enable the shipowners to engage their crews fully, they should be made to fill the gaps with men selected by the Shipping Masters from their own registers. The Commission has also recommended the abolition of licensed brokers as, the supply of seamen being far greater than the demand, their services are no longer needed.† If any shipowners need assistance in recruiting their crews, they can get it from the Shipping Masters. ✓

Seamen have not up to the present taken advantage of the facility, which is given to them by the Indian Merchant Shipping Act, of allotting a portion of their wages up to $\frac{1}{3}$ to a relative. Shipping Masters should, therefore, bring it to their knowledge, should induce them to take advantage of it, and should through their offices send the allotments regularly by money order to

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part II, pp. 82-83,*

† *Report, pp. 179-81,*

the persons named. It is also desirable to raise the maximum allotment to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the wages.

The Seamen's Union representatives urged before the Commission that seamen should be given wages from the date of signing on up to the date of the final payment of all their wages on discharge, as there were frequent and appreciable delays between signing on and actual engagement and between discharge and final payment, subjecting seamen, who were already in debt, to hardships owing to the high cost of living in Bombay and Calcutta. Although the Commission was unable to go into the merits of this question, enquiries show that this grievance has a substantial basis, and therefore needs attention of Government. Further, there are no welfare organisations in the ports to provide for the needs of Indian seamen. As no housing is provided for them, those waiting for work are at the mercy of rapacious boarding-house keepers, who levy heavy charges, and of money-lenders who exact exorbitant interest on loans obtained to pay the charges. An Indian Sailors' Home has now been established in Bombay, and the Commission has stressed the importance of establishing similar institutions in other ports with the assistance of the employers and the public.

Sir Geoffrey Corbett, the delegate of the Government of India at the last maritime session of the International Labour Conference, stated that each English seaman could do twice as much work as an Indian seaman. This statement has been disputed, and the National Union of British Seamen has admitted that Indian seamen can stand the tropical climate better than English seamen. Yet, while the average wage of an English seaman is £9 per month, that of an Indian seaman is £2 s.2 only. The reasons for the employment of the latter in large numbers on ocean-going steamers are that they are cheaper and require less living accommodation than English seamen, and that the compensation to be paid to them or their dependents in case of death or injury, if any, is much less. In many cases, the claimants find it difficult to obtain any compensation,

because, while they are in India, the shipowners are in Great Britain.

Inland steamer navigation is important only in Bengal and Assam, operating in the Brahmaputra, the Meghna and the Padda *i.e.* the lower reaches of the Ganges, and their tributaries, and provides employment for about 16,000 men who are recruited from Eastern Bengal. The serangs and drivers, who supervise the deck and engine-room crews respectively, are engaged directly by the two steamer companies which monopolise the entire traffic. The crews are provided by the serangs and drivers, through whom also the wages are paid. These crews, unlike ocean-going crews, are not provided with rations, and get their food from a joint mess maintained by the serangs and drivers, who deduct a certain amount every month from each man's wages.

When such illiterate and low paid men are given large powers over the crews, the danger of abuses is real, and complaints have been made of their existence. As a result of the formation of the Bengal Mariners' Union, certain grievances of the crews in respect of wages, claims, etc., have been redressed by the companies, but much bribery still prevails with regard to securing employment and promotion. On behalf of the companies it has been urged that direct recruitment by them of the crews is difficult, as men suddenly leave their steamers and substitutes can readily be provided only by the serangs and drivers. As the Labour Commission was unable to investigate this matter, it is desirable that the Government of Bengal should examine the practicability of direct employment and payment of the crews by the steamer companies, and the conditions of employment.

Turning to labour in the docks, it is found that the important docks are situated in the ports of Calcutta, Bombay, Rangoon, Karachi and Madras. These ports are managed by Port Trusts, composed of representatives of shipping companies and commercial bodies and a few

official and nominated non-official members. Two of these Trusts have a member nominated on them to represent labour, and this should be done with regard to the other Trusts also. The demand for dock labour is irregular, depending as it does upon the arrival and departure of steamers, the quantity and nature of their cargo, seasonal variations, and monsoon conditions. Hence in all ports, the supply of labour is greater than the demand at any particular time, and the employers have fostered this unduly with the object of avoiding a shortage of labour in an emergency. Most of the labour needed for loading and unloading cargoes is obtained through contractors, and is employed in gangs under foremen, who often increase their own remuneration by employing a smaller number of labourers than the number ordered and paid for by the shipping companies.

Owing to trade depression in recent years there is much unemployment among the dock labourers, who thus get employment only from 10 to 15 days in a month. Far from any efforts being made to register them and to regulate their employment, the endeavour has been to distribute the available work among growing numbers of labourers, so that their earnings have been reduced,⁹ although there has been no cutting of the rates of wages. The great need, therefore, is that in all the ports registers of genuine dock labourers should be prepared, and that the available work should be distributed not according to the whims and selfish interests of the contractors and foremen, but according to a system which aims at giving all efficient and industrious labourers a more or less equal share.

Finally, there are no regulations to protect the dock labourers from accidents, there is no compulsion to report to Government accidents in the docks, and there is no Government inspection to make sure that sufficient care has been taken to avoid them. Therefore, Provincial Governments should be empowered by means of an Act to frame regulations providing for adequate and periodi-

cal testing of all the equipment used by the labourers in loading and unloading cargoes, making the reporting of all serious accidents compulsory, and making the Chief Inspector of Factories responsible for the carrying out of these provisions.*

* See *Labour Commission, Report*, p. 187.

CHAPTER VII.

Labour in Mines.

Mines in British India, excluding Burma, provide employment to 2,50,000 workers, 1,39,000 in Bihar and Orissa, 45,000 in Bengal and 34,000 in the Central Provinces. 44 per cent of them work underground, the great majority in coal mines. 1,67,000 are employed in coal mines, 27,000 in manganese mines, 16,000 in mica mines and the rest in iron, limestone and salt mines.* The mineral wealth of India is very unevenly distributed. Bihar and Orissa are by far the richest in this form of wealth, and after them come the Central Provinces and Bengal. The other provinces are very poor in this respect.

The manganese mines are open workings and are located near Singbhum in Bihar and Orissa, Chindwara, Balaghat, Bhandara and Nagpur in the Central Provinces, Belgaum and Karwar in Bombay, and Bellary in Madras. The smaller mines obtain their labour locally, but the larger ones in the Central Provinces have to obtain a portion of their labour from other parts of the same provinces and from the United Provinces. Contractors obtain the labour by a system of advances and extract the ore. The workers remain at the mines with periodical visits to their villages, but their wages are low. The mica mines are small, are located in the Hazaribag and Gaya districts of Bihar and the Nellore district of Madras, and employ $\frac{3}{4}$ of their workers underground. The workers are agriculturists who work in the mines during the slack season, the mines being closed during the monsoon.

Nearly 95 per cent of the coal is obtained from a

* These are the average figures. The actual number of workers is far greater owing to the fact that most of them do not work regularly throughout the year.

small area in the east of Bihar and Orissa and west of Bengal in which the Raniganj, Jharia, Bokaro, Giridih and Karanpura fields are concentrated. Of these, the first two are by far the most important, yielding 77 per cent of the country's output. The Pench Valley field in the Central Provinces provides 3 per cent. The fields in Assam and Baluchistan are unimportant. The coal industry has developed only since 1896, and now produces annually 22 million tons of coal as against 4 million in 1896. During the post-war period of depression, its production has been increased by closing down the poorer mines and improving the working of the richer mines, so that the total number of mines and the workers in them is now less than during the war.

The coalfield landscape is a treeless desert disfigured by tall chimneys, workshops and numerous huts. The broken roads are covered with a black layer of coal dust, and here and there a single railway line curls round the mines. The black country is covered with a haze that is partly dust and partly vapour. However, coal mining in India has hitherto been safer, easier and healthier than in Europe. That in Europe has been associated with deep shafts, narrow seams, and great dangers of fire and explosion. But in India, the majority of seams run up to the surface, and even when these are exhausted, other seams are usually found immediately below. In some mines shafts exist, but they are used more for bringing up the coal than the workers. Consequently, inflammable gas is rare, in most of the mines open lights can be safely used, and the chief danger comes from unexpected falls of roofs and not from fire or explosion.

As the seams are thick, of 10 feet and more, the underground tunnels are spacious, and the miners can usually do their work standing erect. 'Going down the pit,' means walking down a steep incline into a large tunnel, in the centre of which tram lines are laid for tubs. Owing to the shortage of tubs, the miners do not care to go into the mines unless they have their tubs in front of them, and so the miners, men and women, two for each tub, can be seen following the little trains of tubs

down into the mines from the surface till the lights carried by them disappear in darkness.

Machinery is being used in mines more and more, but pick-axes and blasting are even now the usual methods of getting coal. The mines generally take the form of squares, the roofs being supported by large pillars of coal. When a particular seam approaches exhaustion, these pillars are gradually cut away and wooden pillars are substituted. The bending of the latter shows that the roof has become unsafe. The seam is then abandoned, the roof falls in, the roads above are re-made, and the land is cultivated once more. The surface workings are not generally very extensive. Screening and loading are carried on in some cases by machinery, but in others still without its aid. Some of the mines are very damp, and work in them is more exhausting than in others.

The majority of the workers are hill and forest aborigines, largely the Santalis, as the collieries are located in or near regions inhabited by them. But they are also agriculturists, and devote a large part of the year to agricultural work. Some are given land for cultivation on the colliery properties by the owners and have made their homes there. Some return to their neighbouring villages every week to work in the fields. Some leave their fields in charge of their families, returning to them for fairly long periods when their labour is most needed. Some come in groups, for days, weeks, or months, earn enough for their immediate cash needs, and then return to their villages. Others, having no land, obtain well paid agricultural work at the time of the harvest. Hence the supply of labour in the mines varies from month to month, the largest supply being available in February and September and the smallest in July and November.* The production at the heights of the mining season is from 30 to 50 per cent higher than that at its lowest points.

A growing minority of the miners are obtained from Bihar, the United Provinces and the Central Provinces.

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 4.*

Being more intelligent, adaptable, painstaking and regular than the aboriginal workers, they are being increasingly employed for the adoption of coal-cutting machinery, explosives and other modern and scientific methods of mining, and of regular working hours. Although they have some connection with agriculture in their distant villages, unlike the aborigines, they are miners proper, dependent on mining for their maintenance. It is naturally to the interest of the managers to obtain such miners. The hereditary miner is, however, almost unknown till now, and the managers have frequently to face a shortage of labour, especially when the agricultural season has been good.

A substantial proportion of the workers have still to be obtained through contractors, who have to be paid from Rs. 2 to 3 per month for every worker.* The cost of recruitment thus comes to 3 or 4 annas per ton of coal. The aim of the mine-owners should be to get rid of all recruiting cost, and the best way to achieve this would be progressively to improve the conditions of life and work of the workers at the mines. The owners should realise that the sums, that they are spending at present on recruiting, would be spent more profitably on improving these conditions. As we shall see later, it is a happy augury for the future that a few of the owners have begun to realise this, and to improve labour conditions in their mines.

A second defect in the working of mines is the system under which the bulk of the coal is raised by contractors, who engage the workers after paying them advances, obtain the coal, load it into wagons, and are paid so much per ton for all this work.† This system involves a division of responsibility between the manager and the contractors. The manager is responsible for the safety, housing and welfare of the miners, and for carrying out the provisions of the Mines Act, and yet he has little control over the selection, number and wages of the miners, or over the distribution of work among them.

* Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence Vol. IV, Part I, p. 9.

† *Supra* pp. 19 and 220.

Some mines obtain labour through sardars, who are leaders of gangs consisting of 10 to 50 men from one village, and who are influential in their own villages. Bribery is fairly extensive on the coalfields also. It is necessary that the contractors and sardars should be eliminated, and that their place should be taken by competent salaried labour officers, who would be under the direct control of the managers, and who by tact and sympathy should be able to win and retain the confidence of the miners.

A third defect is the irregularity of working. During the weeks that they are at work, the miners work on the average for only 4 or 4½ days per week. Moreover, even on these days, the hours of work are frequently irregular. Further, there are the seasonal absences to be taken into account. The combined effect of all this is that the miners work less than 150 days during the year. To them the close connection with the villages provides not only insurance during sickness, unemployment, and maternity in the case of women, but also a kind of defence against overwork, an unconscious resistance to the exhausting work of mining, and an avenue of retreat if working conditions in mines become unbearable. But to the employers it means continual irregularity in working, inefficiency in the working of the mines, and an unnecessary increase in the cost of production, resulting from the fact that they have to bear the overhead charges in the shape of the cost of housing, sanitation, medical facilities, etc. for the whole year. This harms the workers also by depressing their wages.

There are several causes of this irregularity of working. Firstly, it is due to the fact that the workers are primarily agriculturists, independent, and lacking in discipline owing to past traditions, and come to work in the mines just when and as often as it suits them, without worrying about any loss of wages or considering the interests of their employers.* Secondly, it is due to the excessive consumption of liquor and intoxicating drugs

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 176-7 and Vol. IV, Part I, p. 243.*

by them. Thirdly, it results from the shortage of tubs at the height of the busy seasons, the workers delaying the beginning of work till tubs become available. While the contractors pay the miners per tub, they are paid per railway truck, so that if miners have cut coal before tubs become available, they try to make the miners overload the tubs by hurrying them, so as to increase their own profits. Also, if the tubs become available too late in the day to enable miners to fill them with all the coal that they have cut, the remaining coal has to be left behind and is stolen by the miners belonging to the next shift to fill their own tubs. Therefore, miners are unwilling to start work unless they see before them tubs which they can fill at their own speed.

Fourthly, the irregularity is caused by the method of paying wages to them according to the number of tubs that they fill with coal. Several causes beyond their control such as shortage of, or variation in the size of, tubs, difficult working places, long leads, stone and shale, and mechanical breakdown, may make it impossible for them to obtain the full wage in spite of adequate work, and the knowledge of this has a depressing effect upon their mind. A similar effect is produced by deductions that are frequently made from miners' wages, unless they build a pyramid of coal above the brim beyond the legitimate capacity of the tub. Lastly, it is due to the method of paying them wages on Sunday, the weekly day of rest; as they have to wait a long time to receive the wages, the rest-day is wasted, so that they are tempted to take an unauthorised holiday on Monday.

Therefore, discipline should be tightened, the miners' opportunities for indulging in drink should be diminished by a reduction in the number and hours of sale of liquor shops, an adequate supply of tubs and their proper distribution should be provided, wages should be paid on a working day, preferably Saturday, and a scheme should be devised by which the workers would be credited, for the purpose of wage payment, with a

minimum output for a certain number of hours of work.*

A fourth defect is the attitude of some of the owners towards the working of the mines. In the past, some have exploited the mines uneconomically in order to take full advantage of a rising market and to make large profits quickly, and have thus sacrificed the best interests of themselves, the workers and the community to a temporary advantage, and caused a substantial loss in the long run. Moreover, many of them are conservative, have not installed modern machinery in their mines, and obtain coal by the obsolete method of hewing it with pickaxes. Further, much wastage of coal results from the fact that it is stacked a considerable time before it is loaded into waggons the supply of which is frequently inadequate. The grading of coal also is inadequate. The result is that the overhead and other charges for coal production are much higher in India than in other countries, and while in England the miner's wage makes up $\frac{2}{3}$ of the cost of producing coal, in India it is only $\frac{1}{3}$. The efficiency and wages of the Indian miners can be substantially improved by removing the above defects, and also by tackling the questions of railway freight, pooling and standardisation of working conditions.†

The sanitary conditions in many mines underground are unsatisfactory. In all mines scavengers are employed underground as provided in the Mines Act, but their work is inefficient owing to the lack of arrangements for removing the night soil. There are no latrines below ground. This lack of sanitation not only fouls the atmosphere, but also impregnates the soil with hookworm, which infects miners through their feet. Eating meals underground is another source of infection, and outbreaks of cholera are rather frequent among the mining population. The problem has been effectively dealt with in other countries, and a septic tank latrine in one

* See *Labour Commission, Report*, p. 120-3.

† These defects were pointed out by the Indian Coal Committee of 1924-25 and some of its witnesses.

of the Indian collieries is proving very successful. *

As regards accidents, a special safety staff is kept in each mine to examine it every day, to test the safety of the walls and roofs, and to look out for floods and fire-damp. Nevertheless, whereas in Great Britain the death rate from accidents per million tons of coal raised is only 4.36, it is 10.13 in British India. From 1926 to 1929, although the number of working coal mines in British India diminished from 772 to 556, the number of accidents increased from 152 to 183 and the number of deaths from 171 to 218.† The Chief Inspector of mines and his assistants have worked hard to improve the safety of workers in mines by frequent inspections, by keeping in touch with all accidents and investigating closely all serious ones, and by the pursuit of an energetic policy of educating managers and supervisors in the latest scientific safety devices.

The Labour Commission expressed the opinion that progress was being made in the prevention of accidents by the gradual improvement in discipline and regularity of work, leading to greater safety, but that it was being concealed by increased risks produced by deeper mining, owing to the exhaustion of the upper seams, and by the presence of excessive numbers of workers in coal mines, during certain parts of the year.‡ Among the fatal accidents, a little less than $\frac{2}{3}$ are due to misadventure, about $\frac{1}{3}$ are due to the faults of the victims or their fellow-workers, and about $\frac{1}{3}$ are due to the faults of the management. In this respect, the Chief Inspector of mines has often complained in his annual reports, and also stated in his evidence to the Commission, that whereas in Western countries coal mining is a skilled and hereditary occupation, in India a cultivator is allowed to start coal cutting on his first day in a mine, and also that the standard of discipline enforced in Indian mines is far below that maintained in Europe.§

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 14 and Part II, p. 191.*

† See the annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Mines.

‡ Report p. 130.

§ See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 225.*

However, the main difficulty in preventing such accidents is not peculiar to India. It is most difficult to foresee the numerous dangers that may arise from ignorance, carelessness or foolhardiness, and this is true of miners in Europe also.* It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the ignorant and illiterate Indian miners, fresh from hills and forests and possessing a fatalistic bent of mind, should fail to appreciate the dangers of sleeping and resting near tramway or railway lines or machinery. However, the Chief Inspector himself has admitted that they are amenable to discipline, and has suggested that all managers should regard it as one of their most important duties to train the workers in "safety first" principles by personal example, as well as through their assistants. Further, although a large staff of trained men is kept in most of the mines to maintain the safety of the miners, safety depends largely upon the skill and experience of the miners themselves.

Therefore, the Labour Commission has suggested that the new workers should not be allowed to commence work except under skilled supervision, and that they should be given better practical training, as their illiteracy makes written warnings and instructions useless. A number of managers' subordinates have already qualified themselves in first aid; but it is very desirable that the ordinary miners should be stimulated by the offer of a reward to qualify themselves similarly, because in addition to its practical use, such training has a great educative value in respect of avoiding dangers.

The mining industry is at present in a state of transition. Owing to the limitation of the daily hours of work, and the gradual exclusion of women from underground work, measures recently introduced, the workers cannot continue their old irregular and haphazard ways of work. To ensure sufficient output for the mines and to earn enough to maintain their families under the changed conditions, the miners must work more regularly, produce a larger output per head, and

* Cf. Matheson, *Indian Industry*, p. 78.

earn more wages. But, to meet the new conditions, they have no new equipment or knowledge, and their only asset is their physical strength, which has been generally attributed to their regular return to their village homes.

However, the new regime of more regular hours, greater application to work and stricter discipline would mean shutting them up for a longer time each year in the darkness, the vitiated air, the excessive humidity and the insanitary conditions of mines, and therefore there is considerable danger that their physique may become impaired.* Periodical, although less frequent, return to the villages, a better diet and a better provision for health, housing and welfare are the means to ward off this danger, and they will be examined in their appropriate places. It will also be necessary to provide alternative occupations for the women as they become excluded from the mines, so that they can supplement the earnings of their menfolk and at the same time provide them with homes, in the absence of which they are tempted to take to gambling and drink.†

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 293.

† Cf. " " " " Part II, p. 196.

CHAPTER VIII.

Labour on Plantations.

In striking contrast to the noise, smoke, dust and heat of towns and factories, plantations present a delightful freshness and charm. A few hours' journey by motor car or mountain railway, with a number of twists and curves, carries a visitor to them from the hot plains up 6 or 7 thousand feet and almost among the clouds. All around and below, forest covers the steep mountain sides, far below, the plains appear like a sea, and a cool and refreshing breeze blows all the time. In the valleys large forest areas have been cleared by the planters to make room for tea, coffee and rubber plantations, which literally stretch for miles, the plants producing the effect of a solid green carpet, with the sky above often veiled in mist, and giving a wonderful softness to the whole scene. Getting down at a small wayside station, the visitor has a drive of a few miles till he reaches the centre of a plantation with the manager's bungalows, the administrative buildings, the factory, the thatched lines of the labourers and in some cases a hospital.

The plantation system is concerned with the exploitation of the agricultural resources of Eastern countries under the large-scale methods of Western industrialism. Under it a single crop is cultivated in a large area by a large number of labourers under the direct control of a manager, who in some cases is also the proprietor, and in other cases is the representative of a joint-stock company. He may have served thirty years or more with the same company, watching the development of the region since the days when there were no railways or good roads, and is usually a storehouse of information about the different tribes to be found on the plantations, and their religions and customs. But there is this difference between plantation work and factory work,

that the former is really agricultural and not concentrated in a large building, except when the harvested crop has to be treated in a plantation factory to be made ready for the market. Ninety per cent of the plantations in Northern India and almost all in Southern India, except Coorg, are owned and managed by Europeans. It is only in Coorg that the Indian planters have a majority. The plantations managed by Indians are also usually smaller.

The local population in all planting areas has always been small, and the required large supply of labour could be obtained only by recruitment from distant areas. The vast majority of the labourers thus have to work in regions where peoples, languages and climates are alien to them. The causes of this migration are the same as in the cases of factories, with these differences that firstly the migration to the plantations does not cause any radical change of occupation, and that secondly, while factories can provide work chiefly to men, the plantations require the labour of men and women as well as children. But the idea prevailing in some other parts of India, that women, being specially useful for garden work, are recruited much in excess of men, producing adverse effects on the social morals of the labourers, is not at all justified by the facts, and the morality on the plantations is no worse than in the rest of India.*

The most important plantation industry is tea, which has steadily developed since it passed through a crisis in 1866. It now covers an area of 790,000 acres, annually producing 432 million lbs. of tea, and providing employment for 930,000 workers. India is at the top of the tea-exporting countries, and supplies 40 per cent of the world market. The importance of the industry to India is seen from the fact that the value of the export of tea is between 10 and 8% of the value of the total annual exports from the country. The coffee industry, although it has steadily expanded during the last decade, is far less important than tea, covering only $\frac{1}{16}$ of the acreage

* Cf. Matheson, *Indian Industry*, p. 85.

under tea, and providing employment to 92,000 labourers only. Rubber is still less important, being produced only on the Malabar coast, and employing only 48,000 workers.

The plantations in Northern and Southern India differ in four aspects. Firstly, the former produce only tea, while the latter produce all the three crops. Secondly, the Southern plantations recruit all their labour from short distances, the Madras Presidency having a labour supply in excess of the industrial demand. The Northern plantations, on the other hand, have to secure their labour from long distances, owing to the competition of the coal industry of Bengal and Bihar, the jute industry of Bengal and the cotton and oil industries of Assam. Thirdly, while the labourers on the Southern plantations, like factory workers, are migratory, returning to their villages annually for 1 to 3 months, the labourers generally settle on the Northern plantations permanently. Lastly, while nearly all the plantations in the North are located in British India, many of those in the South are situated in the Indian States of Mysore, Cochin and Travancore, thus presenting the danger that labour legislation in these States may fall behind that in British India.

The chief planting areas in the South are the Nilgiri, Anamalai and Shevaroy hills, and Malabar and Coorg. Labour is recruited through overseers called kanganis or maistries, who are given interest-free loans, from which they make advances of Rs. 15 on the average per worker to those labourers who are prepared to migrate to the plantations, the advances being recovered gradually from their wages. To protect the planters from the loss of the advances, the Madras Planters Act of 1903 made it a penal offence for the labourers to leave the estates till their contract to serve for a definite period was completed. The Act was repealed in 1929, as it was found that it unduly restricted the freedom of the ignorant and unorganised workers. The Coorg Labour Act, passed in 1926 to give a similar protection to the planters, expired in 1931. The dis-

appearance of these measures, far from creating any difficulties for the planters, has increased the willingness of the labourers to go to the estates, and has consequently made the labour supply more regular. The Labour Commission has, therefore, expressed the opinion that there is no need for any further legislation of this nature.*

The Assam and Surma valleys in the province of Assam are the most important planting areas in India, providing employment for more than half of the entire plantation labour in India. The other planting areas in the north are Darjeeling, the Terai and the Dooars in Bengal. The labourers in Darjeeling and the Terai are the descendants of immigrants from Nepal and Sikkim who have settled there permanently. Those in the Dooars are aborigines from Chota Nagpur and the Santal Parganas in the province of Bihar and Orissa, ninety per cent of whom have also settled permanently on the gardens. In spite of the entire absence of any system of agreement or penal contract, there have been no labour difficulties in these areas.

The peculiarity of Assam plantations is that recruitment of labour for them is controlled by the Assam Labour and Emigration Act, which lays down restrictions that do not exist anywhere else. The need for them arises from the chronic scarcity of labour in Assam, which is very sparsely populated and full of jungles, the plantations themselves being created by clearing dense jungles. Nearly all the labour has, therefore, to be recruited from distant areas such as Chota Nagpur and the Santal Parganas inhabited by aborigines, Bihar, the United Provinces, Madras and the Central Provinces involving a journey of a week or more. Recruitment has in consequence been expensive, costing Rs. 200 before the war and about Rs. 150 now per labourer. The planters, therefore, have all along tried to ensure that labourers recruited by them at such a heavy cost work on their estates for a sufficiently

* Report, p. 356.

long period, and are not enticed elsewhere. At their instance a number of laws were passed from time to time regulating recruitment on the principle of indenture.

According to this system labourers were compelled by a contract to work for a definite period on the estates for which they were recruited. If they refused to work without proper cause, or ran away, they could be arrested by the planters and punished criminally by the courts of law. This loss of freedom for a number of years, combined with the notoriety of Assam as a region of ill-health owing to the ravages of malaria, and the justified fear of labourers that they would find it very difficult ever to return to their ancestral homes without the active help of the planters, increased the reluctance of labourers to go to the plantations at the very time when the tea industry was expanding, and urgently needed additional labour. The price of a labourer therefore rose as high as Rs. 500, and a large number of unscrupulous professional labour suppliers known as Arkattis sprang up, who resorted to all sorts of tricks for enticing labour from the recruiting areas to the plantations, in order to obtain the large rewards. When the abuses became serious, Government passed the Assam Labour and Emigration Act in 1901, prohibiting all recruiting except by plantation sardars, and making it a penal offence for any one else to help or induce a labourer to go to Assam.*

A plantation sardar is a man, who has actually worked and is employed on an Assam tea plantation, and recruiting by him is strictly regulated. He is given a certificate by his estate manager countersigned by the district magistrate, and recruits labour from his own village under the supervision of licensed local agents maintained in the recruiting districts, and of the forwarding agents of the Tea Districts Association stationed at Goalundo in East Bengal and Gauhatti in Assam. The local agent has in every case to make sure that the

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 168-9.

sardar has not misrepresented in any way the conditions of employment on the estate to the recruit.

Further, in addition, to the control over recruitment exercised by the district authorities of the recruiting districts, control over recruiting is exercised since 1915 through the agents mentioned above by the Assam Labour Board, consisting of the representatives of the planters with an official chairman.* Moreover, Provincial Governments have been allowed to prohibit recruiting for the Assam tea gardens in any of the areas under their jurisdiction, and the U. P. Government has done so in a large part of the United Provinces. Furthermore, the indenture system was withdrawn in 1908, and with the repeal of the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act with effect from 1926, the estate labourers can no longer be criminally punished for a breach of contract. Hence the injustice and hard dealing that were common under the old system of contract labour have now become very much less.

But the report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee of 1921 makes it clear that bad conditions prevailed on many estates as recently as twelve years ago, and as the Government of India pointed out to the Labour Commission, recruitment for the estates has always been regarded with disfavour by Indian public opinion and the legislatures. Moreover, the public enquiries regarding forced labour in different parts of the world, made at the instance of the League of Nations, have shown that forced labour invariably results in great unpopularity of the area and the work that depend on it. Therefore, it is but natural that there should still be much popular misconception in many parts of India about the conditions of Assam plantation labour. The distance and inaccessibility of these plantations make it specially difficult to remove these incorrect ideas, based largely on the outlived troubles of the past, but also in part on isolated cases of cruelty, tyranny, or neglect. Irrespective of the dictates of humanity, the motive of self-

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VI, Part I, p. 66.*

interest, on account of the chronic scarcity of labour, combined with the heavy cost of recruiting resulting from the safeguards provided by law and the abolition of indenture, impels the planters to make conditions of labour attractive, because they would be put to heavy losses if labourers became dissatisfied and ran away.

Actuated by a desire to secure permanent labour, the planters encourage the recruitment of families rather than individuals, and give them small plots of land to grow their own crops, so that the labourers are also small agriculturists, and live in an environment more akin to their former village surroundings than to those of a large industrial centre. The labourers are said to immigrate with three ambitions; the first, soon achieved, is to own an umbrella; the second, to own a buffalo; and the third, to own land and to become an independent cultivator. In 6 or 7 years a labourer can save enough to realise this ambition by acquiring Government land. The Government of Assam, keen on promoting the colonisation of a thinly populated province, has been willing to sell land, and up to now over 600,000 labourers have become peasant proprietors, and Government land continues to be taken up at the rate of about 10,000 acres annually.

Some of them work on the estates at intervals as seasonal day labourers, but it is reckoned that this colonisation involves the estates in an annual loss of more than 25,000 labourers. This cause of labour scarcity is a credit to the tea industry, because it enables the labourers to become independent. At the same time it must be borne in mind that Assam is being colonised at the cost of this industry, which annually supplies to the province a large number of immigrants free of charge, and acclimatised by a short period of work on the plantations. The annual loss of labour from this cause, from deaths, and from labourers returning to their ancestral homes, comes to about 6 or 7 per cent of the total labour force. This means that a deficit of about 60,000 labourers has to be made good every year. It thus

becomes clear that for several years the industry must depend largely on immigration.

On the estates the men attend to the nursery work, cultivate the young seedlings, and do the heavy hoeing and pruning. The women do the light forking of the soil and the top pruning. Grown-up children are employed to move from labourer to labourer to sharpen their knives, and creches are established at convenient centres, where young children are left in charge of an old woman. Many of the working children, however, are 4 to 6 years old, and it is unsatisfactory that children of such tender ages should be made to work in order to add to the family earnings.* In addition to the nursery work, the men have to carry out several duties from time to time for the maintenance of the estates, such as making bricks, thatching, carting and building.

When the tea harvest is gathered, nearly 10% of the garden labourers are diverted temporarily to the tea factories to deal with it, so that about 100,000 labourers have to work for a part of the year in this way. Although the Factories Act is applied to these factories, on account of the seasonal character of their work and the need of treating the tea crop quickly, modifications of the provisions of the Act with regard to meal intervals, rest periods, holidays, and hours of work are permitted. However, it is fortunate that in actual practice these modifications are not applied to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the workers, and that the factories work intermittently, because tea-sorting is a very dusty business, and because the difficulties of ventilation in many cases are great. In many factories the air is full of tea-dust, and the workers have to cover their mouths and noses with a piece of cloth. Moreover, the windows have often to be shut to keep out mist and damp, which would spoil the tea. As the factories are scattered over a wide area, and as they are difficult to reach during the rains when they work most vigorously, the factory inspectors have been more or less compelled to limit their activities chiefly to problems of

* Vide *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 329.*

health and safety, although there have been several prosecutions in recent years for the illegal employment of children.*

In spite of the facts that the climate of Assam during the prolonged rains is trying, that the ravages of malaria are pronounced on many tea gardens, and that some of the labourers are apt to suffer from what is locally known as 'Assam rot' i. e. a general deterioration of physique and morale caused by a prolonged continuous stay in Assam, the Labour Commission felt satisfied that the labourers generally benefited from emigration to Assam, as the mobility of labour, which it ensured, was the best preventive of the continuance in any part of India of depressed conditions of life and work, and especially of vicious systems of bond service.† The grave abuses of the past, that gave Assam great notoriety in other parts of India, have been effectively checked, and the complaint, that women and minors are taken to Assam without the sanction of their husbands and guardians, is met by their detention at the depots for a particular period, during which the local agents endeavour to discover whether there are any objections to their being taken to Assam, and by empowering Provincial Governments to enforce the registration and production before a magistrate of all such women and minors.

The Labour Commission has suggested the repeal of the Assam Labour and Emigration Act because it has several defects. Firstly, it impedes seriously the free flow of labour into Assam. The system of recruitment only through sardars, who are actual workers on the estates, that it has enforced for the sake of checking abuses has made recruitment very costly.‡ 7% of the total adult workers are annually sent out as sardars for recruitment, but half of them do not bring back a single recruit, and each sardar on the average comes back with one recruit only. Moreover, this system has proved

* See Annual Reports on the working of the *Indian Factories Act* in Bengal and Assam.

† Report p. 362.

‡ See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 15-16.*

very inadequate for the labour needs of the plantations, and cannot be used for new plantations and new recruiting areas. Secondly, the Act prohibits even honest advertisement and propaganda in the recruiting areas by any one who is not a sardar, and even by a plantation manager himself. Lastly, it prevents every one, except a sardar, from giving any help to labourers desiring to go to Assam, even when a sardar is not at hand.

This official control of recruitment is harmful in the long run to the industry as well as the labourers, and must be regarded as a temporary device. By increasing the cost of recruitment it increases the temptation for abuses, which in turn augment the difficulty of abandoning control and supply a justification for its continuance. The ideal must be one of ultimate free recruitment, and any new scheme of control must be such as will get rid of itself in a few years. This can be secured by making working conditions on plantations sufficiently favourable, so that the managers, instead of having to make efforts to obtain labourers, will find that the labourers themselves come to them for employment.

With this object the Labour Commission has suggested the passing of a new Emigration Act embodying the following principles.* Firstly, in all parts of India there should be full freedom to bring recruits to a forwarding agency, and Assam planters should have as much liberty as other employers in choosing their agents for securing recruits. Secondly, as control over the forwarding of the assisted recruits is necessary for some time, they should be forwarded to the tea estates only through depots established either by an organisation of the whole tea industry, or by groups of planters, and in charge of local agents appointed by the industry and approved by the Provincial Governments concerned. The agents should be made to keep registers of all recruits, to detain women and minors for a fixed period pending enquiry, and to keep back all minors who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian. The depots and their registers should be inspected at intervals by

* Report, p. 370.

officers appointed by the Provincial Governments for the purpose. The Government of India should frame rules prescribing the routes by which the recruits must be sent to Assam, and providing for the maintenance of depots at necessary intervals on the way for resting, feeding and examining the emigrants. The advisability of removing all this control should be examined by the Government of India after five years. If the former abuses in recruiting reappear, Provincial Governments should be empowered to prevent recruitment once more in any area, except through licensed garden sardars and respectable and reliable licensed recruiting agents. Lastly, advertisement, propaganda and persuasion for recruiting should be open to all.

The Commission has also recommended the abolition of the Assam Labour Board,* on the grounds that it has outlived its usefulness and that, while it exerts with the Provincial Governments a dual control in the recruiting districts, it has no control over the labourers after their arrival in Assam. The Commission has suggested the appointment by the Government of India of a Protector of Immigrants, who would not only take the place of the Board but would also protect the immigrants on their journey to Assam and after their arrival. This protection is vital, for irregularities in recruiting are noticed generally after the labourers have left the recruiting districts. The Protector should be given the right to visit any estate for the purposes of examining the conditions of labourers, should keep in touch with recruiting areas, should report to the Provincial Governments concerned all cases of wrongful recruitment, should launch prosecutions if labourers are forwarded by agencies other than the licensed depots, and should administer the rules to be framed by the Government of India for the protection of the labourers while on their way to Assam. An Act, called the Tea Districts Emigrant Labour Act, has just been passed by the Central Legislature to give effect to these recommendations of the Commission.

✓ * This Board consists of an official chairman and 15 representatives of the tea industry, but has no member to represent the interests of the workers.

The Assam plantations have a bad name in the recruiting areas owing to the system of penal contract, and the right of the planters to arrest absconding labourers, mentioned before. It is a great pity that many planters continue to handicap recruitment by deliberately pursuing the short-sighted policy of permitting the old ideas underlying this discarded system to remain in the minds of the labourers, by avoiding all steps calculated to make them aware of the vital changes that have been made in their legal position and rights, and by continuing to restrain their liberty.* They live in lines to which the public are denied access, and watchmen are maintained to observe and report all movements to and from the lines. Although the labourers move here and there, attending the local market and conducting their side-lines of business, they cannot go far, or absent themselves long, without their movements being noted.

The planters state that they are afraid of their ignorant and superstitious labourers being exploited by agitators, but these restrictions have the effect of isolating the workers from all outside healthy influences, and have been alleged by trade-union leaders as the chief difficulty in the organisation of the workers. Moreover, there has always been an agreement among the planters binding them not to engage each other's labour, and as the labourers have remained entirely unorganised, the agreement has further reduced their liberty to sell their labour to the best advantage, and augmented the restrictions on their movements. Thus, the wages paid to them are lower than those paid in other industries, and all the members of the families including children have to work in order to earn enough even for their admittedly low standard of living.† Further, the labourers who were called upon to give evidence before the Labour Commission stated that beating with canes was now and then resorted to by some of the garden sardars and managers to make labourers work better.‡

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VI, Part II, pp. 216, 255.*

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 257.*

‡ See *Supra*, pp. 110, 117, 139 and 218.

The first essential of a vitally needed constructive policy is, therefore, to promote the liberty of the workers by acquainting them with the changes that have been made in their legal rights, and the Protector of Immigrants and the district authorities should be made to adopt measures to achieve this object. Moreover, the public should be given a right of access to the lines occupied by the labourers, so that they can come into contact with the public, especially the welfare workers. Secondly, a well-organised publicity campaign should be conducted by the planters in the recruiting districts by means of leaflets, photographs, lantern slides, etc., to remove the incorrect ideas that still exist about labour conditions on the estates, and to bring to the notice of likely emigrants the benefits which the estates can confer upon them. The estate labourers should also be encouraged to keep themselves in touch with their relatives and friends in their ancestral villages by being provided with the free services of a letter-writer, who should be maintained on every estate.

Finally, the estate labourers should be given a statutory right to return to their villages after serving for three years, at their employers' cost. In addition, the employers should promise them return fares, if they return to the estates after a short leave in their villages. This is necessary, because, the journey between the gardens and the principal recruiting areas being long and costly, the workers find it very difficult to return to their village homes without financial assistance from their employers, and this knowledge has hitherto affected very adversely all recruiting for the gardens. Moreover, the Commission has suggested that the existing right of District Magistrates to send back at the employers' expense any workers, who have been wrongfully recruited, or who have become physically unfit to earn their living, should be transferred to the proposed Protector of Immigrants, who should further be given the right to repatriate workers within a year of their arrival on the gardens for reasons of ill-health, or the unsuitability of the work to their powers, or harsh treat-

ment by the employers, and to repatriate workers at the cost of their employers before the expiry of three years, if they are dismissed by their employers without any misconduct on their part, or if they are treated with physical violence by the employers or their assistants, or if it is proved that they are unable to obtain a normal wage in spite of due exertions on their part.* These recommendations have been incorporated in the new Act mentioned above.

Such a scheme will stimulate the planters to improve working conditions on their estates, and the expenses will prove a remunerative investment, because the scheme, by giving a much better sense of security to the labourers, will increase their flow to Assam and will therefore diminish the expenses of recruiting them. Already the planters are spending appreciable sums each year in repatriation, because $\frac{1}{3}$ of the sardars, who are sent by their employers to their villages for bringing recruits, never return to Assam.† The cost of the above scheme will not be much larger, and at the same time it will give the planters a far better return. The fear of some of the planters that it will deprive their estates of workers is groundless, because the best way of attracting and keeping workers is to convince them that the estates offer them better conditions of life and work than their own villages.

* Report, pp. 380-1 and Evidence, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 208.

† See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 265,

CHAPTER IX.

A Brief History and Present Position of Protective Labour Legislation.

It is a disconcerting fact that in most countries man's growing conquest over nature by the invention and elaboration of machinery and development of capitalistic methods of production, instead of lightening the labour and enriching the lives of the workers, has in the past tended to cause their exploitation and to inflict various direct and indirect sufferings upon them. England, being the first country to be revolutionised industrially, was the greatest culprit as well as the greatest sufferer in this respect, but she has also been the first and the foremost country in the adoption of ameliorative measures, for the protection of her industrial workers. (India, like several other countries, has endeavoured to learn from England's experience, and to check the forces of undiluted individualism and competition before their evils engulfed the Indian workers, who have been more helpless than their fellows in other countries, although she has endeavoured to do this in rather a halting manner, and could have profited more from England's example.

These endeavours have been made by philanthropists, including a small minority of enlightened employers, legislators and the workers themselves. The philanthropists have conducted propaganda and agitation for the enactment of labour legislation, and established organisations for relieving the sufferings and eliminating the disabilities of the workers. The legislators have passed laws for improving the conditions of their life and work. (The workers have established trade unions to strengthen themselves in their dealings with the employers, so as to achieve the same object. There has been considerable co-operation among all of them to secure this common aim, although it must be admitted

that they have not always been able to see eye to eye with each other.

Labour legislation and trade-unionism, however, are not without their drawbacks. The former is apt to reduce the spontaneity and adaptability of the private efforts of employers for the improvement of the lot of their workers and, as it must generalise so as to be able to influence large areas and numbers, it may cause injustice in individual cases. However, the latter defect has been overcome to some extent by giving powers to the Provincial Governments and their Inspectors to remove injustice as far as possible. In any case, well-considered legislation has a decided balance of gain in its favour, because it extends to all the workers in an industry the benefits conferred upon their own workers by the best employers in it, and because it protects the generous employers from the unfair competition of their less scrupulous rivals.* The great drawback of trade-unionism is the danger of serious conflict between the workers and their employers. But here also the balance of gain is in favour of trade-unionism, because it is the best form of self-help for the workers.

The Industrial Revolution in India reproduced from the sixties of the last century some of the most unfavourable aspects of the Industrial Revolution in England at the beginning of the century. An important feature of both the revolutions was the eagerness of the employers for quick returns and easy profits. Profits can be both substantial and just when based on a humane treatment of labour, or they can be immense and unjust when obtained by the exploitation of miserably paid labour. The profits of the Industrial Revolution in India belonged largely to the latter category. The temptation of cheap, helpless, and submissive labour, used to long hours of toil and a very low standard of life, proved too strong for many employers who secured enormous profits by terrible sweating of men, women and children. They were also encouraged to pursue this policy by the pre-

*Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 119.

valence of the doctrine of *laissez faire*, which although losing ground in England was in full force in India, and which made them believe that industry would be allowed to manage its own affairs as it liked without any interference from the State.*

✓ (At that time the policy of the Government was to protect the social system from workers rather than to protect workers from the social system, and so legislation was enacted in 1859 and 1860 making workmen liable to criminal penalties for breaches of contract.) Even up to the world war, Government did not often feel called upon to take action for the protection of labour, which went unrepresented in the Legislatures and the National Congress. There was no substantial public opinion prepared to agitate for the protection of labour, and on the few occasions when labour measures were brought forward by Government, they were strongly opposed by the employers and inadequately supported by the public.†

Public attention was drawn to the unsatisfactory working conditions in Indian factories and the need for regulating them by law for the first time in 1874, when Major Moore, the Chief Inspector of the Bombay Cotton Department, pointed out in his report, that in the Bombay cotton factories women and children were employed in large numbers, that many of the children were hardly eight years old, that all of them had to work from sunrise to sunset with only half an hour's recess, and that they had no periodically recurring day of rest.‡ These statements were supported by Mr. Ballard, the Mint Master of Bombay, by Miss Carpenter, the founder of the National Indian Association, who made enquiries into factory conditions in India, and by the Calcutta correspondent of the London Times of 7th August 1874.§

* Cf. Read, *The Indian Peasant Uprooted*, pp. 227-8.

† See Clow, *The State and Industry*, p. 137.

‡ Cf. Clow, *Indian Factory Legislation*, p. 2.

§ Cf. Mukhtar, *Factory Labour in the Punjab*, p. 10.

Mr. Redgrave, the Inspector of Factories in England, thereupon emphasised the need for enacting a Factory Law in India, and Lord Shaftesbury, who had played a leading part in the progress of factory legislation in England, interested himself in the matter, and drew the attention of Parliament to it. The Secretary of State then called the attention of the Bombay Government to the evils prevailing in the Bombay cotton mills, and in 1875 the latter appointed a Commission consisting of 5 Englishmen and 4 Indians to examine the need of legislation ; two of the English members, however, were unable to serve. The Commission found that the working conditions in the factories were very similar to those mentioned above, but that the evidence received by it seemed to show that the health of the workers had not suffered except in some cotton pressing factories. All the Indian members and one English member, who was a director of a cotton spinning and weaving company, therefore, reported that legislation in any form was not needed.

This view was based partly on the belief that legislation would produce adverse financial effects on the industry, and partly on the apathy of the workers themselves. Moreover, as stated above, the doctrine of *laissez faire* was prominent at the time, and many thinkers and liberal individualists even in England objected to all restrictions on industry. Two members of the Commission, however, the Collector of Bombay and an English Doctor, recommended a simple act not merely for the Bombay Presidency but for the whole of India, to enforce adequate protection of machinery, prohibition of the employment of children under 8, an 8 hours' day for children between 8 and 14, a 12 hours' day for adults, including one hour's rest, a weekly holiday, and provision of pure drinking water for the workers. All of these recommendations came to be adopted ultimately, but they were in advance of the general opinion of the time.

It thus becomes clear that the movement for the protection of the workers by means of legislation was

humanitarian in origin, and that those who had interested themselves in it had no connection with the Lancashire cotton industry.) But at this stage it was natural that the Lancashire manufacturers should seize the opportunity of diverting public attention from conditions prevailing in their own mills to those existing in the Indian mills, and that they should repeatedly urge upon the Secretary of State the need of passing legislation in India, not merely to protect the workers, but also to protect themselves against the unfair competition of Indian cotton manufacturers, resulting from the latter's freedom to employ the low-paid labour of men, women and children without any restrictions.

The Secretary of State in dealing with the matter referred to pressure exercised on him, but did not state the quarters from which it emanated. Consequently the feeling grew up in India that Government was being influenced by "ignorant English philanthropists and grasping English manufacturers," and that in shaping the legislation "the voice was the voice of Exeter Hall but the hand was the hand of Manchester."* Although the Viceroy publicly stated in 1881 that the Government of India was actuated by the sole desire to benefit India and was not in the least influenced by any desire on the part of English manufacturers to place restrictions on their Indian rivals, the suspicion that the main incentive to all this legislation was being supplied by the selfish interests of Lancashire was not allayed and continued for a long time.† Owing to this suspicion, pressure from Lancashire has on the whole done harm to the cause of factory legislation in India.

Any legislation was regarded as unnecessary and harmful by the Government of Bengal, the Bombay and Bengal Chambers of Commerce, the Bombay Millowners' Association, the Calcutta Trades' Association, the British Indian Association, managers of mills and a number of private persons, and owing to their strong criticism and protests, the bill that was introduced in

*Kydd, *A History of Factory Legislation in India*, p. 47.

†Cf. R. K. Das, *Factory Legislation in India*, pp. 40-1 and 88.

1877 was much whittled down in spite of the persistent efforts of Mr. Sorabji Shapurji Bengali, a well-known social worker of the time, and of the representatives of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and a number of workers, was passed in 1881 in an attenuated form, and came to be known as the First Indian Factory Act.

The Act was applicable to all manufacturing premises using power-driven machinery, employing 100 or more persons and working for more than 4 months in the year. Employers were prohibited from engaging children below the age of 7 and from making children between 7 and 12 work for more than 9 hours on any day. Four holidays every month were made compulsory for them. It also provided for the fencing of dangerous machinery, the reporting of accidents and the appointment of special factory inspectors, if necessary, the district officers being ordinarily expected to enforce the provisions of the Act without any addition to their staff. The Act thus did not apply to tea and coffee plantations, to factories using power-driven machinery but employing less than 100 persons, to factories employing more than 100 persons but using no power machinery, and to ginning and other seasonal factories which did not run more than 4 months in the year. Lastly, it gave no protection to adult workers and left them entirely at the mercy of their employers.

The Act was a victory for conservative opinion because, although the Governments of India and Bombay and a large section of Bombay public opinion were in favour of a much more stringent Act, they had to give way to the powerful opposition of the rest of India led by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. But it was soon found that the Act was inadequate for dealing effectively with the abuses in the factories, especially as the smaller factories had not been brought under its operation, and as it contained no provisions for sanitation and ventilation and for the regulation of the labour of women. The Bombay Government, therefore, appointed a Commission in 1884 to examine the necessity for further legislation, and this Commission recommended further

protection to children and the grant of protection to women.

While the Government was considering these recommendations, Mr. Jones, who had been an Inspector of Factories in Bombay, published a memorandum in England alleging that grave abuses existed in the Bombay factories, and that the Government of India was not likely to take steps to deal with them unless pressure was exercised from England.* Thereupon, two members of Parliament suggested that the English Factory Acts should be applied to India. The Lancashire millowners pointed out to the Secretary of State the urgent need of giving full protection to the Indian factory workers, as they were unable to safeguard and promote their own interests. Further, an international Labour Conference was held in Berlin in 1890, and as its recommendations were accepted by England, it was thought desirable by some philanthropists in England that they should be put into force in India also. The Secretary of State, therefore, urged upon the Government of India the necessity of passing more stringent legislation, and the latter appointed a Commission in 1890 to suggest the lines of reform. Mr. S. S. Bengali was a very active member of this as well as of the Commission of 1884. The Bombay workers were becoming active now, and they presented a memorial to the Viceroy and the Commission stating their demands.

(At last, in 1891, another Factory Act, far in advance of the Act of 1881, was passed and it reduced the number of persons required to constitute a factory under the Act to 50, and empowered Provincial Governments to reduce the number to 20, provided weekly holidays and a compulsory recess of half an hour at midday, limited the hours of women to 11 per day except when the women workers themselves desired exemption from this limitation, prescribed a recess of $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours for them, and prohibited their employment at night, fixed the age of children who could be employed at 9 to 14, made the

* See Clow, *Indian Factory Legislation*, p. 17.

certification of their age compulsory, limited their hours to 7 during daylight, and prohibited their employment in dangerous occupations. It made extensive provision for inspection and the imposition of penalties for infringements of the Act, and empowered Provincial Governments to make rules for the ventilation and sanitation of factories.

The rapid advance of industrial activity in India made this Act also inadequate in a few years. The growing use of electric lights in factories, and the shortage of labour, due to the ravages of plague, brought about excessive hours of work and the illegal employment of children below 9. The safety provisions of the Act were also found to be inadequate, and there was a rise in the percentage of accidents owing to the carelessness and loose clothing of the workers. Moreover, most of the cotton ginning and pressing factories had managed to escape control, because the Act had excluded from its operation factories working for less than four months in a year. Further, as the Bengal jute industry began to advance, the evil of excessive hours became noticeable in the Calcutta jute mills also. So the Lancashire manufacturers renewed their protests, and this time they were joined by the Dundee jute manufacturers. Protests were made in the Indian press also, particularly in the *Times of India*, and a few enlightened employers expressed themselves in favour of a reduction of hours. Therefore, a preliminary committee of enquiry was appointed in 1906, and it was followed by the Factory Labour Commission of 1907, which visited all the important industrial centres in India.

Its report, however, was not unanimous. All the members, except Dr. Nair, were opposed to any direct restriction of the hours of adult males on the grounds that such a restriction had not been enforced in any other country, not even in England, that it would have to be imposed upon all factories although it was needed in the case of textile factories only, that it would be impossible to enforce it owing to the vast area, over which the factories were spread, and the small number of inspect-

ors, that it would hamper the industrial progress of the country, and that it would soon lead to a demand for a further limitation of hours.

They, however, advocated indirect restriction by the creation of a young persons' class with working hours limited to 12, the limitation of the hours of women also to 12 without any exemptions, the reduction of the hours of children from 7 to 6, and the prohibition of the employment of women, young persons and children before 5-30 A. M. and after 7 P. M. Dr. Nair alone advocated a direct restriction of the hours of adult male workers. The Commission pointed out that inspection of factories had proved ineffective, and that the provisions of the Act of 1891 had been frequently violated by many factory owners with impunity, because the district officers, who were ex-officio inspectors, had neither the time nor the special knowledge necessary for this work. It, therefore, recommended the appointment of full-time qualified inspectors.

Thereupon, (a third Factory Act was passed in 1911,) and Dr. Nair's cogent arguments in his masterly minute of dissent did much to influence the legislators. It limited the hours of adult male workers in textile factories only, and not in any other factories, to 12 per day and between 5-30 A. M. and 7 P. M., unless an approved system of shifts was in operation. It reduced the hours of children in textile factories to 6. The employment of children before 5-30 A. M. and after 7 P. M. was prohibited in all factories. The hours of women were maintained at 11, but the recess was reduced to an hour. Their employment before 5-30 A. M. and after 7 P. M. was prohibited in all factories except ginning and pressing factories.) It brought under its operation also those seasonal factories which worked for less than 4 months in the year. (Lastly, it contained a number of new provisions relating to the health and safety of the workers and for making inspection more effective.) However, the definition of a factory remained the same under the new Act as under the Act of 1891.

Then came the war, and factory legislation and administration were influenced considerably by it. In the first place, there was a large increase in industrial activity and therefore in the number of factories and their workers. Secondly, the greater demand for labour increased the power of the workers, and the growing unrest due to the rise in their wages lagging behind the rise of prices and the profits of their employers, and other factors, made them more conscious of their power and more reluctant to submit to unsatisfactory conditions of work. Their agitation for improved conditions, therefore, became a powerful force for the first time in the shaping of further legislation.* Thirdly, certain defects in the Act of 1911 became prominent, especially the exclusion from its scope of all factories employing less than 50 workers and the exemption of cotton ginning and pressing factories from all restrictions relating to the work of men. The Indian Cotton Committee pointed out that these defects had led to serious abuses. Fourthly, the Indian Industrial Commission in 1918 drew the attention of Government to the growing public opinion in favour of a reduction of the legal maximum of working hours and recommended an examination of the question.†

Finally, after the war, protection of labour became an international problem, as it was recognised that owing to keen international competition in commerce no country could go on improving the conditions of its workers without the co-operation of other countries. The Peace Conference appointed a Labour Commission, which emphasised the principles that universal peace could be maintained only on the basis of social justice, and that the failure of any country to make the conditions of its workers equitable made it very difficult for other countries to humanise the conditions of their own workers. The Commission then suggested certain general principles and methods for protecting labour, which all industrial countries could adopt with modifications suited to their

* Clow, *Indian Factory Legislation*, p. 54.

† Report, p. 151.

special circumstances. Lastly, it suggested the holding of an International Labour Conference every year to devise means for a progressive improvement in the conditions of the workers of all the participating countries and the establishment of a permanent International Labour Office at Geneva to give effect to the suggestions of the annual conferences.

These suggestions of the Labour Commission were included in the Treaty of Versailles, and the first International Labour Conference was held in Washington at the end of 1919. India, being a member of the League of Nations, has been sending four representatives to these annual conferences, two representing Government and one each representing the employers and workers, but all of them nominated by the Government of India. The conferences adopt conventions, which the legislatures of the participating countries may or may not ratify, and legislation is passed to give effect to such conventions and other recommendations of the conferences as are ratified.

This sudden recognition of India as an important industrial nation has made it a matter of national pride and status for her that industrial labour conditions should not remain below the standards laid down by the International Labour Office, especially as this Office performs the most valuable function of giving world publicity to the conditions in different countries and to the position of these countries with regard to the ratification of its conventions and labour legislation. It has created an international labour conscience, and the international status of countries is now largely determined by the extent of their compliance with the standards set up by the Office. Moreover, workers' representatives from India now come into close touch with those from other countries at the annual conferences, and learn about labour conditions in other countries and the progress of these countries in ratifying the conventions. Through them this knowledge percolates among the workers of India, creating a ferment of new ideas, a reluctance to tolerate bad conditions, and a growing discontent.

Employers could oppose the earlier factory legislation in India by stating that labour made no demand for it, but they are now forced to admit that labour demands more and more of it.* India's association with the International Labour Office has thus done a great deal to increase the pace of Indian labour legislation and, as the Labour Commission has pointed out, nearly the whole of the present labour code of India dates from 1922. ✓

The Factory Act of 1922 was passed to give effect to the convention, that was adopted at the Washington Labour Conference, with reference to India. It brought under its scope all factories using power machinery and employing not less than 20 persons, and empowered the Provincial Governments to extend its provisions to factories employing not less than 10 persons even if they did not use power machinery. The employment of children below 12 was prohibited, and children between 12 and 15 were not to work for more than 6 hours per day in any factory. The employment of children and women before 5-30 A.M. and after 7 P.M. was forbidden in all factories. The hours for adults were restricted to 60 per week and 11 per day. Sunday was to be a holiday, but the employers could substitute for it a holiday, on any one of the three days preceding or succeeding the Sunday, so as to give the workers a holiday on a day of one of their religious festivals. All workers were to be given one hour's rest for work exceeding 6 hours, but if they desired it, this could be divided into two rest intervals of half an hour each. (Provisions regarding the safety and health of workers were made more drastic, and Provincial Governments were empowered to lay down standards of ventilation and artificial humidification so as to prevent injury to the health of the operatives. Finally, inspection was improved by the appointment of a larger number of technically qualified full-time inspectors.

The Act of 1922 was amended in 1923 to remove a small defect in the clause relating to weekly holidays.†

* Cf. Read *the Indian Peasant Uprooted*, pp. 232-4.

† See Mukhtar, *Factory Labour in India*, p. 46, for details.

It was further amended in 1926 in connection with the provision of rest intervals, which were found inconvenient to the employers as well as the workers in certain factories. So the amending (Act of 1926) permitted a rest interval of half an hour only for men working not more than $8\frac{1}{2}$ hours per day, only if they desired, the reduction and the Provincial Governments sanctioned it. The opportunity was utilised to remove two other defects that had come to light. (Firstly, the Provincial Governments were empowered to forbid the cleaning of machinery while in motion and to provide for a better reporting of accidents. Secondly, it was made an offence for a parent or a guardian to allow a child to work in two or more mills on the same day, so as to enable the Provincial Governments to stamp out this abuse) which was growing in certain centres, especially Ahmedabad, owing to the progressive reduction in the hours of work of children, and the progressive raising of the minimum age of employment. In the same year, the laws that had been passed in 1859 and 1860, making certain classes of workmen liable to criminal penalties for breaches of contract, were repealed.

In all industrial countries the proper administration of labour laws is far more important to the workers than their enactment. However praiseworthy the laws may be on paper, they are useless to the workers, if they are broken by the employers. In the Western countries, their efficient administration has depended upon the integrity and zeal of factory inspectors, public opinion, and the assistance of the workers themselves in bringing the law-breakers to book.

✓ In India, however, a majority of the workers are ignorant of the provisions of the laws, and those who are not are always most reluctant to give evidence regarding any infringement of the laws owing to the fear of victimisation by the employers or overseers.* Secondly, while public opinion in the Western countries, especially in England, as pointed out to the Labour Commission in

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol V, Part II, pp. 180-1 and Read The Indian Peasant Uprooted, pp. 241-2.*

London by the Chief Inspector of Factories, is so strong against any infringement of labour laws that employers are always careful to avoid the notoriety of a prosecution, in India such a public opinion has not yet been created. Consequently, many employers, mainly in the smaller towns, still attempt to increase their profits by evading the factory law. They keep watchmen at the railway stations in order to obtain timely information about the arrival of a factory inspector, and pay a reward to any one who gives such information. They keep false registers, and even if an inspector manages to arrive unexpectedly, they or their overseers engage him in conversation while the underage children are quickly sent out by side doors or concealed in bales of cotton.*

Although the Factory Acts have been passed by the Central Government and Legislature, the work of administering them has been entrusted to the Provincial Governments, which have also been empowered to frame rules under the Acts and to get supplementary legislation passed with the sanction of the Government of India to enable them to meet varying local needs. The administration is conducted mainly through qualified factory inspectors, who must not be financially interested in any of the industrial establishments under their control. In recent years, their number has been increased, and although the increase has not kept pace with the increase in the number of factories and the volume of work, the administration of the Factories Act has improved, and the number of prosecutions under the Act has also increased.† The inspectors visit most of the permanent factories at least once a year, and the more important ones, twice or thrice every year. Their work has been a record of patient and unremitting effort to make employers and the public do justice to the workers. The Labour Commission was favourably impressed by the energy and capacity shown by them

* Vide Miss Read's personal experience stated in *From Field to Factory*, p. 41.

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 238-9.

in discharging their difficult duties, and was convinced that the standard of the enforcement of the Act had steadily improved.*

In addition to these special and permanent inspectors all district magistrates are ex-officio factory inspectors, and a number of sub-divisional and other magistrates and a few medical officers have also been appointed to help in factory inspection in addition to their usual duties. But the help received from them in the enforcement of the Act has in most cases been small, chiefly owing to their lack of the technical knowledge that is needed for the efficient inspection of a perennial factory. There are no women inspectors, except one, in Bombay, who is a doctor.

The inspectors have to prepare and to keep up to date the provincial registers of factories and to examine the notices, abstracts, employment registers and other prescribed records in factories. They have large discretionary powers in regard to the health and safety of the workers in factories. The Provincial Governments also appoint certifying surgeons to examine all children and judge their probable age and general fitness, before they are allowed to work in factories. Certificates can be suspended or withdrawn, if facts are discovered later contrary to the bases on which the certificates were originally issued.

The Provincial Governments have framed various rules under the Act for safeguarding the health and safety of the workers in factories. Thus, a periodical lime-washing of the walls and ceilings of all rooms, passages and staircases, and a periodical painting and varnishing of rafters, doors and other woodwork are made compulsory. But certain exceptions are usually allowed, such as store-rooms, roofs of rooms made of galvanised iron, tiles, or glazed bricks; certain factories producing gas, chemicals, cement, and oil; engineering workshops and iron foundries providing at least 2,000 cubic feet of air space per worker. Further, collection of refuse in the vicinity of all factories is prohibited.

* Report, p. 68.

To prevent overcrowding of the workers, a certain number of cubic feet of air space per worker, varying between 500 and 700 in different provinces, must be provided. In all factories, there must be proper ventilation, sufficient lighting, freedom of the air from industrial impurities, and suitable and sufficient sanitary accommodation, and the inspectors are empowered to lay down standards and methods to secure them, subject to the employers' right of appeal to the Provincial Governments. If artificial humidification is resorted to, the water used must be of the drinking standard. To guard against fire, smoking or the use of open lights in the proximity of inflammable materials is prohibited, and to minimise the danger to life from fire, fire-extinguishers must be kept, doors must slide or open outwards, except in factories built prior to 1911, and in some cases there must be two staircases made of brick or some other fire-resisting material.

Fencing of dangerous machinery and openings in addition to that provided by the Act is prescribed by the Provincial rules. If any immediate danger to life is apprehended, the inspectors can order the suspension of work in a factory until the danger has been removed. Women and children must not clean power machinery while in motion, and workers replacing belts or oiling the bearings of shaftings, must be given gratis tight trousers by their employers. Information must be supplied by managers to the inspectors about all accidents causing death, or injury preventing work for more than 48 hours. If the injury prevents work for more than 3 weeks, the accident is classed as serious. On the average there are 2 accidents annually per factory coming under the operation of the Factories Act.*

Provincial Governments are empowered to grant exemptions to employers from the provisions of the Act regarding the holidays, hours and rest periods of adult workers, if they are engaged on necessary preparatory work, intermittent or seasonal work, work needed for

* Cf. Mathesan, *Indian Industry*, p. 25.

the daily supply of prime necessities to the public, continuous processes, or work under exceptional pressure, provided that all work for hours in excess of 60 per week is paid 25% higher wages. But women must never work overtime for more than 6 hours per week, and men must not do so for more than 12 per week, unless they are engaged on urgent repairs, when the inspectors must be supplied with the details of the work done by every worker every week.

The Factories Act is also applied to seasonal factories, but as regards exemptions and enforcement they have hitherto enjoyed a greater latitude than perennial factories. The only important exemption given generally is the exemption from providing a weekly day of rest to the workers. This is often used for evading the law by employing on the 7th day workers who have already worked for 60 hours during the preceding 6 days. Exemptions are also given regarding the rest intervals and the weekly and daily limits of hours for "dealing with an exceptional press of work." The seasonal factories form an important group, because taking as the definition of a seasonal factory one which works for not more than half of the year, it is found that, of the 8,143 factories registered under the Act, 4,406 are seasonal and that 2,88,000 workers are employed in them.* The workers are primarily cultivators, and most of them return to their village homes in the evening after doing the day's work in the factories. The skill required from them is small, and the proportion of women employed is substantial. The factories are scattered over the areas producing the crops with which they deal, and their scale of production is usually small. The workers are unorganised and their wages are low. Such factories are cotton ginning and pressing factories, tea factories, rice-milling factories, jute presses and lac, indigo, coffee and rubber factories.

Finally, if the provisions of the Act or the rules framed by the Provincial Governments thereunder are

* Statistics of Factories 1931, published by the Government of India.

violated, or if an inspector is obstructed in the performance of his work, the occupier and manager are jointly and severally liable to a maximum fine of Rs. 500. But they can plead that while they have duly complied with the provisions of the law and the rules, another person is really responsible for the alleged infringement, or an inspector may himself come to the conclusion that the really guilty party is another person, and may launch a prosecution against him.

However, the actual fines imposed by magistrates have so far, in most cases, been too small to serve as deterrents even in the cases of repeated offences.* This has been one of the chief difficulties in the enforcement of the factory laws. It makes it profitable for an employer to flout the laws and to risk detection by an inspector. The fine ranging from Rs. 10 to 50 can be made up by a single hour's illegal work, and the inspector cannot come except at fairly long intervals. The inadequate fines have been due partly to the fact that the cases are often tried by magistrates possessing imperfect knowledge of the principles of the Factories Act and its administration, and little or no previous experience of such cases. But partly they are an indication of the general public apathy about the conditions of the workers. If a public opinion is created regarding the welfare of the workers, the magistrates would find it impossible to take such a lenient view of the offences. In the enactment of protective labour laws India leads the Eastern countries. The effectiveness of their enforcement, however, must depend principally upon public opinion.†

Protective legislation for miners has been much slower in coming than that for the factory workers. The first Mines Act, passed in 1901, provided merely for the safety of the miners and for the appointment of inspectors. But, owing to the rapid growth in the number of miners and the recommendations of the Washington

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. III, Part I, p. 197, Vol. V, Part II, pp. 178 and 183 and Vol. VII, Part I, p. 320 and Part II, p. 261.

† Cf. Read, *The Indian Peasant Uprooted*, p. 244.

Labour Conference, another Mines Act was passed in 1923. It restricted the hours of work to 60 and 54 per week above and below ground respectively, and provided a weekly holiday. Children below 13 were not to work underground. The Act did not prohibit the employment of women underground for the reason that it would have seriously disorganised the mining industry, as nearly 45% of the underground workers consisted of women. But the need of this reform became clear a little later, as underground work is known to be harmful to women, and has been prohibited in all the Western countries. Another defect in the Act was that it imposed no limit on the daily hours of work of the miners. It was feared that any such limitation would also dislocate the industry, as many of the miners, being agriculturists, were irregular workers, and worked only for 4 or 5 days of the week. But the result was that the miners were encouraged to spend long hours underground, so that proper supervision became difficult; accidents increased, and the efficiency of the workers suffered.

(So an amending Act was passed in 1928 limiting the daily hours of work to 12 and arranging for the introduction of a system of shifts.) (In 1929 regulations were issued prohibiting the employment of women underground in all mines, except coal and salt mines. In the latter mines, prohibition was to be gradual so as to avoid serious industrial dislocation, due to women working in family gangs, and so it was provided that the number of women employed underground in them, must be gradually diminished to nil during 10 years.†) For the administration of the Mines Act, unlike that of the Factories Act, the Central Government is responsible and appoints the Inspectors. However, inspection of mines has proved rather inadequate so far, there has been no sufficient check upon the miners' hours of work, and many of them yet frequently exceed the daily or weekly limits.

* For details of the shift system see *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 170-2.

† India in 1929-30, p. 178.

As regards the railway workers, the International Labour Convention of 1919 relating to hours of work, ratified by India in 1921, recommended a 60 hours' week not only for factories and mines but also for such branches of railway work as might be determined by the competent authorities. This provision has been in operation in railway workshops, in which the normal hours have been 48 per week, and in the engineering departments concerned with the maintenance of permanent way, in which the normal hours have varied between 48 and 58, overtime work being done only during emergencies or accidents. But the application of the provision to other branches of railway work was found difficult, and the hours of work in them were not regulated till an Act was passed in 1930, which has limited the weekly hours of continuous workers to 60, and of intermittent workers such as ticket-collectors, gatekeepers, watchmen, watermen, and sweepers to 84, but which has excluded from these provisions the station staff and the running staff consisting of drivers, guards etc., who have often to work from 10 to 20 hours in excess of 60 per week without a weekly holiday.

Workers need protection not only against long hours and unhealthy conditions but also against accidents. These are due partly to the absence of adequate safeguards against dangerous machinery, and partly to the carelessness of the workers resulting from miscalculation, or wrong judgment, or deliberate failure to take the necessary precautions, or ignorance of the risks involved, or overwork. Accidents mean death, or permanent or temporary disablement, and therefore waste of economic resources and human energy. Of course, every effort must be made to minimise them by educating the workers and by the development among them of the safety-first movement and of safety-first devices, but as the number of large industrial concerns increases in a country and as the machinery used in them becomes more complex, provision of compensation to workers for industrial accidents is bound to become an important part of the labour legislation of that country.

(The aim of compensation is partly humanitarian. It is to minimise the hardships of accidents by providing the workers with monetary compensation for permanent or temporary loss of earning power, and by supplying the dependents with compensation in cases of deaths of the bread-winners. But it is also partly economic, because the knowledge that they or their dependants are entitled to compensation from their employers for all accidents met in the course of their employment, and as a consequence of the risks assumed in that employment, gives the workers a better sense of security, and so makes them more contented and more efficient, and increases the supply of labour.) Moreover, experience has shown that such compensation is a powerful factor in lowering the incidence of accidents, because it supplies to the employers the best incentive for providing adequate safeguards for machinery, exercising effective supervision over the workers, maintaining good discipline among them, and providing adequate medical treatment for them, so as to reduce the burden of compensation upon themselves.

Voluntary compensation was paid for many years by a few enlightened employers out of accumulations of unclaimed wages, fines, etc., but it was never systematic or generally adopted.* A demand for compensation was made by the workers as far back as 1884, when the Bombay operatives sent a petition to the Government of India for this purpose. In 1885, an act was passed, known as the Fatal Accidents Act, enabling the dependants of a worker to sue his employer in the case of the former's death by accident. But the act remained a dead letter as it had several defects. Under it a suit had to be filed in a civil court, and this meant a heavy expense and a prolonged waste of time, which the dependants of a dead worker could not afford. Moreover, owing to their ignorance and helplessness they had not the courage to sue the employers. Further, an employer could not be held responsible for an

*Cf. Miss Broughton's article in the *Journal of Indian Industries and Labour*, August 1922, pp. 345-7 and her *Labour in Indian Industries*, p. 182.

accident, which was due not to his own negligence but to that of his manager, or which was due to machinery that was obviously dangerous.

Therefore, in 1910 the Bombay workers again set up a demand for compensation, and with the growing power of the Indian industrial workers after the War, the demand became more urgent. At last, in 1923, the Workmen's Compensation Act was passed, as an experimental measure, as the industrial conditions varied in different parts of India, as reliable data were not available regarding the incidence of accidents and the burden of compensation upon the employers, and as the nascent industries of the country were regarded as being unable to bear this burden.* Under it workmen in organised industries, earning not more than Rs. 300 per month, are entitled to compensation for injuries from accidents arising out of and in the course of their employment, and for contracting certain occupational diseases such as lead or phosphorus poisoning and its sequelæ. But no compensation is payable if an injury does not result in disablement for more than 10 days, or if workmen at the time of an accident were under the influence of drink or drugs, or if it was due to a wilful removal or disregard of safeguards or safety devices by them.

The Act applies to all workers under the Factory and Mines Acts, workers on railways, tramways and ships, dock labourers, telegraph and telephone linesmen, underground sewage workers, and certain classes of workers in the building trade. Any agreement between a worker and his employer, by which the former abandons his right of compensation from the latter, is declared null and void. In the case of a fatal accident, the dependents of a dead adult, *i.e.* a person over 15, are entitled to a compensation amounting to 30 months' wages, subject to a maximum of Rs. 2,500, while those of a minor are entitled to Rs. 200 only. If adult or minor workmen are completely disabled for life, they are entitled to 42 and 84 months' wages respectively, subject

*Cf. Mukhtar, *Factory Labour in India*, p. 73.

in both cases to a maximum of Rs. 3,500. If they are disabled temporarily, they get $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of their wages respectively. These amounts cannot be seized for debt, and payments to women and minors must be made through a special Commissioner, who is appointed by each Provincial Government, for the administration of the Act and the settlement of disputes under it, and who is invested with wide discretionary powers for protecting the rights of both the parties. The procedure has been made very simple, and the right of appeal has been restricted, disputants being allowed to appeal from the Commissioner's decisions to the High Court if the amount in dispute exceeds Rs. 300. The Commissioner has also to perform the difficult task of dividing the compensation in the case of death among the dependents, who range from paternal grand-parents to minor grandchildren.

A claim for compensation must be lodged as soon as possible after an accident, and within six months at any rate. Unless the rules are specially altered, notice of the claim must be given to the employer, giving all particulars, and before the worker has voluntarily abandoned his employment. If the employer offers free medical examination at a reasonable place and time, the worker must accept it, but women can insist upon examination by a woman doctor or in the presence of a woman witness.

The Act was amended in 1926 and 1929 to remove certain defects, but no change has been made in the principles or important aspects of the Act. At the time of its passing, fears were expressed in several quarters about the success of its working, owing to the migratory character of the industrial worker, his inability to meet the expenses of litigation, his ignorance of the right to financial relief, the lack of qualified men in many centres for a proper presentation of his case, and the lack of medical and insurance facilities. However, the working of the Act has been very smooth, and it has proved to be an unqualified success, with the exception of the facts that up to now workmen and their depen-

dants have not taken full advantage of it, and that the workers' practice of returning to their villages, when sickness overtakes them, makes cases of industrial poisoning difficult to detect. However, there has been a remarkable increase almost every year in the number of claims presented under the Act and in the amount of compensation paid by the employers.

(The success of the Act has been due firstly to its great precision and to the special machinery created for its administration. Secondly, most of the large employers have been quite willing to comply with its demands, and have generally refrained from contesting cases. It is true that some of the smaller employers have tried to evade their liabilities under the Act, but their success has been negligible. Thirdly, insurance companies have come forward to give all possible facilities. Fourthly, welfare workers in several centres have assisted workmen to receive the benefits of the Act, and in some cases lawyers have conducted their cases without charging fees. Lastly, although the majority of the trade unions have not up to the present appreciated the importance of the Act, some of them have been assisting their members to turn to its provisions in case of need. The financial effects of the working of the Act on industries have been very small, and no industry has complained of any hardship. Adequate insurance facilities are available for employers.*)

The progress made by protective labour legislation in India can be appreciated better, when it is seen that similar legislation in Japan has made less progress. This is a matter for surprise, considering that education is spread much more among the masses of Japan and that the country is politically free. The first Factory Act in Japan was passed in 1911, but was not enforced till 1916. It applied only to factories using power-driven machinery and employing 15 or more persons. It fixed the age for factory workers at a minimum of 12, and limited the hours of attendance in factories to 12 hours

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 51-52 and Vol II, Part I, p. 207.*

a day for women and young persons under 15, but permitted in certain industries 2 additional hours of labour a day for them. It provided a minimum of 2 rest days a month for women and young persons under 15, and 4 rest days if the factory operated in two shifts of labour alternating day and night. It compelled employers to give compensation in case of injury or death of the factory worker, but not in case of serious fault by the worker. The Act, however, did not much alter the prevailing labour conditions, for there were exceptions to nearly every regulation, which had the effect of nullifying considerably the application of the Act.

The amending Act, passed in 1923 and enforced in 1926, was extended to all factories using power-driven machinery and to other factories employing 10 or more persons. The age of special protection was raised from 15 to 16 years after 1929. The hours of labour for women and young persons under 16 were reduced from 12 to 11 per day including one hour of rest, though exceptions were made for textile factories, allowing 12 hours' attendance and 11 hours' work until August 1931. A special arrangement was made for seasonal industries, allowing 1 additional hour of labour per day in the busy season for not more than 120 days in the year. Further, for a period of 15 years after 1926, the minister in charge can extend the daily hours of labour by not more than 2 hours in any industry. Night work for women and children was prohibited from July 1929 and the night hours were defined as those from 11 P. M. to 5 A. M. No change was made as regards rest days. The rates and period of compensation for injury or death were increased, financial assistance was provided for women workers during child-birth, and provision was made for 14 days' compensation or 14 days' notice to workers for dismissal. Regulations were framed for the prevention of accidents and of the spread of disease.

Another Act passed in the same year raised the age limit for all industrial workers from 12 to 14, but permitted the employment of children between 12 and 14 if they had completed the elementary school require-

ments. But the exceptions provided under the Act of 1923 have done much to nullify its provisions also, as in the case of the Act of 1911, and many of the exceptions have been permitted in those industries where the hours of work are the longest and the majority of the workers are women and children.* Miners' Protection Regulations, passed in 1929, prohibiting underground work for women and children will come into force from 1934. An Act providing conciliation machinery for industrial disputes came into force in 1926, but unions have not yet been granted legal recognition.

* See Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, pp. 403-9.

CHAPTER X.

A Programme of Further Protective Labour Legislation.

Although the industrial workers in India have already received a substantial measure of protection from legislation, as seen in the preceding chapter, they vitally need further protection. An important aspect of this need is a further limitation of their hours of work. At present, only some industries, of which the cotton textile industry is by far the most important, make their operatives work for the full 60 hours per week, the limit laid down by law. This week prevails also in perennial rice and oil mills, woollen and silk factories, and in some other factories located in the less industrialised provinces and especially in the smaller towns. The jute mills have been working 54 hours per week or even less, the engineering shops 50, railway workshops and metal factories 48, and factories that have to run continuously, such as large sugar factories, coke factories, iron and steel works, and electricity generating, water and gas works, which have to supply the daily prime necessities of the public, 3 shifts each of 8 hours with a holiday once a fortnight, giving an average of 52 hours per week.

The labour associations and labour representatives that submitted memoranda to and gave evidence before the Labour Commission strongly advocated the reduction of the statutory maximum to 48 hours per week, while the employers generally expressed themselves in favour of the retention of the 60 hours' maximum.*

✓ The Commission was of opinion that public opinion would support a reduction, if it could be made without harming industries or the economic conditions of the

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 263, 396, 424, 441.*

workers. One member of the Commission, Sir Victor Sassoon, representing employers' interests, was opposed to any reduction on the ground that it would involve either an increase in the cost of production or a reduction in wages in several industries, of which the cotton industry was by far the most important. In his opinion, the adoption of the first alternative during a period of depression and exhaustion would be very unwise, and the adoption of the second alternative was impracticable owing to the certainty of strikes. The only practical way was to reduce hours in lieu of raising wages, when industries, particularly the cotton industry, entered a period of prosperity.

All the other members of the Commission advocated a reduction of hours on the grounds that a reasonable amount of leisure was essential to the factory workers for maintaining health, for developing life as distinguished from mere existence, and for becoming worthy citizens, that a moderate reduction of hours would not cause any appreciable inconvenience or contraction in most industries, and that even if it caused some inconvenience and contraction at first in a few industries, the workers had a right to insist that the industries should make the necessary adjustments so as to get over the difficulties within a short time.

It is true that at present the workers in those industries in which the 60 hours' week prevails have little leisure except on the weekly holiday, although they were brought up in the freedom of the open fields, because the hours of the day, remaining after 11 hours are spent in the factory (10 hours of work and 1 hour of interval), have to be spent mostly in going to the factory in the morning and returning home in the evening, cooking, and eating meals, the household duties and sleep. Moreover, even if they are made to work for 10 hours a day nominally, they waste, according to the evidence of the representatives of the Bombay and Ahmedabad Millowners' Associations before the Commission, from 2 to 3 hours daily in the factory compound, smoking, loitering and eating their meals,

✓ Owing to the climatic conditions of the country and the poor physique and agricultural antecedents of the workers, it is impossible for them to remain at work throughout the 10 hours and, as the Commission pointed out, the unauthorised intervals are their self-defence against overwork. On the other hand, it is found that in those factories in which the weekly working hours are less than 60, the unauthorised intervals are less, the operatives attend better to their work, and stricter supervision is exercised over them, and neither such operatives nor their employers desire a longer but less intense working day, with more intervals and less concentration.

If the reduction of hours is moderate, there need be no adverse effect either on the wages or on the cost of production even in the cotton textile industry, because with greater real leisure the operatives would concentrate better on their work, the unauthorised intervals would become less, absenteeism would diminish, and the duration and frequency of the periodical return to village homes would also be reduced. This view is supported by the fact that the reduction of hours in the past has not only brought about an improvement in the efficiency of the workers, but has also stimulated the employers to take various steps for improving the efficiency of production and organisation.*

Although it is true that improvement in the efficiency of labour and organisation cannot indefinitely keep pace with the reduction of hours, there is no evidence to show that the limit of improvement has already been reached. On the contrary, there is much evidence to show that there is still substantial scope for further improvement in organisation in various directions, for the replacement of obsolete machinery by up to date plant, and for a wider adoption of shifts. For the same reasons, even if a moderate reduction of hours produces any adverse effect, it will take the form of a small and temporary reduction of wages, and the workers can

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 304.*

stand this, as in recent years their real wages have increased appreciably owing to a greater fall in prices than in wages. Finally, reduced hours would provide a stimulus as well as a greater opportunity to the employers for improving the efficiency of the workers and the general standard of work, and the employers have already been demanding such an improvement irrespective of any reduction of hours.

But, although all the members of the Commission, except one, agreed on the desirability and practicability of a reduction in the statutory maximum of 60 hours per week, there was a difference of opinion among them as to the exact reduction. Three members,* representing labour interests, advocated a reduction of the weekly and daily limits to 48 and 8 hours respectively, and an extension of the daily rest periods to 2 hours, on the grounds of atmospheric conditions, the physical requirements of the workers, and the need for raising the general standard of efficiency, especially in the cotton industry.

The majority of the members thought these proposals to be too sweeping, as they would mean a reduction of hours in most of the perennial factories, and a heavy reduction in the factories working 60 hours, particularly the textile factories, and would make a substantial reduction in wages inevitable. It has also to be remembered that efficiency is more likely to be improved by a moderate than by a heavy reduction of hours, that the employers can fairly assert that, until the workers approximate more to the standards of discipline operating in the West, it is unjust to them to establish the 8 hours' working day of the West, and that if experience of a moderate reduction of hours proves the practicability and desirability of a further reduction, it would be easier to carry it out then than now.

So the majority of the Commission have recommended a week of 54 hours, consisting of 6 days of 9 hours each, or 5 days of 10 hours each, and the sixth day,

* Mr. N. M. Joshi, Mr. John Cliff and Diwan Chaman Lall.

a half working day of 4 hours and a half holiday, thereby providing some elasticity for the convenience of the employers and the workers. Factories, which have continuous processes, or which supply daily necessities of the public, may be allowed a 56 hours' week provided that the workers are given an average week of 54 hours. The Commission was not in favour of reducing the hours of women below those of men, because it would lead to the replacement of women by men workers on a considerable scale and therefore to an increase in the sex disparity, which was already a grave defect in the life of the workers in the big industrial centres, and because the suggested reduction in the hours of men to 54 per week would largely obviate the danger of working hours proving excessive for the strength of women.

As regards the rest intervals, the Commission has recommended that, with the approval of the Chief Inspector of Factories, the employers after ascertaining the wishes of their workers may be permitted to distribute the existing statutory rest interval of an hour or two intervals of half an hour each in as many periods as they think desirable, because experience in other countries has proved that fatigue can be reduced to a larger extent by more frequent shorter intervals than by less frequent longer intervals, the aggregate being the same in both cases.

Although workers need rest intervals, too long or too many intervals are harmful to their interests as, by extending the spreadover, they involve much unnecessary strain. The problem of maximum intervals or spreadover has not so far been dealt with by legislation in India, but the workers need protection in this matter. In this connection the Labour Commission has suggested that legislation should be enacted limiting the work of individual adult workers in any day to a period of 13 hours, making the 11 hours of rest cover the night in the case of women but not of men, and limiting the spreadover for children to 7½ hours, the night rest for them continuing to be from 7 P.M. to 5-30 A.M.

Although in recent years the employment of child labour has diminished owing to its replacement by women's labour, and although the number of children employed in factories is now only 4% of the total number of workers, further protection is needed by them because, in spite of the fact that their physique on the whole is poorer than that of Western children, the protection which they receive at present falls short of that given in the West. The Commission has, therefore, suggested that the maximum working hours for children between 12 and 15 years should be reduced from 6 to 5 per day. There was, however, a difference of opinion among the members regarding the need of raising the minimum age for the employment of children. The three members representing labour interests have recommended that the minimum age should immediately be raised from 12 to 13, and that after 5 years the feasibility of raising it to 14, in accordance with the International Convention which has dealt with the subject, should be considered. All the other members of the Commission, however, were in favour of retaining the minimum age at 12 on the grounds that raising it would divert children that would be underage in regulated factories to unregulated factories where they would be worse off, and that 5 hours daily on work of the nature, which children had usually to do in Indian factories, could not be considered to be unduly taxing for children 12 years old, provided that all children were medically certified as fit for employment, as laid down by the law. Further, the Commission has suggested that adolescents should be protected by prohibiting the employment of persons between 15 and 16 as adults, unless they are medically certified as physically fit for adult work, and by giving them the same protection as women in respect of spreadover and night work.

As regards the power of the Provincial Governments to grant exemptions from the provisions of the Factories Act to particular factories or classes of workers and factories, the Commission has suggested three broad guiding principles, *viz.* firstly, that exemptions should be

given for definite and limited periods so that they will have to be reconsidered periodically, secondly that the administration of the Act should be steadily tightened up by a progressive reduction in the grant of exemptions, and thirdly that, if workers are put to work on a day of rest, they must be given an extra holiday as early as possible.

With regard to seasonal factories, the Labour Commission has expressed the opinion that the law should take into account their special position and should lay down somewhat lower standards for them, but that these standards should be enforced with as much strictness as the higher standards applicable to perennial factories. Somewhat longer hours are justifiable in seasonal than in perennial factories, because the workers in the former work only during a part of the year, live under healthier conditions and do less exhausting work than the workers in perennial factories. The Labour Commission has, therefore, suggested the retention of the existing maximum of 11 hours per day and 60 per week in these factories.

Exemptions from these restrictions would be justified only if the factories cannot obtain extra labour. But most of them have no difficulty in securing all the labour that they want, and therefore exemptions in their cases from the above limits cannot be justified. Nevertheless, exemptions have hitherto been granted to them too freely, with the result that the factory managers have made little effort to avoid extra strain upon the workers by employing extra labour and organising the work properly. This ought to stop immediately. However, limited exemptions may be given in respect of workers whose work is of a preparatory or complementary nature, and also in regard to intervals, but not the weekly holiday. Any factory may be allowed to work all the days of the week, provided that no individual works for more than 6 days. To prevent the overworking of women the Commission has proposed that such overworking should be made unnecessary by extending, from 13½ to 17 hours, the period in which factories may

employ women, although the period during which any individual woman may work should be reduced from 13½ to 13 hours. The Government of India has drafted a bill consolidating the present law and incorporating most of the above recommendations of the Commission regarding perennial and seasonal factories, and it will soon be introduced in the Central Legislature.

The inspectors should satisfy themselves that adequate ventilation is provided in cotton ginning factories to secure the removal of dust, as effective dust-extracting machinery, that is not very costly, is not available for such factories. They should compel the installation of dust-extracting or protecting machinery in all new tea factories and rice mills, and in all those existing ones where conditions are found to be bad. They should compel the provision of suitable and adequate latrine accommodation, regular cleaning of the floors and roofs, and periodical white-washing of the walls. The guarding of machinery requires special attention, and the inspectors should issue simple leaflets in the vernaculars giving instructions to the factory managers and workers. They should also pay more attention to the safety of the buildings, as it is likely to be neglected owing to the fact that the buildings are used for only a part of the year.

The operation of the law regarding the certification of children workers has not been quite satisfactory in seasonal factories located far from large towns, and inspectors are apt to come across children, who are clearly under 15, working as adults and children under 12 working as half-timers.* Certification of children by local medical practitioners has frequently been found unreliable. The appointment of inspectors with medical qualifications will remove or considerably diminish the need of utilising the services of such practitioners. In addition, the Commission has proposed that the Provincial Governments should be empowered to fix standards of normal height for children of 12 and 15 of both sexes

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. III, Part I, p. 38.*

and to declare illegal the employment of children, who are either under the prescribed age or under the prescribed height, and that the factory inspectors should be empowered to arrange for the medical examination of uncertified children workers whom they believe to be under the minimum age, and to keep them away from factories until their age and fitness for employment have been certified.*

Adequate inspection of seasonal factories is a specially difficult problem, as they are scattered in rural areas, as their owners are usually uneducated persons with a poor knowledge of the law and are tempted to evade it by their isolated condition, and as their management is liable to frequent changes owing to the system of short leases. Inspection of these factories cannot be regarded as adequate, unless each factory is visited at least twice every season, but this task is beyond the capacity of the full-time inspectors owing to the large number and the scattered nature of these factories.

The Commission has, therefore, suggested a wider and more methodical use of district and sub-divisional magistrates as part-time inspectors. They have this advantage over full-time inspectors that they are always in the neighbourhood of these factories and can pay them surprise visits. But hitherto they have been handicapped in this work by the lack of technical knowledge. This drawback can be removed by the Chief Inspector periodically giving a special course of instruction, including practical inspection work, to these officers. After this is accomplished, it will be enough for the full-time inspectors to prescribe definite standards of inspection regarding the number of visits and the nature of the report by the part-time inspectors, to examine a portion of the factories to check the work carried out by the part-time inspectors, and to deal with special problems which cannot be tackled satisfactorily by the latter.

The workers in those factories, which have up to the present been unregulated by law, also need protection.

* Report, p. 87.

The history of factory legislation has shown gradual progress, each new Act covering a larger field than the preceding, and increasing the area of protection given to workers, by regulating particular classes of workers and factories and by empowering the Provincial Governments to bring smaller factories under the regulations, as the growth of industrialism has shown the necessity of extending protection and regulation. The Provincial Governments have been given, and have used to some extent, the power of applying the provisions of the law to factories using power machinery and employing less than a certain number (at present 20) of workers and to factories which do not use power machinery but employ a considerable number of workers or conduct dangerous processes. The same policy of steady progress should be continued, and it has now become necessary to apply the protective legislation to the two above types of factories.

Small factories using power machinery and employing less than 20 workers, especially small machine shops concerned with the rapidly developing mechanical transport and the growing use of electricity and machine tools, suffer from several important drawbacks, such as unregulated hours of work, absence of suitable and adequate sanitary facilities, unprotected shafts, belting and machinery, unsafe buildings, absence of any obligation to report accidents, and exclusion of the workers from the benefits of the Workmen's Compensation Act. As the full application of the Factories Act to such factories is impracticable at present, the Commission has recommended the extension to factories using power machinery and employing between 10 and 20 workers, and to those employing less than 10 workers, where the Provincial Governments find conditions dangerous to life or limb, of only those provisions of the Act which give inspectors the power of entry and dealing with the health and safety of the workers.* In addition the Provincial Governments will retain the existing power of applying the whole Act to any such factory, and they

*Report, p. 93.

should further be empowered to apply to it any provisions of the Act besides those automatically applied.

Factories not using power machinery and dealing with wool-cleaning, carpet-weaving, bidi-making, tanning, mica cutting and splitting, shellac manufacture etc., have defects such as long hours, overcrowding, defective lighting and ventilation, lack or inadequacy of proper sanitary accommodation, employment of children below the minimum age, and unsuitable and unsafe buildings.* These factories must be regulated on the principle of gradualness, because they constitute a large variety and have so far been free from regulation, and because evasion will be attempted by the employers and parents of children workers till regulation loses its terrors or evasion is found not to pay in the long run. The parents are also ignorant, extremely poor and much indebted, and unless they are given time for adjustment to the new standards, the legislation may remain only on paper or may result in oppression and social and economic dislocation and disorder.

The Commission has, therefore, urged concentration for the present on the two most important needs *viz.* the protection of the children workers and the removal of serious dangers to the health of the workers, and has suggested the passage of a short and simple Act for application to all establishments not using power machinery and employing at least 50† workers during any part of the year. The minimum age for children workers should be 10 years, and the hours for children between 10 and 14 should be laid down by the Provincial Governments, varying, if necessary, from one district to another and from one season to another, so as to eliminate the danger of the employment of children in two factories on the same day, within the maximum limit of 7 hours, with a spreadover of 9 hours and a recess of at least one hour. Overtime work and homework for children, the payment of advances to

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VII, Part I, pp. 94-7.*

† The three members of the Commission representing labour interests have suggested the figure 25 instead of 50.

their guardians to secure their labour, and the execution of bonds pledging their labour should be prohibited. A weekly holiday should be made compulsory for children as well as adult workers.

To provide for the other important need *viz.*, the health of the workers, the Act should enforce the necessary alterations in, or repairs to, buildings, adequate sanitary accommodation, ventilation, lighting and drainage. The Provincial Governments should be empowered to apply any clauses of the Act to particular factories employing less than 50 workers, where conditions make such application necessary in their opinion, and this should be done immediately in the case of offensive factories, such as leather and shellac manufacturing factories and factories in which a substantial number of children are employed, or which have been deliberately reduced in size to escape the law. Such legislation should be regarded as a beginning, and further legislation should be passed after 5 years. The inspection of both these types of factories does not require much technical knowledge and need not be heavy. It can be carried out by part-time inspectors *e.g.*, municipal health officers, sub-divisional magistrates and other officers, whose work should be co-ordinated in every province by the Chief Inspector of Factories. The policy of gradualness should be applied also to the enforcement of the legislation proposed above.

The Government of India has drafted a bill covering the above recommendations of the Commission regarding factories which have been unregulated so far by law, and it will soon be introduced in the Central Legislature. Another bill prohibiting the pledging of the labour of children has already been introduced in the Central Legislature.

As regards the full-time inspectorate for perennial factories, the Commission has recommended the appointment in every province of an inspector with medical qualifications, who should be primarily responsible for inspection from the medical point of view, and of women inspectors, because women workers are generally un-

willing to place their complaints before men inspectors, because their special disabilities can be adequately discovered only by women inspectors, and because it would be difficult to enforce regulations dealing with the welfare of women and children without the assistance of such inspectors.*

To check the tendency, mentioned before, of magistrates to impose inadequate fines in cases of infringements of the Factories Act, so that the fines do not serve as deterrents even in the cases of repeated offences, it is necessary that all such cases should be brought before experienced magistrates, that appeals should be made more frequently to the High Court against inadequate sentences of magistrates, and that provisions should be included in the Factories Act, permitting the leading of evidence of previous convictions, and laying down that in the case of second and third or any subsequent offence by the same accused the fine imposed must be at least $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$ respectively of the maximum fine prescribed under the Act.

With regard to the railway workers, the existing hours of those who have been excluded from the provisions of the Act of 1930, and also of some of those who are included in them, are unduly long considering the degree of concentration that is required of them. Therefore, the majority of the Commission has suggested the examination of the different branches of railway work one after another in order to determine the extent to which the existing hours need reduction, the ultimate aim being to reduce them to 48 hours per week. The minority, consisting of the three labour representatives, has recommended an immediate reduction, by statute, of the weekly hours of all continuous railway workers to 48, as in the case of factory and mine workers, on the grounds that for many of them the times of beginning and finishing duty are irregular and are spread over day and night, that the workers conducting traffic services must be very attentive and alert in their work as they

* Report, pp. 70-2.

are responsible for the safety of the passengers, and that long hours make it very difficult to maintain the needed standard of efficiency on some of the railways.*

With regard to the hours of miners, as the Commission found that the legal limit was being exceeded in some cases, it has recommended that the proper and accurate maintenance of registers of hours should be made the personal responsibility of the managers, and that inspectors of mines should check the registers carefully. Further, the Commission has agreed to the suggestion of the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly, which considered the amending Mines Act of 1928, that the 8 hours' shifts should be regarded as the goal, and it has suggested that in 1933 the position should be re-examined to find out whether any steps can be taken towards the achievement of this goal, but it has expressed the fear that the immediate introduction of 8 hours' shifts is not practicable owing to the difficulty of managers of making the statutory system of shifts work smoothly, the difficulty of the miners of adjusting their work to the situation created by the exclusion of their women, and the fact that the mining industry even now largely depends on workers who arrive for a few days from somewhat distant villages, and want to do the maximum work during these days so as to be able to return to their villages and to stay there as long as possible.

The Commission has, therefore, suggested that until the goal can be achieved, the weekly hours of work above ground should be reduced to 54 as in the case of permanent factories, and that employers should conduct experiments and explore the possibilities of 10, 9 and 8 hours' shifts. The three members of the Commission representing labour, however, were of opinion that 8 hours' shifts should be introduced forthwith on the ground that the attendance and level of earnings of the miners working in mines, which had adopted the 8 or 10 hours' shifts, were higher than those of the miners working in mines which had

* Report, pp. 159-60.

continued to work on longer shifts.* The Government of India is at present engaged in exchanging views with the Provincial Governments, regarding these recommendations of the Commission in respect of mines.

It is necessary to take steps to minimise the hardships that will be caused to women workers in coal mines by their gradual exclusion from underground work, to be completed by the middle of 1939. This will mean a loss of wages to the women, who will find it difficult to obtain other employment, and this will lead to a lowering of the family incomes. Greater regularity of attendance by the men workers may prove to be a compensatory factor, but this development will be difficult and will take time. Moreover, when the earning capacity of the women is gone, miners will not bring them to the mining areas, unless the conditions of life are substantially improved there, so that these areas, like cities, will begin to suffer from the evils of a growing sex disparity.

Therefore, in the first place, in filling vacancies occurring among surface workers, employers as far as possible should give preference to women who have been excluded from underground working. Secondly, some fair and workable system of selecting women for exclusion should be devised by employers in consultation with the workers and inspectors of mines. Lastly, the employers, not merely on moral grounds but also in their own interests, should pay special attention to the improvement of the conditions of life of the miners. This will induce the miners to bring their womenfolk with them, and the release of women from mining work will enable them to attend properly to their household duties and will therefore raise the miners' standard of home life, and consequently, their efficiency and regularity of work. On the ground of health it is not necessary to exclude women from quarries and open workings provided that loads carried by them are statutorily limited in those cases in which the depth and the lead are over a certain number of feet. The actual limits should be fixed by

* Report, pp. 125-6.

the mining Boards in consultation with technical and medical experts.

Finally, it is necessary to give further protection to children employed in mines by raising the minimum age from 13 to 14,* as work in mines is much more exhausting than work in factories.

With regard to the dock labourers' hours of work, unregulated at present, the Commission has recommended that they should be fixed at 9 daily but that overtime should be allowed up to 3 additional hours, subject to a payment of not less than 33½ per cent over the ordinary rates for the overtime. The Commission has also recommended that the minimum age for the employment of children in the docks should be raised from 12 to 14. Legislation to give effect to these recommendations is at present under the consideration of the Government of India.

A veritable social revolution will be effected in India if the recommendations of the Commission for limiting the age of working children in all organised industries to 10, 12 or 14, according to working conditions in different industries, are given effect to, as it will mean the adoption by India of the principle that every child has a right to its childhood, that is to an endowment of health, freedom, play and education with which to start life. This right has not been recognised so far in India owing to the extreme poverty of the masses. These recommendations, combined with the others regarding the promotion of health and education, truly constitute a "Charter of the Rights of Childhood."*

It is also necessary to extend the protection that has been given to workers by the Workmen's Compensation Act. The existing limitation of its benefits to workers in organised industries that are hazardous is not logical for several reasons. Firstly, the effects of an accident upon a worker or his dependents do not depend upon the nature of his employment. Secondly, voluntary compensation is more likely to be given by a large than by

* See *Labour Commission Report*, p. 129.

† Cf. Read, *The Indian Peasant Uprooted*, p. 193.

a small employer. Thirdly, there are several branches of industry which, although more or less unorganised, are hazardous. Finally, the effects of an accident are not less harmful simply because it has occurred in an industry which is considered to be non-hazardous *i.e.* not much liable to accidents.

Nevertheless, it is impracticable at present to extend the provisions of the Act to all industrial workers, firstly because effective administration of the Act will become impossible, secondly because the cost of collecting premia, in connection with some scheme of compulsory insurance that will become essential, from a large number of small employers scattered all over the country away from large towns, will necessitate the fixing of the premia at a much higher level than that at which they have been fixed for the large employers, and lastly because the important benefits of compensation *viz.* the adoption of measures for the prevention of accidents, an increase in workers' freedom from anxiety, and an increase in the attractiveness of industrial occupations, cannot at present be secured in most of the unorganised industries. The only practicable line of advance, therefore, is immediately to bring under the operation of the Act all workers in organised industries, whether hazardous or not, and then gradually to bring under it workers in less organised industries, starting with those which are considered as hazardous.

Thus, the Labour Commission has recommended that the Act should immediately be extended to workers in factories using power and employing not less than 10 workers, and in those not using power and employing not less than 50 workers, to workers in all mines, except open quarries, employing less than 50 workers, to dock workers, certain additional classes of seamen and building workers, workers employed on plantations engaging not less than 50 persons, workers engaged in motor transport, and those engaged in the generation and distribution of electricity. This recommendation will have the effect of adding about 2 million workers to the 4 million who are already under the Act. The Commis-

sion has further suggested that the practicability of including in the Act workers under large agricultural employers and in reserve forests should be examined.*

The most important aspect of the scales of compensation provided under the Act is the preference for a lump sum payment over recurring payments. Employers, workers and the officers administering the Act in their evidence before the Commission expressed themselves in favour of the continuance of this preference and the Commission has agreed with them for two reasons.† Firstly, although the danger exists that lump sums received by workmen or their dependents may be squandered by them, the great majority of them can and do receive larger benefits from lump sums than from recurring payments, by using the sums for paying off debts on which heavy interest has to be paid, and for purchasing land, or for other investments. Even expenditure on marriages, funerals, etc. is incurred by these people by borrowing if they do not have funds of their own, not because they are fond of extravagance, but because such expenditure is made obligatory for them by social and religious customs, so that, if they receive compensation in the form of lump sums, they are freed from the necessity of borrowing and paying excessive interest. Secondly, the administration of a large increase in the number of recurring payments will be very difficult, especially in view of the suggested large increase in the number of workmen included in the Act, owing to the great distances between the receivers and the sources of the payments, so that the great danger is that the former will be subjected to delay, inconvenience, even harassment and illegal deductions by way of secret commissions.

Another aspect of the Act is that in the case of fatal accidents to adults, the amount of compensation does not depend upon the number of dependents of the deceased or the extent of their dependence. Under the British Act, however, it varies according to the number

* Report, pp. 299-302.

† *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part II, p. 177.*

of dependents and the degree of dependence. But an approximation of the Indian Act to the British Act in this respect is not practicable at present owing to administrative difficulties.*

The present scales of compensation are unduly low and should be substantially raised. The Commission has recommended that payments for temporary disablement to adults receiving not more than Rs. 30 per month should be raised to $\frac{2}{3}$ of their wages, and to minors, to the full wage rate: that the minimum compensation for death and complete permanent disablement of adults should be raised to Rs. 600 and 840 respectively, and that the minimum for partial permanent disablement should be increased to a corresponding extent. The maxima at the other end of the scale are also too low, and the Commission has recommended that the maxima for death and permanent disablement should be raised from Rs. 2,500 and Rs. 3,500 to Rs. 4,500 and Rs. 6,300 respectively, and that all workers receiving as wages more than Rs. 100 per month should be given a compensation of Rs. 60 per month for temporary disablement. Further, the present waiting period of 10 days, during which no compensation is given for temporary disablement, is too long owing to the very poor resources of Indian workers, and should therefore be reduced to 7 days. Difficulties created by an increase in the number of claims and the danger of malingering, in the Commission's opinion, will not be serious and can be met.

The rejection of a claim to compensation, if an accident is due to the misconduct of a worker *vis.* intoxication, deliberate disobedience of orders or deliberate removal of safety devices, as provided in the Act, is unjust, if the accident proves fatal, for two reasons. Firstly, it causes great hardships to dependents who were not responsible for the misconduct of the deceased, and yet it is not likely to serve as a deterrent to other workmen against similar misconduct. Secondly, the dependents of a deceased workman find it very hard

*See *Labour Commission Report*, p. 304.

to disprove the evidence of misconduct on his part that is often led by the employer, and therefore even just claims met get rejected. The Labour Commission has suggested, therefore, that the Act should be modified so as to prevent the rejection of claims in the case of fatal accidents on the ground of the misconduct of the persons killed. It has also suggested by a majority, that similar protection should be given to workmen who permanently lose at least half of their earning power owing to injuries caused by an accident.

Claims for compensation on account of lead or phosphorous poisoning and their sequelæ, as provided by the Act, have been very seldom advanced so far, because workers return to their village homes when illness overtakes them and do not receive medical attention or treatment from a qualified doctor capable of diagnosing these industrial diseases. Moreover, it is probable that other industrial diseases prevail in India although their incidence may not be high, and some evidence in this respect was placed before the Commission. It is, therefore, necessary for Government to conduct investigations regarding the prevalence of various industrial diseases in India. In the meanwhile the Commission has recommended that compensation should be provided for poisoning by benzene and chrome ulceration and their sequelæ.

The fact that the number of claims under the Act has been increasing every year, without any appreciable increase in the number of workers included in the Act, shows that the workers and their dependents are realising their rights under it only very gradually, and that this realisation is yet far from complete. Further, the fact that the ratio of claims paid for disablement to those for death is far smaller than the ratio of non-fatal to fatal accidents, shows that a large proportion of the workers entitled to compensation do not yet receive any compensation. This is largely due to their ignorance of the protection which the law is meant to give them.

Even in many cases of fatal accidents, compensation is not claimed by dependents, because they live at great

distances from the industrial centres, correspond only at long intervals with their supporters, are ignorant of their exact whereabouts for considerable periods, or learn about their death only after a considerable time, or are themselves helpless women and children. It will be a long time before knowledge of the protection to which the dependents are entitled can be spread among the numerous and scattered villages in which they live.

The only remedy for this state of affairs seems to be to compel employers to send notices of fatal accidents to the Commissioner of Workmen's Compensation, accompanied either by the due amount of compensation and particulars to enable the Commissioner to check the amount, or by a statement disowning liability for compensation and giving reasons for it. If the Commissioner receives the amount of compensation, he should divide it among the dependents; if not, he should make sure that the reasons given by the employers for disowning liability are satisfactory. If the reasons are not satisfactory, he should either order the employers to show cause why they should not be made to pay compensation, or he should find out the dependents and advise them to claim compensation, or both.

It is also desirable to simplify the procedure which at present lays down that a person claiming compensation must send a notice of it to the employer concerned in addition to placing the claim before the Commissioner. Therefore, the obligation to give notice should be withdrawn in the case of fatal accidents, and in the case of other accidents the absence of notices, or defects in them, should not invalidate claims for compensation, if it is proved that the employers received information about the accidents from some other sources about the time they took place. Finally, as in England, employers should be made to keep books for recording all accidents, as they will facilitate the giving of notices to their employers by the workers who claim compensation.

With regard to the administration of the Act, the Workmen's Compensation Commissioners consisting of single officers, part-time but possessing special labour

or judicial qualifications, have proved satisfactory in the three Presidencies. But in the other provinces the administration of the Act by a number of judicial and executive officers in single districts has not proved satisfactory because they have lacked the special knowledge and outlook that are needed for the work, and, after they have acquired useful experience, are liable to be transferred to other districts in which the administration of the Act may be negligible. Therefore, the Labour Commission has recommended that in every province there should be at least one Commissioner with special qualifications and continuous tenure, in charge of the more important industrial districts and as many other districts as he can manage, and that the other districts may be in charge of less expert part-time officers, who would administer the Act under the general supervision of the expert Commissioner.*

The Act is applicable to workmen in receipt of wages of not more than Rs. 300 per month. If workmen receiving higher wages meet with accidents, the only recourse available to them or their dependents is to file suits for damages against the employers concerned in the civil courts. But the employers can disclaim and escape liability by pleading 'common employment', which means that the accident was caused by the default of a fellow worker, or by pleading 'assumed risk', which means that workers are supposed to have assumed risks which are apparent when they take up particular work. Both these defences are inequitable, and in the opinion of the Labour Commission should be made invalid.† A bill closely following all the above recommendations of the Labour Commission has been introduced in the Central Legislature, and is being considered by it.

The Commission further recommended the repeal of the Act of 1860 which made workmen engaged in the construction of railways, canals and other public works,

* Report, p. 309.

† Report, p. 315.

liable to criminal penalties for breaches of contract, and the Act has been repealed.

Finally, it is most desirable that workers should have a fair knowledge of the protection to which they are entitled under the different labour laws. At present, the vast majority of the workers have not even an elementary knowledge of this protection, owing to their illiteracy and migratory habits. Most of the employers do nothing to acquaint the workers with their rights, except posting an abstract of the Factories Act in their factories as required by the Act. But most of the workers cannot read it.* Little effort has been made so far by any authorities or public bodies, except a few trade unions, to educate them in their rights and duties under the labour laws, and especially under the improvements made in them from time to time. Moreover, workers' organisations are few, under-staffed, and ill-equipped. When an industrial dispute develops meetings of workers are held, but the appeal is usually made to their emotions, and not to arguments based upon their legal rights and duties. What little educative work is done at such times is not followed up by sustained and systematic efforts to acquaint them with the provisions of the laws.†

There is no quick remedy for this situation. The factory and mine inspectors in the course of their visits should gather and address workers, acquainting them with the protection to which they are entitled, and the procedure to be adopted for availing themselves of it. Provincial Governments, social service agencies and trade unions should endeavour to do the same by means of leaflets, pamphlets and lectures in the vernaculars. But effective remedy will be supplied only by the progress of education and organisation among the workers.

* Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. V, Part II, p. 189 and Vol. VII, Part II, p. 262.

† Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. III, Part I, p. 196.

CHAPTER XI.

The Labour Union Movement.

Having considered the achievements of the State and the philanthropists regarding the protection of the industrial workers by means of legislation and the need for extending the protection, we may now examine the endeavours of the workers to protect themselves by forming labour unions, commonly known as trade-unions. The trade union movement is modern in all countries and is the result of the factory system and the concentration of industry, which have dissolved the old personal ties between employers and workers and made the bargaining between them impersonal and cold-blooded. The unorganised workers of a large employer have little bargaining power owing to their dependence, immobility, lack of reserve funds, and the perishability of their commodity *viz.* labour. By removing or minimising these handicaps trade unions strengthen their bargaining power, and secure them higher wages and better conditions of work. The trade union movement is an important indication of social unrest and social progress.] The workers in all countries are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their dependence upon employers and their conditions of life and work, and trade unions are increasing everywhere in number and power, for emancipating the workers, for protecting their interests when they come into conflict with those of their employers, and for serving as mutual benefit societies.

The labour movement in India may be said to have begun in 1875, when a few philanthropists under the leadership of Mr. Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengalee started an agitation in order to draw the attention of Government to the wretched conditions of the workers, especially women and children, in factories and to the need

for legislation, but the progress of the movement was disappointing till the end of the War. As the Factory Act of 1881 proved very inadequate, and as the agitation in England for more drastic legislation in India led to a counter-agitation by some of the Indian manufacturers against it, the workers found it necessary to place their grievances before Government.

Out of this need arose the first labour leader in India, Mr. Narayan Meghjee Lokhande, who started his career as a factory worker and devoted his whole life to the labour movement. In 1884 he organised a conference of the workers in Bombay factories for representing their grievances to the Commission which had been appointed just before,* and their memorial was duly considered by the Commission. But as no action was taken by Government, and as it was said that the workers themselves did not care for protection, the workers employed in the Bombay cotton mills sent a petition to the Governor-General in 1889 reiterating their grievances and appealing for protection. This was followed by a mass meeting of over 10,000 factory workers in Bombay in April 1890, which sent a memorial to the Bombay Millowners' Association requesting a weekly holiday, and it was granted.

This was the first victory of the workers who, thus encouraged, formed the Bombay Millhands' Association under the leadership of Mr. Lokhande. This was the first labour organisation in India. Mr. Lokhande started a labour journal called the *Dinbandhu* i.e. The Friend of the Poor, for ventilating the grievances of the workers and drawing public attention to them. It should, however, be remembered that till the end of the War the whole labour movement was actuated by the spirit of appeal and peaceful methods, and not by those of demanding rights and fighting. On the Labour Commission of 1890 Mr. Bengalee was appointed a general member, and Mr. Lokhande a local member for the Bombay Presidency, and the Commission obtained evi-

*Cf. Das, *The Labour Movement in India*, p. 9.

dence from a number of factory workers as witnesses. The Bombay Millhands' Association also sent a memorandum to the Commission.

With the passing of the Factory Act of 1891 the first phase of the labour movement came to an end. It declined during the period of famine, plague, and economic depression that followed. But it revived when a boom began in the cotton industry in 1904, and the Bombay factory workers sent a memorial to the Government of India urging the regulation of their hours of work. The partition of Bengal in 1905 led to political agitation in Bengal, and a few of the political leaders took up the cause of the industrial workers in that Presidency, and the Printers' Union was organised in Calcutta.

The deaths of Mr. Bengalee and Mr. Lokhande deprived the movement on the Bombay side of leadership for some time, but in 1909 a meeting of the Bombay workers supported the move of Government for regulating by law the working hours of male adults in factories. In 1910 the second organisation of the Bombay factory workers called Kamgar Hitavardhak Sabha, *i. e.* Workers' Welfare Association was established, and a labour weekly entitled *Kamgar Samachar i. e.* Labour News, was started. The Association sent a memorial to the Government of India, supporting its proposal to limit the daily hours of male adults in factories to 12, and praying for the provision of compensation for accidents, education for factory children, improvement of housing etc. It also intervened in a number of industrial disputes on behalf of the workers. With the passing of the Factory Act of 1911 the second phase of the labour movement came to an end.

The above associations were not trade unions proper. The real beginning of the labour union movement came in 1918, when the Madras Labour Union, consisting of the workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills at Madras, was organised by Mr. B. P. Wadia. During the next three years the movement spread rapidly, and a number of trade unions were started in several industries.

Several factors stimulated this development. Firstly, the war, which stirred the whole world, also affected the Indian masses, especially the industrial workers, and a new consciousness, that was born in them, produced restlessness, discontent, a spirit of defiance, as well as new ideals and aspirations.*

Secondly, while the cost of living went on rising, wages did not keep pace with it, and although trade and industry were enjoying unprecedented prosperity, the workers, far from sharing in it, frequently found conditions more trying than before. The economic distress and discontent produced thereby resulted in many strikes for an advance in wages, and a substantial proportion of them were successful. Many trade unions came into existence immediately before or after strikes, some of them had no regular constitution, or definite subscriptions, or system of auditing or publishing accounts, and it was believed at the time that they were mere strike committees.† This belief was only partially correct, and while some of these unions ceased to exist soon afterwards, the majority of them have continued and strengthened their position.

Thirdly, the constitution of the annual International Labour Conference gave the workers' organisations the right to have a delegate recommended by them nominated by the Government of India. This made it desirable not only to establish unions, but also to co-ordinate their activities, so that a single delegate could be recommended unanimously to Government every year.‡ Thus the All-India Trade Union Congress began to hold its sessions every year from 1920 at different centres, and the enthusiasm generated by it led to the creation of several new unions. The Congress has served as a meeting place for all the leaders of the movement, as a platform for

* The war gave a similar stimulus to the labour movement in Japan also. See Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, p. 386, and Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 186.

† See *Freedom of Association*, published by the International Labour Office, Vol. V, p. 330.

‡ See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. V, Part I, p. 119, and *Freedom of Association*, published by the International Labour Office, Vol. V, p. 333.

the formulation of labour policy, and as a link between trade unionism in India and in Europe.* Lastly, the political movement for the achievement of Swaraj has also promoted unionism by increasing the prevailing unrest and providing willing leaders.

The workers, being illiterate and having few leaders from their own class to turn to for guidance, have been led to a considerable extent by middle-class men, professional lawyers and others, who have often mixed up economic and political considerations. A number of young patriots, many of them fresh from colleges, with their fervour roused by the idea of labour uplift, have devoted themselves to the task of the emancipation of the workers. A majority of these leaders have been quite sincere, and have been endeavouring to promote the trade-union movement according to their lights for the benefit of the workers. — But some have tried to exploit the unrest among the workers by encouraging strikes and disturbances until they have secured the desired prominence for themselves, when they have transferred their activities as well as the union funds to other fields, leaving the workers disillusioned, despoiled, leaderless, and helpless.† It was, therefore, believed for a considerable time that the labour movement was only a part of the political movement.

The entanglement of unionism with nationalist politics was probably inevitable, but it increased the bitterness between the workers and the employers, prejudiced the latter against unionism, obscured the justice of many of the demands of the workers, and threw into the background the important fact that the movement was based on real and urgent needs. Employers often expressed their willingness to deal with unions led by their own workmen, but declined to have anything to do with outside leaders, their hostility to outsiders being due mainly to the fact that they were often dismissed workers or politicians. However, recent recognition by the Trade

* Cf. *India in 1924-25*, p. 246.

† Cf. Mathesan, *Indian Industry*, p. 117, and *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 159.

Union Act of 1926, considered below, of the right of registered unions to have outsiders as their members and to appoint them to their executive, has done much to reduce the employers' objection to outsiders. It has, moreover, become clear by now that the origin of the movement was economic and that its fundamental basis is economic.*

The movement received a little setback after 1922 from the fall of prices which improved the economic position of the workers, because in its infancy economic distress is the chief binding force for its followers. However, more recently it has given indications of recovery, and although owing to the continuing economic depression, the number of unions is not increasing rapidly, the older unions are becoming more solid and their working is becoming more systematic.† But a large proportion of the workers are on the whole still apathetic towards unionism, although temporarily they may be quite enthusiastic over the creation of strike committees, and many of the trade unions have not yet got a real and especially sustained control over the workers that they claim to represent.‡

In its earlier stages trade unionism in England had to contend against the deep hostility of Government, which was controlled entirely by the propertied classes, owing to the fear of these classes of a revolution in England similar to the French Revolution. Therefore legislation for suppressing unions was passed, and legislation for protecting the workers hardly existed. But Government in India has never shown any hostility towards unionism; it has, however, adopted an attitude of caution, on account of its apprehension that the very poor and illiterate working classes may be exploited for political purposes through their own unions. To promote a healthy growth of the trade union movement by protecting legitimate trade unions, giving them status, and dissociating them from political propaganda

* Cf. Joshi, *The Trade Union Movement in India*, p. 10.

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. VII, Part II, p. 277.

‡ Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. V, Part I, p. 120.

which may conceal their real aims and jeopardise their usefulness, and to protect the ignorant and superstitious workers from fraud and imposture to which they can be easily subjected, an act called the Indian Trade Unions Act was passed in 1926.*

Under this Act every Provincial Government has appointed a Registrar of Trade Unions. Any seven or more members of a trade union may apply to him for its registration. They must furnish the name and address of the union, the names, addresses and occupations of its officers, their own addresses and occupations, and a statement of its accounts. These statements, with necessary changes, must be supplied every year. But any change in the name, address or rules of the union, or its amalgamation with another must be notified and registered immediately. Registration of a union is thus optional. Further, the rules of such a union must be sanctioned by the Registrar, must state all the objects for which it exists, and must provide for the keeping of a complete list of members, for the admission, as ordinary members of those who are over 15 years old and are employed in the particular industry, for the admission of outsiders not engaged in the industry as honorary or temporary members, and for methods of election, removal of officers and a dissolution of the union. The rules must also provide for the election of at least one-half of the office-bearers from among the ordinary members, and for all of them being at least 18 years old.

* Previous to the passing of this Act the legal position as regards the right of association was that the State did not prevent any individual from joining an association provided that it conformed to the ordinary law. Apart from this, the position was not at all clearly defined. See *Freedom of Association*, Vol. V, p. 336.

In Japan, Government and not the employers, has been the chief opponent of the union movement, and whenever a union has become at all powerful, radical, or in any way troublesome, it has been dissolved by Government forthwith. The police watch the movements of labour leaders and student agitators, raid the offices of unions and search for radical literature, attend all labour meetings, prevent or break up many of them, interfere in strikes, and arrest from time to time labour leaders, union members and radical students who are sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, if declared guilty of plotting against the constitution and political system of Japan and even of aiming at the destruction of the institution of private property. See Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, pp. 390-2.

Finally, the rules must provide for the proper keeping and audit of the union's accounts, and must lay down the precise objects on which its funds may be expended, and the terms of benefits, fines and forfeitures. The objects are restricted by the act to administrative expenses; legal action relating to the protection of a union's rights, the conduct of a trade dispute, or a dispute between a member and his employer; allowances to members or their dependents in connection with deaths, sickness, accidents, unemployment, or old age; the supply of educational, social, or religious benefits to members; the conduct of a journal for the discussion of labour problems; and subscriptions limited to $\frac{1}{2}$ of a union's income for carrying out similar objects. A registered union may establish a political fund for furthering the civil and political interests of its members, and the fund may be used for election expenses, political meetings, and distribution of literature, but subscriptions to it must be purely voluntary, and no members must be victimized for not subscribing to it.*

As compensation for these restrictions, the Act grants immunity from criminal liability and from indictment for conspiracy to all the officers and members of registered unions, for acts done by them for promoting the legitimate aims of the unions. The Act grants a large measure of immunity from civil liability also, by providing that no civil suit can be maintained against an officer or a member of a registered union with regard to any act done by him in respect of a trade dispute, on the ground that it encourages some other person to break a contract of employment, or that it involves an interference with the business of some other person, and by providing that no civil suit can be maintained against a registered union with regard to any act done in respect of a trade dispute by any agent of the union, provided that it is proved that he acted without the

* This holds good in England also. "A trade unionist in using and developing his political arm should see that his trade union arm is neither tied up, nor broken, nor withered. He should also be careful to see that it is not used to cut his own stomach". Appleton quoted in *Bombay Labour Gazette*, September 1922, p. 27.

knowledge of the union's executive or in contravention of its orders. Finally, the Registrar can cancel the registration of a union on application from it, or if he discovers a fraud, stoppage of activity, illegal cancellation or retention of rules, or any other contravention of the Act. He must, however, give two months' notice, and the union can appeal against his decision to Government.

This act has regulated the position of trade unions, and enables them to progress by helping them to keep away from outside interests, and to protect themselves from politicians who have succeeded in some cases in the past in wrecking unions, which had started well, by obtaining control over them, driving away their legitimate leaders, and misleading their members. It helps the real labour leaders, whether they are workmen or social leaders, to obtain the guidance of the movement into their own hands, and helps employers to distinguish between them and political leaders who, however estimable their work may be in the political sphere, have no proper place in the movement, which is primarily economic in character.

Since the passing of this Act the trade union movement has developed more rapidly, both as regards the number of new unions and the number of members of the older unions, owing to the increasing willingness of the employers to recognise unions registered under the Act. Moreover, a considerable improvement in the conduct and administration of the registered unions, and in the proper maintenance of accounts and registers of members has become noticeable.*

Recently, communists in India and from outside the country have endeavoured to capture the movement, and in 1928 a prolonged strike among the cotton factory workers of Bombay city made it possible for a few communist leaders to include more than 50,000 of these workers in a communist organisation.† Quarrels regarding communism brought about the secession of a majority of the unions, guided by more experienced

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 104 and 113.*

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part II, p. 307.*

and responsible leaders, from the All-India Trade Union Congress in 1929, and the creation by them of the All-India Trade Union Federation.*

Trade unionism has made the greatest progress in the Bombay Presidency, in which there are nearly 100 unions with 120,000 members, and the number of organised workers is about the same in the rest of India. Over 90 unions claiming nearly 200,000 workers, have been registered under the Trade Unions Act. Transport workers have been the best organised.† The railway workers have 25 unions with 50,000 members. The seamen and dock workers have a number of active unions. Organisation is fairly common among workers under Government. The unions of postal employees have 30,000 members. Unionism has made slow progress among the textile workers, except those of Madras and Ahmedabad cities where they are strongly organised, the total number of organised cotton workers being 30,000.‡ Even now the jute workers in Bengal are poorly organised, the aggregate membership of their unions being about 2,000 only.

Among the mining and plantation workers there is little or no organisation, as the majority of them belong to aboriginal tribes, have not yet fully come under civilising influences, and living on big estates have little opportunity of coming into touch with the public or labour organisers. Moreover, until very recently, the plantation workers were subject to the Workmen's

* The labour movement in Japan also has been suffering from internal dissensions. "The movement embraces all the varying and conflicting liberal, social doctrines of the world without any cohesion and with the extremes and means in open conflict." Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, p. 393. See also Harada, *op. cit.* p. 193 *et seq.*

† It was significant that the evidence presented to the *Labour Commission* by the railway trade unions filled the larger part of a big volume. In no other industry was it so clear that the workers were not only consciously discontented but also quite well prepared to present their case. See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII.*

‡ The textile workers of Japan also, comprising nearly half of the total factory workers, have been slow in organising themselves, only 2 per cent of them being organised. The work is unskilled, the majority of the workers are women and girls living in dormitories controlled by the employers, the labour turnover is large, and it is very difficult to educate this ever changing group into the value of organisation. Cf. Orchard, *op. cit.* p. 388.

Breach of Contract Act, which punished a breach of contract of service as a criminal offence. Further, the strikes on Assam plantations in 1920-1, instead of crystallising the employers and workers into two groups with different interests as strikes did in other industries, have emphasised the 'ma—bap' relationship between the employers and workers, *i.e.* the utter dependence of the latter upon the former for the promotion of their welfare. The Assam Labour Enquiry Committee in 1921, and the Assam Government in its memorandum to the Labour Commission mentioned this dependence as a weak spot in the labour situation on the Assam plantations.* There is some organisation among printers, steel workers, tramway-men, motor and coach drivers and Port Trust workers.

On the whole, it may be said that the idea of unionism has already penetrated into a number of industries, and to that extent is widespread in the country. However, although the majority of the unions are permanent and regular, there are some which are not so. There are the *ad hoc* unions often organised by outsiders for securing some definite object beneficial to the workers, *e.g.* strike committees. When the disputes for which these unions have been brought into existence come to an end, the unions disappear till they are revived by later disputes.† Such unions temporarily have a large number of members and perform a definite service for them, but they cannot develop real unionism among the workers. At the bottom of the scale are the unions, whose members are nominal, and which represent only one or two professional men who become President and Secretary in the hope of being nominated as labour representatives to the Legislative Councils or International Labour Conferences.

Most of the unions have a structure based more on industry than on craft, due to the fact that they have been established by means of local efforts for improving

* Cf. Read, *The Indian Peasant Uprooted*, p. 144.

† Similar conditions prevailed in the early stages of the trade union movement in England also. See Appleton, *Trade Unions*, pp. 79-80.

working conditions under a common employer, and this is in consonance with modern tendencies in the union movement in other countries also. This means that trade unionism in India is losing the benefits of the early stage of intensified education that characterised unionism in the Western countries. But it does mean that skilled and unskilled workers are forming common groups, and that the latter, in spite of the far greater divisions among them, are from the beginning receiving benefits which were long withheld from their fellows in the West.

Although the unions are at present local in character, they will soon have some loose national federations, and the Railway unions have already formed their National Federation. It is, however, doubtful whether they will at any time become centralised and national, and whether, in an immense country like India possessing several different languages, such a development will make the unions stronger than federations of independent units.* This much, however, is clear that the existing small local and independent unions must centralise themselves to some extent, and work on a bigger scale if they are to play an important role in the lives of the industrial workers in India.

The trade union organisation has undoubtedly improved the conditions of workers, particularly in the Bombay Presidency, during the last dozen years, and although some of the strikes have caused them considerable distress, they have also secured for them many important concessions from the employers. But the activities of the unions have up to the present been limited to efforts to obtain the redress of the grievances of their members by representing them to the employers. Most unions include all sorts of benefits for their members in their rules, but very few have been able to do any effective work regarding them.†

Very few unions have funds large enough to enable them to give financial assistance to their members

* Cf. Joshi, *The Trade Union Movement in India*, p. 15.

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence Vol. I, Part I*, p. 109.

during a strike, and no union has yet begun to pay sickness, unemployment, or old-age benefits to its members, although a few unions have very recently started a death benefit fund. Unions in India are not likely to take up these activities to a large extent, because the State in India will soon have to undertake responsibility for conducting them as the State has already done in the West. Some unions conduct monthly or weekly journals in English, or in the vernaculars, for ventilating the grievances of the classes of workers that they represent, but they seldom deal with general labour problems and their solutions. A few unions, among which the Ahmedabad Labour Union, an organisation controlling six separate unions of Ahmedabad textile workers, is the most notable, conduct welfare work and housing and health activities for the benefit of their members.*

Although the union movement is not at present a very important factor in the labour economy of India, the germ of organisation that has taken root is a promise of further organisation, and the influence of a mass movement like the union movement is out of all proportion to its actual size. Gains made by organised labour are constantly extended to unorganised labour to check the further development of unionism or to satisfy the awakened social conscience. (The improvement in industrial labour conditions in India has been brought about as much by the changing economic conditions, the changing social standards, international conventions, and the efforts of the press and the public leaders, as by the union movement.) The movement has so far functioned chiefly in stating the problems to be attacked, in formulating higher standards for labour, in suggesting methods of reform, and in stimulating agitation for these reforms.†

The scope for the development of the movement is immense because, while the total number of workers

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 24 and 43.*

† The present position of the Union Movement in Japan is very similar. See Orchard, *op. cit.* p. 403.

whose organisation can immediately be taken up is about 4 million, consisting of the workers in organised industries, transport and plantations, only 4% of them are organised at present, and because even among these a large proportion have grasped only faintly the real importance of the movement. But the movement is severely handicapped at present by a number of difficulties. The first is the lack of education which prevents the workers from taking long views. It is difficult to induce them to spend money by way of subscriptions to trade unions, because such expenditure does not yield any clear and quick return. Corporative saving for future benefits makes no appeal to them. Secondly, even if any of them appreciate the importance of subscriptions to unions, their low wages and indebtedness make even small subscriptions a substantial burden to them, so that unions generally find it difficult to secure sufficient funds without outside help. Thirdly, they are divided by race, religion, language and caste.

Fourthly, while the employers are highly organised into associations possessing large economic and political power, the transition from personal loyalty to their master to group loyalty to their fellows is difficult for Indian workers, and the peasants, who have left their village community, find it difficult to accept a trade union as a substitute. Fifthly, their creed is apt to inculcate in them the wisdom of accepting their existing position and disabilities. Sixthly, jobbers, sardars, maistries and other overseers are deeply hostile to unionism, because they are afraid that it would gradually destroy their power over the workers. Seventhly, the migratory nature of the workers makes it difficult for them to take a keen and continuous interest in any union.

Eighthly, this migratory character, combined with their desire to escape from the taxing industrial work and to settle down in their villages as soon as possible, reduces their interest in the attempts of unions to improve their conditions of life and work in industrial centres and increases their willingness to put up with disabilities.

Ninthly, their low standard of living and long hours of work leave them neither energy nor time to pursue trade union activities. Tenthly, while spurious labour leaders find it easy to obtain a following by making spacious promises of immediate benefits, genuine leaders find it difficult to keep their hold upon their followers and to train them in the principles and methods of unionism. Finally, some of the workers, discouraged and depressed by bad conditions, cherish communist ideals, and employers are not prepared to deal with their unions. Unless these ideals are given up, it will be very difficult to improve the relations between workers and employers.

Some employers have condemned the movement on the ground that it is foreign and therefore unsuitable for Indian conditions. But they conveniently forget that modern industrialism, which they are promoting in India, is itself foreign in character, that it has been imposing on the Indian workers disabilities and hardships similar to those which the Western workers had to suffer in the past, that the latter workers have overcome them successfully by promoting trade unionism, and that no other effective remedy is forthcoming for dealing with those of the former. Even those Indian and European reformers and thinkers, who regard Western institutions as unlikely to suit Indian conditions, continually assert that the salvation of Indian industrial workers lies in trade unionism.

Time alone will show whether the movement will develop strictly on Western lines, or whether it will be moulded into something more indigenous, but there is no doubt that the only effective safeguard for Indian workers against wretched conditions of work and life and exploitation can be provided by their combinations. Labour legislation, welfare work, works committees, conciliation boards, etc. cannot go far in protecting the workers, unless they know how to protect themselves. The public, therefore, ought to welcome the progress of the movement and help its growth on the right lines. Apart from humanitarian considerations, employers also

should welcome it in their own interests. The workers are becoming conscious of their disabilities and of the urgent need for organisation, and some sort of organisation is unavoidable. If the organisation is not assisted to take the form of a sound and healthy trade union movement, it may take the form of dangerous and irresponsible combinations with communist tendencies. Some employers have already been seriously hampered by such combinations.

Employers should, therefore, realise that attempts to suppress the movement are futile, and that the gains from such suppression are doubtful and at best temporary. Further, suppression of unions on the ground that they have been acting in irresponsible ways cannot make the movement healthy. The movement achieved responsibility and health in the West only after long experience, and in India the movement must pass through similar stages. If employers refuse to recognise and assist the movement till it becomes healthy, they will be merely postponing the reaching of that stage. It is essential to recognise the vital importance of unions as an integral part of the industrial structure of India. They can make a valuable contribution to industrial development, and its value will be increased by a policy of trust in them and co-operation with them. Government and many enlightened employers have appreciated the importance of these considerations and have already announced their policy to be one of encouragement and assistance to the movement.

Many employers, however, have hitherto often refused recognition to many unions on the grounds that their members have been only a minority of the workers concerned, or that other unions have already been in existence, or that they have included outsiders in their executive, or that they have declined to dismiss certain office-bearers, or that they have not registered themselves under the Trade Unions Act. In spite of all these reasons, unions cannot regard employers as playing the game, when they take shelter behind their entrenched power and refuse to answer letters or to meet the leaders

of the unions. This autocratic refusal to negotiate exposes most forcibly the uneven balance of power between the employers and the workers. Refusal means to the employers freedom to do as they like and escape from awkward meetings, but it means to the unions a loss of influence among the workers and the laborious task of building it up again after every rebuff.

Moreover, all the above reasons for withholding recognition are unsound. If an employer is asked to make an agreement with his workers, the question of the union representing the majority of the workers for that purpose is relevant. But for the representation of the grievances of the workers who are members of a union, the union must always be considered to be competent. Again, although the inclusion of all the workers with common interests in a single union is desirable in their own interests, it is a matter for them, and not for their employer.

The inclusion of some outsiders in the executive of a union is unavoidable owing to the difficulties of the movement mentioned above and owing to the fear, in many cases justified, of victimisation in the shape of dismissal, fine, wage reduction, etc., if the grievances of the union members are presented to the employer by workers acting as office-bearers of the union. The objection of employers to particular office-bearers of a union on the ground, either that they are dismissed workers who are actuated by a desire more for revenge upon the employers than for the promotion of the welfare of the union members, or that they are politicians who have stepped in to misuse the unions for political purposes, can be understood, and such office-bearers often prove troublesome to the employers. But experience shows that the hostility of the employers only serves to strengthen their hands and to give them additional influence over the workers.

The best policy for the employers is to recognise such unions, and they will soon discover that union leaders, who are not working sincerely for the welfare of the unions, are found out and dismissed by the members

within a short time, unless they are helped by the antagonism of the employers. The unhealthy characteristics of unions are more likely to be removed by toleration than by hostility.* Finally, the refusal of a union to register itself under the Trade Unions Act creates a presumption that it is not a *bona fide* body, because registration confers valuable benefits without involving such obligations as a *bona fide* union would not care to shoulder. But there is no certainty about this, and the only effect of the employers' refusal to recognise an unregistered union would be to stiffen its attitude and to delay its registration.

However, as the Labour Commission has pointed out, recognition in the letter must be followed by recognition in the spirit. This means that the employers must not only recognise the right of unions to treat with them in regard to matters pertaining to the common or individual needs of their members, but that they must also make themselves freely accessible to the union officers and be willing to discuss, with sympathy and in a spirit of compromise, the matters brought forward by the officers, and to give them credit, whenever they deserve it, for all that they may do to promote the interests of the unions.

Several railway trade unions stated to the Labour Commission that the attitude of the railway authorities towards them was not merely of indifference, but even of open hostility, and that the Agents of some railways had been endeavouring to get rid of unions by establishing Joint Works Committees to deal with some of the grievances of the railway workers and by forcing them upon the workers.† But the Whiteley Committee in England pointed out that it was wrong to try to establish Joint Committees as substitutes for trade unions, and that these Committees could work successfully in those industries only in which the workers were organised in unions. These attempts of the Agents are doomed to

* See *Labour Commission Report*, p. 325.

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. VIII, Part I, pp. 373, 400, 426, 450.

failure, but they have been creating a lot of ill feeling among the workers and should, therefore, be abandoned.

Further, these Agents and Government do not permit unions to represent the grievances of individual members. This restriction is irrational because experience shows that unions can do much good to their members by representing the grievances of individual members to the employers. These members are unable to represent their disabilities properly, and it is the work of unions, which are in the position of advocates for their members, to present the disabilities and grievances on their behalf. The Labour Commission recommended to the Railway Administrations a more generous policy regarding the recognition of, and encouragement to, the unions of their workers and the establishment of conciliation machinery for joint consultation in the shape of a Joint Standing Central Board for all the railways composed of equal representatives of the Agents and workers and of a Railway Council on each railway working in conjunction with district and local works committees, all composed of equal representatives of each Administration and its workers and holding meetings at regular intervals for considering the grievances of the workers.*

Joint Works Committees have been created also in a few establishments of other industries for bringing together the employers and workers to discuss in a friendly spirit the demands and grievances of the latter, so as to remove misunderstanding and discontent in time. But they have not succeeded so far, mainly because the employers have been generally reluctant to discuss with their workers the latter's demands and grievances in a spirit of friendliness and reasonableness, and have been unwilling to redress many of the grievances and to grant many of the demands without a threat of, or a resort to, a strike.† The Commission has suggested that employers should not regard these committees

* Report, pp. 168-9. See also *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 35.*

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 433.*

as rivals to trade unions, and that they should seek the co-operation of unions, wherever they exist, in establishing and working these committees.*

However, the future of trade unionism depends mainly upon the efforts of the unionists themselves. The utmost encouragement and help from the employers and Government cannot instil vigour into unions which lack vitality. Real strength must come from within. It is essential, therefore, to eliminate the tendency of unionists towards inertia and to train them to play an active part in the proceedings of the unions. Of the two alternatives of making the unions' work efficient by doing most of it themselves, and of training members in the work, giving them responsibility, and allowing them to learn from errors, the leaders must unhesitatingly choose the latter.†

This will no doubt mean a temporary falling off in the ability of unions to protect the interests of their members. But unionism cannot thrive if it has to depend largely upon outside encouragement and guidance. Members, therefore, should be given as large a share in the work of unions as possible, and branch meetings should be held often. To secure this object, it is desirable that the provision of the Trade Unions Act, that at least half of the executive of a registered union must be actual workers in the industry to which the union relates, should be modified so as to increase the proportion to two-thirds.

It is also essential to expand the activities of unions so as to increase the benefits to members and to enable them to play a more active part in the work of the unions. With the exception of a few unions like the Madras Labour Union and the Ahmedabad Textile

* Similar conditions in this respect have prevailed in Japan also. "The shop committee system existing at present in Japan is more or less a type of organisation functioning as a consulting body to the employers and no trade-union principle is embodied. Hence it is attacked by labour unions as a tool of employers to evade the encroachment of labour. It can be raised, however, to the standard of a negotiating body for industrial disputes and means of disseminating the point of view of employers and employees." Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 278.

† Cf. *Labour Commission Report*, p. 327.

Union which have been carrying on various welfare activities, the tendency of unions in India so far has been to regard themselves as existing solely for obtaining concessions from employers, and to ignore the very important work that they can do by way of mutual help.

This tendency must be effectively eradicated as soon as possible, and unions must start activities such as the provision of day schools for children, night schools for adults, reading rooms, libraries, dispensaries, co-operative credit societies, co-operative stores, cheap grain and cloth shops, restaurants, gymnasiums, death benefits, and assistance and guidance for securing the benefits of the Workmen's Compensation Act. If they can start schemes for paying sickness, unemployment, or old age benefits, their stability, and the training and unity of their members would be further promoted. But it is too much to expect them to do this because, as stated above, they know that Governments in the West have already begun to make some provision for the sick, the aged and the unemployed workers, and that the Government in India will soon have to follow suit.

Another great need is the provision of union leaders from the ranks of the workers themselves. As mentioned before, the bulk of the leaders have so far been outsiders, professional and public men and social workers, and although the movement owes a great deal to them, they do not generally have a sufficient knowledge of the technical details of industries, cannot have a complete understanding of, and feel full sympathy with, the aspirations of the workers, often attempt too much by organising and guiding several unions at the same time and, their work being honorary, have frequently shown a weak sense of responsibility and a disinclination to do their utmost for the unions.

The movement, therefore, cannot thrive unless it is led by the workers themselves. These leaders should be full-time, paid officers of the unions. If they are honorary officers, and have to earn their living by working in a factory, they cannot afford sufficient time and energy

for the work of the unions, cannot show a sufficient independence of spirit in their dealings with employers for protecting the interests of their fellow-members, and cannot always act with a full sense of responsibility. The unions should not grudge the payment of salaries to them, because the latter will make it worth while by increasing the income of the former by means of increasing membership and inducing the members to pay regular subscriptions. A few such leaders of the proper sort have already become available, and many more will come forward if they get opportunities. Therefore, the present outside leaders of the movement should do their best to find out suitable men from among the workers to serve as trade union officials, and should give them training for the work.

The qualities needed to make efficient officers are literacy, capacity for organisation and hard work, coolness of temper and patience. The training needed by them is a properly guided comparative study of economic, social and particularly labour problems in India and the West, and an insight into the details of unions' work. In the course of their training they should generally maintain themselves by doing ordinary industrial work, and payment to them by the unions should commence only after their training is completed and after they have assumed full responsibility for the unions' work. But, in selected cases, they may be given scholarships by Government for an intensive study at colleges or universities, as their efficiency would be increased by such an advanced training, with freedom from the necessity of earning their living by doing industrial work. Finally, the labour delegates and advisers that are sent by India annually to the International Labour Conferences should as far as possible consist of labour leaders who have been actual workers, and they should be helped by Government to prolong their stay in Europe in order to make a first hand study of the working of trade unions in the West.*

* Cf. *Labour Commission Report*, pp. 328-30.

CHAPTER XII.

Wages and Standard of Living of Industrial Labour.

Prices rose rapidly and considerably between 1918 and 1920, and as wages in principal industries did not rise in proportion, real wages became less than before and also during the greater part of the War. Since 1921 a substantial fall in prices has taken place, but as wages have not fallen in proportion, real wages of industrial workers are at present higher than at any previous time.

In organised industries two methods of payment exist, time and piece wages. The latter are in force wherever it is practicable to determine accurately the output of individual workers. Thus, weavers are usually paid piece wages. But if time and piece wages give the same results, the former are generally preferred. From statistics regarding cases under the Workmen's Compensation Act and investigations conducted in various industrial centres for the Labour Commission, it is found that the average wages of individual families (the average number of workers in each family being $1\frac{1}{2}$) in organised industries are the lowest in Madras, the Central Provinces and the United Provinces, being Rs. 30, a little higher in Bengal and Bihar and Orissa, exceeding Rs. 30, still higher in the Punjab, being Rs. 35, and the highest in Bombay, being Rs. 40.

When men and women do the same work together and are paid piece wages, the piece rates are usually the same for both. Nevertheless, even in such cases the earnings of women tend to be less than those of men owing partly to their inferior skill, strength or attendance, and partly to the fact that the majority of them have to bear the treble strain of housework, factory work and child-rearing, the housework being made more taxing by the necessity of bringing water from some

distance and waiting to obtain it, and by certain customs. In all other cases, the wages of women are substantially lower than those of men,[†] and the principal reason advanced in support of this distinction has been that while, owing to the universality of marriage and the joint family system in India, men workers have invariably to support a large number of dependents, women workers, owing to the same joint family system, have not to support even themselves fully. However, enquiries conducted by Miss Mathesan, as well as by the writer, show that a substantial proportion of women workers have to maintain not only themselves but dependents also.* This is, therefore, a problem that Indian industries will have to face in the near future.

In the cotton mill industry, according to the investigations of the Bombay Labour Office, the average monthly earning of men operatives working without any absence are Rs. 44, 33 and 27 in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Sholapur respectively, and those of women operatives working in the same way are Rs. 20, 21 and 11½ in the same centres. In Sholapur all workers, who do not lose more than 4 days in the month, get in addition a grain allowance in the shape of the right to purchase from the employers 18 seers of jawari and 2 seers of dal for Rs. 2 irrespective of their retail selling prices in the town. The value of this concession varies between Rs. 2 and 3.† According to the reports of the Chief Inspectors of Factories, the average monthly earnings of male weavers and spinners are Rs. 33 and 25 respectively in Cawnpore and Rs. 26 and 20 in Madras city. The earnings are appreciably higher in the Punjab and Bengal than those ruling in Cawnpore, and appreciably lower in other centres of the Madras Presidency than those prevailing in Madras city.

In the jute mills, according to the information given by the Indian Jute Mills Association to the Labour Commission, the earnings in multiple shift working per week, consisting of 5 days, are Rs. 9½ and 7½ for sacking and

* See Mathesan, *Indian Industry*, p. 40.

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 74.

hessian weaving, Rs. 5 and 5½ for sacking and hessian winding, Rs. 3¼ and 3½ for sacking and hessian spinning, and Rs. 3½ for batching. The rates are appreciably lower in multiple shift working per week of 4 days and a little higher in single shift working per week of 5½ days.*

In the engineering and metal industries the earnings are the highest in Bombay city, masons earning from Rs. 50 to 70 per month, carpenters and blacksmiths from Rs. 60 to 75, and fitters and turners from Rs. 65 to Rs. 80, and the lowest in the United Provinces, Madras, Bengal and Bihar, the same categories of workers earning about Rs. 30, 35 and 40 respectively. The earnings in the Central Provinces and the Punjab are between these two extremes.

In seasonal factories the daily rates vary between annas 8 and 12 for ordinary men and annas 5 and 8 for women. Those whose work is skilled or responsible, such as fitters and engine drivers, are given much higher and monthly wages.

From the statements supplied by mine owners to the Chief Inspector of Mines, it is found that the daily wages of miners, loaders and women working underground in coal mines are annas 13, 10 and 8 respectively, and of skilled and unskilled labourers and women working on the surface are about annas 12, 9 and 6 respectively. The average monthly earnings of the miners cannot, however, be determined from the above daily earnings, because their attendance is very irregular, and from the information obtained from various sources the Labour Commission has come to the conclusion that the average monthly earnings of miners vary between Rs. 10 and 15.† The Chief Inspector of Mines stated to the Commission that since the war miners' wages had increased a little, but that as the cost of living had also risen they were no better off than before.

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 299-301.*

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I, pp. 65, 133*
230-1.

From the statements supplied to the Labour Commission by the Railway Board concerning the principal railway lines in British India, it is seen that the workers in the engineering departments make up $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total subordinate staff with an average monthly wage of Rs. 18 per head, that those in the locomotive, carriage and wagon workshops, and electrical and signal departments form $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total staff with an average monthly wage of Rs. 40, and that those in the transportation and commercial departments are a little more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total staff with an average monthly wage of Rs. 44. Besides, all of them get free housing accommodation, uniforms and clothing, free railway passes for travelling, medical attendance and educational facilities, the total value of which is substantial and much beyond that of similar facilities received by most other industrial workers. Moreover, workers drawing between Rs. 15 and Rs. 29 per month can, and those receiving Rs. 30 or more must, take advantage of the Provident Fund schemes, and $\frac{2}{3}$ of the workers in receipt of Rs. 20 or more do so at present. Consequently, railway service has become very popular, better workers have become available, and the supply has exceeded the demand.

Before the war, the wages of railway workers were determined in relation to those existing in other industries. Since the war, however, the wages have been raised owing to a rise in the standard and cost of living, and they are no longer fixed solely in accordance with the principle of demand and supply. Further, they have been fixed on an incremental basis, so that the workers get higher wages as their service and age increase. The workers are divided into grades and are promoted to higher grades as vacancies take place. The average wage for all the railway workers is now Rs. 34, and this represents an increase of 124% over that prevailing in 1913-14. Although a substantial fall in prices has taken place recently, there has been no reduction in the wages, because the railway authorities have begun to realise that the accepted standards of living and wages are

being raised, and that what was regarded as satisfactory before or during the war is no longer so.

However, it must be mentioned that even now rather more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the workers on the principal railway lines receive as wages less than Rs. 20 per month, and that many of the workers such as gatemen, gangmen, pointsmen, watchmen and lampmen are started on a monthly wages varying between Rs. 7 and Rs. 9. At the same time, it is necessary to remember that the railway earnings have been hit hard by the continuing trade depression, and that this has made it difficult for the Railway Administrations to raise further the wages even of the poorly paid workers.

The dock labourers in Bombay city can earn from annas 14 to Rs. 1½ per day, but as their supply exceeds the demand, employment is irregular, and the average monthly earnings are about Rs. 25 per head. In Calcutta they are Rs. 20. Unskilled labourers doing manual work in factories get between Rs. 20 and 15 a month in the Bombay Presidency, about Rs. 15 in the Punjab, and between Rs. 15 and 10 in the other provinces. There is also a large number of unskilled labourers employed casually or for limited periods on daily wages in various miscellaneous occupations, the daily wages being a little over annas 12 and 8 for men and women in the Bombay Presidency, and a little less in the Punjab, annas 8 and 6 in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and the Central Provinces, and annas 6 and 5 in the other provinces. These wages are much influenced by agricultural wages in the vicinity, but, although low, are a little better than the latter.

The wages of the workers on Assam tea plantations are piece wages. The older system known as the hazira and ticca system still prevails on many plantations. Under it the workers have to do a standard daily task known as the hazira which takes only 5 hours, so that they can work extra, the payment for which is called ticca. The payment for the hazira varies between 6 and 4 annas for men, and 5 and 3 annas for women, and that for the ticca is 4 annas for men, and 3 annas for

women. This system is giving way to the new unit system, which is intended to give the workers a greater freedom regarding attendance and to allow them to earn as much or as little as they care. Under this system payment is made per unit of work, being one anna per unit for hoeing and pruning and $\frac{1}{2}$ anna per unit for plucking.

The actual monthly wages vary between Rs. 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ and 10 $\frac{1}{2}$, 11 and 8 $\frac{1}{2}$, and 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ and 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ for men, women and children respectively, because absenteeism is an important factor, the workers doing on the average $\frac{2}{3}$ of the work they could have done by regular attendance. Absenteeism, however, is bound to exist in some degree, because private cultivation and household work in an agricultural environment, such as the weekly purchase of supplies from the market, the collection of firewood, the grazing of cattle and the threshing of corn, take up a large part of the workers' time. But there has been a rise in the wages and a fall in the cost of living in recent years, and the economic condition of the workers has improved appreciably. In spite of their lack of education and organisation, and their isolation, they have improved their standard of living, and plantation markets show that the luxuries of ten years ago are becoming the necessities of to-day.*

We must not think them to be worse off than other industrial workers simply because their wages are lower. For, firstly, on the plantations, unlike other industries, almost all the members of a worker's family earn wages, and therefore, in spite of low individual wages, the total earnings of the family can be large enough to prevent appreciable economic hardship. Secondly, the workers receive concessions, in addition to money wages, and their contentment depends mainly upon the value of the concessions. They receive free quarters, medical attendance, firewood, grazing for cattle and advance of wages without interest. The last, however, is often regarded with suspicion because they feel that they are bound to the particular plantations till the advances are repaid. But the most

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. VI, Part I, pp. 18-20 and 74.

valuable concession is the grant of land for private cultivation at a very low rent. As the workers' craving for private land, if fully met, would make it unnecessary for them to work on the plantations, the planters confine the allotment of land for private cultivation within the plantations to those families which can supply labour on them, and the workers, who are eager and able to become independent cultivators, have to take up Government land outside the plantations. The area available for private cultivation is also limited on most plantations, so that the majority of the workers can get only small holdings. Finally, the enjoyment of the concession depends entirely upon the wishes of the planters, as there is no tenancy law to regulate grants of land on the plantations. However, eviction, except for a redistribution of the land among the workers, is rare. But it must be admitted that the distribution of the land among the workers is frequently unfair, some of them getting more than their due share and a proportion of them getting no land at all.

In spite of the value attached to the above concessions the importance of cash wages must not be ignored. Workers have to be brought from distant places, and cash wages are the chief stimulus to immigration. The system of piece wages makes it possible for those workers, who have not obtained land for private cultivation, to obtain a larger income by working longer than the others.

It thus becomes clear that in most industries under the present standard of earnings, men cannot become the sole bread-winners of their families.* Their women also must go out to work although the strain imposed on them by the treble responsibility of home-making,

* It is interesting to note that wages in Japan, although low according to Western standards, are much higher than those in India. "Japanese wages range from 30 to 80 cents (Japanese currency converted into American currency) a day for women and from 50 cents to 2 dollars a day for men. The workers receive additional reward in the form of free or partially free lodging and food, clothing and other necessaries at below cost." J. E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, p. 351. According to the same writer the value of this additional reward ranges from 25 to 40 per cent of the money wages. See pp. 354-5.

child-rearing and factory work is tremendous. Evidence placed before the Commission from all parts of India goes to show that sheer necessity compels women to work in factories, mines and plantations, and that they would remain at home if not driven to work by economic pressure.* But a more serious aspect of the present industrial situation is presented by the fact that the majority of the families are compelled to make their children also work, leading to their exploitation, simply because the parents cannot earn enough to feed and clothe them.

Most employers, whose establishments produce articles used or consumed by the workers, give them the right to purchase limited quantities for their own consumption at cost price. Moreover, a few employers maintain cheap grain and cloth shops for the benefit of their workers. Prices in the bazaars fluctuate much and in periods of scarcity may rise very much. The workers must buy their food in small quantities because they have neither the money needed for purchasing, nor the room needed for storing, large quantities. But the employers know when and where to buy it and can store it in large amounts. They fix retail prices which they regard as reasonable, and stick to them even if they involve a loss at times, because they may regard the loss as covered by the low wages paid to the workers. But regular attendance at work is usually made a condition of the right to make purchases at these shops. The workers, however, are free to purchase their requirements from the bazaars, if the prices there happen to be lower than those charged at the employers' shops, and to return to the latter at their will. But the bazaar grocers frequently charge higher prices to those workers who make their purchases from the employers' shops whenever they can, and serious hardships may have to be experienced by those workers who are not allowed to

*In Japan although 50 per cent of the factory workers are women, most of them are unmarried, and the majority of them quit work as soon as they are married. Very few women would remain unmarried in Japan. See Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 118.

purchase foodstuffs from the latter shops because they have been absent from work through illness.

In many industrial areas there is a great need for the supply of the necessaries of life of better qualities than those sold in the bazaars, and at more reasonable and stable prices, but for the above reason and also to prevent the danger of abuse, more reliance should be placed upon the establishment of co-operative stores and other reliable independent stores than upon an increase in the number of employers' stores.

Industrial workers do not always get all the wages that they earn, because employers may make various deductions from the wages. The deductions are of three kinds *viz.* fines levied for breaches of discipline and absence from work, deductions owing to damage to materials or machinery incurred by the employers, due to some fault of the workers, and deductions for the use of materials or tools by the workers and for other benefits supplied by the employers, such as medical attendance, education, reading rooms, interest on advances out of wages, and for charitable, religious, or other purposes determined by the employers.

Although the total loss to the workers from all these deductions is not large, it is necessary to limit by legislation the power of the employers to make these deductions, for several reasons. (Firstly, the workers are entirely at the mercy of the employers in this matter and cannot check abuses owing to the lack of organisation. With some employers fining becomes a habit and is practised as the line of least resistance.) In many cases, the power is delegated to subordinates who lack the judicial qualities necessary for its proper exercise, there are no rules and regulations setting out the conditions on which the deductions are to be made, and no limits have been prescribed with regard to the extent of the deductions.* (Secondly, the fact that wages generally are low and in most cases are barely enough for the purchase of the primary necessaries of life, makes even

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 80-1.*

small deductions an appreciable burden, and larger deductions may compel the workers to borrow and to run into debt. Thirdly, deductions may cause severe hardship in a number of cases. Finally, with regard to compulsory deductions, it is essential to make sure that they are made for legitimate objects, and that the workers obtain in return proportionate advantages.)

The principal objects in imposing fines *viz.* the promotion of discipline and efficiency, and the prevention of insubordination, disobedience, and late or irregular attendance,* are justifiable, and the alternatives in the shape of the suspension or dismissal of workers would create greater hardship and insecurity. What is needed, therefore, is not the abolition of fines, but their regulation, except in the case of children where they should be abolished by law, owing to their low wages, want of experience, and utter helplessness. In the case of adults, the Labour Commission has recommended that fining should be regulated in the following ways.† Firstly, the maximum period for the deduction of a fine should be one month from the date on which it is imposed. Secondly, the maximum deductions in any month should not be larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ anna per rupee of the wages. Thirdly, the proceeds of fines should be utilised in promoting objects advantageous to the workers.‡ And lastly, employers should be made to state particular actions or omissions on the part of the workers for which the fines are levied.

It is also desirable to regulate fining in the following additional ways. Every employer should be made to frame rules clearly defining all offences for which fines can be imposed and laying down conditions under which they can be imposed, and must bring the rules to the notice of his workers. Secondly, the power to fine

* In many factories two days' wages are deducted for each day's absence without leave.

† Report, p. 219.

‡ The Railway Trade Unions complained to the Commission that fines collected from Indian railway workers were utilised for the maintenance of recreation institutes for the European and Anglo-Indian staffs and of schools for their children. *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part I, pp. 470, 488, 495.*

should be given only to managers and heads of departments, and no subordinate, whose remuneration depends in any way upon the amount of fines collected, should be allowed even to recommend fines. Finally, the deduction of two days' wages for each day's absence without leave should be prohibited.*

As regards deductions for 'damage or loss sustained by the employers, although generally they are *bona fide* deductions made to serve as correctives for bad or negligent work and not for recompensing the employers for the damage sustained, workers complain that the amount of the damage and their responsibility for it are fixed by the employers. The complaint should be met by providing that deductions must not be greater than the wholesale prices of the goods damaged, and that registers must be kept of all such deductions.

Deductions from the wages of railway workers are called debits and are made with regard to loss of, or damage to, railway property in workers' charge, compensation paid by the railways to the public for loss of, or damage to, goods, undercharges in fares and freights, short remittances and base coins. But in many cases the workers compensate themselves for these deductions by collecting equivalent amounts from the merchants who pay them out of policy as they have to deal regularly with the workers. This is unsatisfactory. Workers have also to suffer much hardship when large deductions are made several months after the mistakes were made.† It is, therefore, necessary to investigate how far the debits are due to defects in rating and routing methods, and how far due to inefficiency or negligence of the workers, and whether it is possible to adopt other disciplinary measures. Further, a maximum should be laid down for the amount of these debits bearing some proportion to the wages, and for the period of recovering them.

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 88-9.*

† In some cases workers earning Rs. 60 or less per month have been debited Rs. 200 to 300. See *supra*, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 382.

Deductions made for services performed by the employers and accepted willingly by the workers should be regarded as legitimate, and the only restriction needed is that the deductions should not be greater than the value of the services. Deductions should be permitted for the provision of housing, tools, or raw materials. Other deductions should be made only after they are sanctioned by the Provincial Governments, which may permit deductions on account of subscriptions to provident funds, medical assistance, and co-operative and other activities for the benefit of the workers.

Employers should be made to keep registers of all deductions from wages, and these registers should be examined periodically by factory inspectors, in the case of factories, and by audit officers in the case of railways, to ensure compliance with the provisions of the suggested law. Trade unions, wherever they exist, should also help in the matter. If deductions not allowed by the law are made, Commissioners of Workmen's Compensation, or selected magistrates, should be empowered, on application from the aggrieved workers, or trade unions or persons acting on their behalf, or factory inspectors, and after giving the employers an opportunity for explanation, to order a refund of the deductions with compensation to the applicants. Prosecutions should be launched, with the permission of the inspectors or the officers empowered to order the refund, only in serious cases where heavy and palpably unfair deductions have been made for the sake of gain, or where unauthorised deductions have been repeated.* This legislation should be applied only to establishments coming under the Factories Act, because the deductions have reached such proportions as to need legislation only in large establishments, and because otherwise the burden and cost of administration would be too heavy. A bill incorporating all these recommendations of the Commission regarding deductions from wages is at present under the consideration of the Central Legislature.

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Report*, pp. 216-21.

(Indebtedness is far more important than deductions from wages in preventing workers from benefiting fully from the wages that they earn, and is a principal cause of their low standard of life.) The Labour Commission has estimated that at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of the industrial workers are in debt, and that in most cases the debt is larger than 3 months' wages. The rate of interest usually charged is one anna per month for every rupee lent, *i.e.* 75% per annum. At this rate, interest on debt amounting to 3 months' wages comes to 20% of the monthly wages. Frequently still higher rates of interest, reaching a maximum of 150%, are charged. Some money-lenders obtain a higher rate than even 150% by taking promissory notes for larger amounts than the loans really given.*

The money-lenders usually do not receive the full interest regularly, so they add the arrears of interest to the sum lent, and the original loan of a small sum frequently develops in a few years into a large and permanent debt. In many cases, the money-lenders take from the workers and their families the whole of their wages on pay day and give them back a portion just sufficient for bare subsistence. Many hardworking operatives are compelled to forego some of the necessities of life in order to pay merely the interest without any chance of being able to pay off any portion of the actual debt. Thus, indebtedness is a great check to efficiency of labour. The indebted workers putting forth an extra effort merely benefit their money-lenders. Further, the Chief Inspector of Factories in Bombay, in his annual reports for 1928 and 1929, has laid stress on indebtedness as a cause of industrial unrest.

The main causes of indebtedness are expenditure on festivals, especially marriages, births, deaths and other events of life, and unemployment caused by sickness, dismissals, strikes, lockouts and trade depression. Heavy expenditure on a marriage amounting to more than a year's wages, induced by social pressure and financed by a large loan, leads to the enslavement of many workers

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 97 and Vol. III, Part I, p. 182.

for many years.* [The high rate of interest is due to the fact that industrial workers as debtors are not permanent residents in any industrial centre, have little or no security to offer to the money-lenders, and cannot use their borrowing to increase their earning capacity.] Their mobility has also proved to be a great difficulty in the way of developing the co-operative movement among them for eliminating the money-lenders. When a co-operative society is established, its members are apt to vanish into the country leaving debts behind them. The absence of close touch among the members makes it difficult for them to watch each other's doings, to judge adequately the eligibility of candidates for membership, and to enforce the joint and unlimited liability which has been the chief factor in the success of co-operation in rural areas.

[Even if it is possible to enforce this liability, the industrial workers have no adequate security to offer. Even if they possess rights in ancestral village lands, these will generally be at a great distance and will therefore be useless to the society. Moreover, they can hardly use the borrowed sums for productive purposes, so that the society has nothing to depend upon for the repayment of the loans, except their future thrift, honesty, and capacity to work and earn wages.] Further, the illiteracy of the members of a society is a much greater stumbling block in urban than in rural areas, because it is more likely to create misunderstandings among people who come from different parts of the country and have different associations. The jealousy shown towards these societies by overseers and clerks, who act as money-lenders, or who are in league with money-lenders, is another difficulty. Finally, such societies will have to be financed substantially by the employers, and therefore

* The Jute Mills Association in its evidence before the Commission emphasised the fact that large sums of money were annually remitted by jute workers to their village homes. But the investigations carried out in 1930 by an officer of the Co-operative Department show that much of the remittances represent borrowings and not savings, and are sent under compulsion for the maintenance of dependents left behind in the village homes and for agricultural or ceremonial expenses. See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. V, Part I, p. 300 and Part II, pp. 167, 172 and 222.

they cannot yield the economic or educational benefits of rural societies unless a powerful strengthening influence is exercised over the members by outside organisers.*

In spite of these difficulties many societies were started, notably in Bombay, but only a few of them have been fairly successful.† These defects can be removed only gradually by the education of the workers, by the grant of leave to them, and by the appointment of a labour officer in each establishment, as suggested above, so as to inculcate in them a sense of responsibility, to give them regularity of employment, and to remove the domination of the overseers over them.

Facile credit has proved to be a curse for the workers. Large loans obtained not for subsistence but for satisfying the demands of social prestige and customs have proved to be most harmful to them. The gravest drawback of the existing system is the ease with which they can borrow large sums which they can seldom hope to repay. Their illiteracy makes it very difficult for them to develop any business sense and to think of the future, and their inability to make any calculations compels them to accept whatever figure of increase or decrease in indebtedness is mentioned to them by their money-lenders. The Usurious Loans Act of 1918 empowers courts dealing with suits for the recovery of debts to relieve debtors of excessive interest, if the debt agreements are quite unfair from the start, but it has failed to give any appreciable relief owing to the unwillingness of the courts to take up issues that are not raised by the pleadings.

The lack of more effective legislation for checking this evil has been due partly to the unwillingness of Government and the Legislatures to interfere with the sanctity of contract, and partly to their belief that legislation cannot be made effective owing to the existence of opportunities for evasion by the money-lenders. But

* Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, pp. 254-5 and *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. III, Part I, p. 183.

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 45-6.

no sanctity can attach to contracts between shrewd, grasping and sometimes unscrupulous money-lenders and ignorant, simple and helpless workers, because in most cases they are very unfair from the beginning. Moreover, the harm done by the existing system is so pronounced that even the danger of much evasion should not be allowed to stand in the way of the adoption of legislative measures for educating public opinion in the matter, intensifying the forces favourable to the freedom of the workers, and making the prudent and cautious money-lenders unwilling to try evasion. Further, the danger of evasion must not stand in the way of the enactment of measures needed for the protection of the weak and the illiterate.

As the extensive ruin caused by the existing system of facile credit is far greater than any hardships that may result to the workers from a decrease in the willingness of the money-lenders to lend to them, the protective measures should aim at making the grant of loans, which the workers would be unable to repay, unprofitable to the money-lenders. Therefore, the Labour Commission has suggested that the wages and provident funds of the workers should be freed altogether from attachment for the recovery of debt, and that arrest or imprisonment for debt should be done away with except when the workers have been proved to be able but unwilling to repay.*

Further, the help of the law should be given to the money-lenders for the recovery of only such debts as the borrowers can reasonably repay within a definite period. To achieve this, the Commission has recommended that special courts should be established, which should in summary enquiries estimate the borrowers' assets and wages on the one hand, and legitimate expenditure for the subsistence of themselves and their families on the other, during the following two years, and should then issue decrees to the money-lenders based on the difference between the two amounts, the decrees remaining valid for not more than three years. Further,

* Report, pp. 231-2.

as many money-lenders wait outside factories on pay day and compel the debtors as they come out to part with a substantial portion of their wages under threats of violence, waiting near industrial establishments for the recovery of debts should be made a criminal and cognizable offence. Legislation for giving effect to all these recommendations of the Labour Commission is at present under the consideration of the Government of India. Finally, trade unions and social workers should help the workers to take advantage of these protective measures.

Periods of wage payments have also an important bearing on the indebtedness of the workers. Monthly payments are universal, except in jute mills and mines where they are weekly, in Ahmedabad cotton mills and all Cawnpore mills where they are fortnightly, and in seasonal factories where they are daily. A delay of 10 or 15 days in payment is general because otherwise the workers, for many reasons, are often tempted to leave employment suddenly, especially before they get accustomed to it, but the delay is not very important as its only result is to increase by so many days the first period of work without wages.* But the length of the wage period is far more important, and its decrease will produce important effects.

The arguments against its decrease are, firstly, that the workers are afraid that if wages are paid weekly their money-lenders will demand the making up of the accounts weekly without reducing the rate of interest, and that this will increase the burden of debt as compound interest is charged, and secondly, that as there is a substantial falling off in the number of workers attending work on the day succeeding pay day, the decrease will increase absenteeism.† But the balance of advantages is on the side of the arguments in favour of the decrease. The shopkeepers, who are frequently also money-lenders, and from whom the workers have

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part II, p. 206.*

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 94 and Part II, p. 312, and Vol. V, Part II, p. 223.*

to purchase the necessaries of life on credit, secure interest by charging them higher prices, and if the workers are previously in debt, purchases on one month's credit, necessitated by the monthly payment of wages, mean a substantial increase in their burden. Moreover, as the simple-minded and illiterate workers find it difficult to think of the future, a decrease in the wage period will produce increased efficiency of work and more careful expenditure on their part. It will also increase the money-lenders' difficulty of obtaining repayment of debts and therefore diminish the workers' ability to borrow from them.

But, while the Labour Commission has urged all employers to adopt weekly payment of wages, it was not prepared to recommend its immediate enforcement by legislation for fear of a dislocation in industries and the hostility of jobbers and others who desired to maintain the prevailing system. The change from monthly to weekly payments should be made gradually, and as a first step it has suggested that legislation should be passed enforcing wage payments for periods not exceeding 16 days in all textile factories, railway and engineering workshops, and iron and steel works, and that the Provincial Governments should be empowered to apply this provision to other industries also, but that the workers must not be deprived of any benefits attaching to monthly payments.

Further, the legal period of notice from the workers to the employers as regards quitting work should nowhere be greater than a week, whereas the employers at present insist on a month's notice, hold the wages back in its absence, and subject the workers to considerable loss. As the return of the workers to their villages is often connected with illness, either their own or of a relation, it is often impossible for them to give a month's notice. Moreover, even if they think beforehand of returning to their village homes for a marriage, or at seed or harvest time, most of them do not have the foresight and the wisdom to give a month's notice.

Finally, legislation should be passed enforcing the payment of wages in all industrial establishments within a week after the expiry of the period during which they are earned, if the workers continue to be employed, and within two days from the date of discharge, if any workers are discharged. Experience shows that keeping back the wages of every month for nearly a half of the succeeding month does not really prevent the workers from leaving suddenly, that it only increases the opportunities of overseers and pay clerks for further exactions, and that the long interval is not needed for the calculation of the wages, which can be paid promptly, if the workers are divided into groups and paid on different days of the month. A bill incorporating this recommendation is at present under the consideration of the Central Legislature.

It is still believed by many employers and others that low paid labour is cheap.* But many employers in India have already shown that it pays them to give higher wages to their workers, and many other employers may find the same if they have courage to try this experiment. However, it is not always reasonable to insist that an improvement in the efficiency of workers must precede an increase in their wages. In many cases it has been found that, if employers offer better wages first, improved efficiency follows, as not only the existing workers put forth better effort, but also a better type of worker is attracted to the establishments. Efficiency or production bonuses are given to workers in several concerns and have proved useful in stimulating them to greater effort, and such bonuses can be introduced with much advantage in other concerns. Profit-sharing

* A similar belief has been erroneously held in Japan also. "Wages have been low, working hours long and labour for the most part unorganised. And yet, Japanese labour has not been really cheap, certainly not as cheap as it is considered to be by Western industrialists or even by the Japanese employers. Labour is dear or cheap to industry according to the labour cost per unit of output, not according to the wage per worker. The output of the workers in Japan is low compared with the output of workers in Western countries. The element of skill has been neglected for the cheapness of the individual. Efficiency has been sacrificed to low wages." J. E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, pp. 346-7. He has proved this by means of facts and figures on p. 367 *et seq.*

schemes, however, are not likely to prove successful in the existing stage of industrial development and the mental equipment of the workers in India.

Even if it is not possible to increase the rates of wages, the earnings of workers can often be increased by assuring to them a greater regularity of employment. The poverty and low standard of living of workers are frequently heightened by keeping in many industries a far larger number of them than is really needed. The substitution of regular for irregular workers is a matter of great importance and, as stated before, employers can do a great deal in this matter. Even if the surplus workers that now come to industrial centres get no employment in their villages, they would be in a better condition there, as they would live in a healthier environment and more cheaply. Moreover, they can get intermittent work in the villages. The shrinkage of the labouring population in industrial centres would also reduce the intensity of the problems of sanitation, medical relief and housing. Lastly, the regular and better paid workers would improve in efficiency, and benefit themselves, their employers, and the community.

The earnings of some of the lowest paid workers can be improved by the adoption of schemes of standardised wages. At present, partly custom and partly the law of supply and demand are the bases of wage fixation in most industries. The result of the lack of proper wage fixation, owing to the differing extent of combination among workers, is that wage rates vary, not only from province to province and from centre to centre, but also in the same industry located in the same centre and even in the same factory. This diversity is an important cause of the insecurity felt by the workers and of their constant movement from one factory to another. There is much need, consequently, for the adoption of common standards of payment for similar classes of work in several industries, particularly the cotton and jute industries.*

* For a full discussion of this problem see *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 75-8, and Vol. V, Part I, p. 153.

The Labour Commission was convinced that a larger degree of uniformity in this respect could be established in these industries, without any adverse effects upon them, thus assuring higher wages to some of the worst paid workers. On the railways, standardisation of wages is aimed at, and two railway administrations have already established it to a considerable extent. However, disparities in wages and service conditions continue in many centres which are the termini of more than one railway, in workshops not far from each other, and in different districts of several railways. This shows that the scope for the extension of wage standardisation is large, and wherever practicable, standard rates should be fixed for different classes of railway workers, subject only to variations in those districts in which economic conditions differ appreciably.

A Convention approved by the International Labour Conference in 1928 recommended the establishment of a minimum wage-fixing machinery in those industries in which wages were not effectively regulated by collective bargaining or some other arrangement, and in which wages were exceptionally low. The Indian Central Legislature and the Government of India agreed that the convention could not be ratified by India until the problem was examined by the Labour Commission.* Several trade unions, in their evidence before the Commission, emphasised the importance of a minimum wage not only for providing the poorest paid workers with the minimum necessary for a livelihood, but also for introducing an impartial element in wage negotiations, as wages were usually determined not by means of negotiations but arbitrarily by the employers.

But the Commission did not find any industries of the kind mentioned by the convention, in which sufficient investigations had been carried out, to justify its recommending the creation of a minimum wage-fixing machinery for raising the wages of a class of workers whose standard of living was depressed below that of their

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 223.

fellows.* The Commission, however, believed that in some unregulated industries, such as those concerned with mica-cutting, wool-cleaning, shellac-manufacture, bidi-making, carpet-weaving and leather-tanning, there was a strong case for investigation, and suggested that they should be examined with regard to the necessity and practicability of establishing a minimum wage-fixing machinery.

The Commission has, however, recommended the creation of a wage-fixing machinery for the tea industry in Assam, on the ground that the workers in this industry are in special need of protection, owing to the striking disparity between their bargaining power and that of their employers, which enhances the danger that some of the workers may not obtain a fair wage, especially in a period of rising prices.† There is a strong combination of the planters to prevent any of them from paying appreciably higher wages than their neighbours and from enticing the labour of neighbours. The workers, on the other hand, are entirely unorganised on account of being immigrants from distant areas and speaking several different vernaculars, and owing to the universal absence of education, the large proportion of aboriginals, and geographical isolation. The agreement among the planters to prevent enticement of labour makes it very difficult for those workers, who are disgusted with the treatment received on one estate, to obtain employment on another, and thus seriously checks healthy competition. The lack of other employment in Assam, and the great distances between the estates and their village homes, that make it very difficult for them to return to their homes without the help of their employers, also destroy their freedom.

The creation of a wage-fixing machinery would benefit the planters also, as the protection that it would give to the workers would help to dispel the suspicion and prejudice that have hitherto prevailed in most of the recruiting areas of the country against employment in the Assam tea gardens, thereby making the recruitment of

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part II, pp. 224 and 228.*

† Report, pp. 388-97.

labour troublesome and costly for the planters. The Commission has suggested that before undertaking legislation Government should conduct an enquiry, with the help of selected representatives of the planters, with regard to the actual rates of wages and variations in them from estate to estate, and the most suitable form of wage machinery. Government should then invite the planters to submit a scheme for the creation of such machinery for its consideration and should finally pass legislation establishing the machinery, which would be worked by a Board or Boards, having equal representation of the planters and the workers, and an independent chairman consisting of an official.

The law should fix, not the actual piece rates, but only the basic rates, which would not exceed those that are paid at present in the better managed estates. This would raise the wages of the workers on the poorly managed estates to the general level. The essential consideration is that the piece rate settled by a planter for a particular piece of work should be such as to give the workers of average ability and industry the amount fixed under the law, the workers above or below the average earning more or less than this amount. As regards time wages, it would be sufficient to ensure that the workers are paid a minimum amount for work performed during a particular unit of time. In accordance with these recommendations the Government of Assam deputed an officer to Ceylon to study the working of the wage-fixing machinery there, and is now considering his report.

Proceeding to the expenditure of the workers, from the investigations made into family budgets in Sholapur and Ahmedabad by the Bombay Labour Office it is found that a very large proportion of the income of the workers *viz.* nearly 85% is spent on the primary necessities of life, such as food, fuel, lighting, clothing and house rent.* Besides, all workers have to spend some-

* Compare this with the following. "According to the Kyochokai report, the per cent distribution of the family budgets of Japanese workers shows that 31.9 per cent was spent for food; 12.5 per cent for shelter; 14.1 per cent for clothing; 5 per cent for fuel and light; and 36.5 per cent for sundry items." Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 160.

thing on washing, the barber, household utensils, sickness, and the events of life, such as births, marriages and deaths, not to speak of the expenditure dictated by religious and social customs. Finally, they have to pay debt charges and the expenses of periodical travel to and from their villages. If anything remains after all these charges are paid, it can be spent on the few pleasures that are available to the uneducated.

The knowledge of many employers about the vital needs of their workers appears to be vague. For instance, the Agent of the G. I. P. Railway stated in his written memorandum to the Labour Commission, that in his opinion and that of his Administration, Rs. 15 per month was an adequate wage for the majority of the workers on this railway. But, in his oral evidence he admitted that he had no figures regarding the cost of living, or the minimum wage on which a man and his family could live, and yet he persisted in his opinion that Rs. 15 per month was an adequate living wage.* The following oral evidence of the Agent of the Eastern Bengal Railway is also instructive in this connection.

“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 6 annas. If you take the case of a man, his wife and two children, regarding that as equivalent to 3 adults, if you allow 6 annas per day for each adult, that would come to Re. 1 annas 2 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 6 annas, most people would not have more than 3 or 4 annas and yet they live.”

“If I take the figure of 4 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 to Rs. 17, and Rs. 13 to Rs. 17. If you take the cost of food as 4 annas per adult, how is it possible for a man

* *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part II, p. 296.*

to live and support his wife and 2 children on wages of Rs. 9, Rs. 11, Rs. 12 or Rs. 13 per month?—But he does live.”

“Yes, but have you ever considered how he lives? As an employer of labour do you not think the duty devolves upon you to find out exactly what is a living wage? While the Agent, the Deputy Agent and superior officers draw high salaries, I take it there are thousands of your workers who are living on a wage less than Rs. 25 a month?—There are 40,000 workers on less than Rs. 30 a month.”*

From the evidence of the workers themselves before the Commission it appears that the food of the vast majority of the workers is very poor, consisting entirely of rice, millets or wheat of inferior qualities and a little pulse, oil and spices, with little or no milk, ghee, or even vegetables. They cannot renew their clothing at regular intervals owing to the want of funds, and many of them find it very difficult to purchase the minimum of clothing even when it is absolutely needed. Moreover, many of them have to run into debt to obtain such a meagre living.

The physique of a large proportion of industrial workers gets impaired as forces conducive to health are often outweighed by unfavourable factors. The favourable forces are that the workers are not permanent town-dwellers, but return periodically to their comparatively healthy village homes during the busy agricultural season, or for marriages, or on account of their own illness, or owing to the illness or death of a relative, and that in some degree they are selected recruits, because the migration to towns, with their difficult and taxing conditions of life, requires more enterprise and courage, better physique and greater youth than are possessed by the average villagers.

{ On the other hand, the villagers, owing to debt and economic pressure, have a low standard of living with a diet

* *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 55 and Part II, pp. 358-9.*

deficient in quality as well as quantity, owing to the scarcity of milk, ghee and vegetables, the lack of fish and meat, and the predominance of rice or millets.* This causes a deficiency of stamina and lowers the power of resisting disease, so that when the villagers migrate to towns they are seriously handicapped in making several necessary adjustments in their new life, such as living in an overcrowded room in a congested area without sufficient light, ventilation or sanitation, a change in their usual meal hours, eating in the early morning cold food prepared the night before, a poorer diet owing to milk, pure ghee, vegetables, and fruit being beyond their means, indoor work, and concentration for long hours on new work.) Moreover, they have to remit home a substantial portion of their earnings, and therefore have to deny themselves comforts and even some necessities. Finally, the lack of family life owing to the difficulties of securing suitable family quarters at moderate rent, and the consequent striking inequality in the numbers of the two sexes produce disastrous effects on the home life of the workers and lead to prostitution, venereal diseases and the formation of irregular unions.†

The physique of the workers in the Bombay cotton mills is the poorest, as most of them come from the

*Rice the staple food of a large proportion of the workers is very defective. Its protein is poor in quality and quantity. It lacks fats, vitamins and certain essential mineral elements. Moreover, its power of affording nutrition, poor as it is, is seriously reduced by the widespread practice of milling and polishing it and also by the practice prevalent among certain workers of throwing away the water in the process of cooking it. See an article entitled "The Food of the Worker" in the April 1925 issue of the *Labour Gazette*, Bombay, and *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 31-2. See also the comparison between the dietary of the workers in India, Japan and the U. S. A. made in the C. P. Government Memorandum, *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. III, Part I, p. 18. The diet of the Japanese workers also is badly balanced. It has too much starch and too little protein, vitamins and roughage, and there is little variation. See J. E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, p. 357 and Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, pp. 153 and 163. The inclusion of appreciable quantities of fish, however, makes the diet of the Japanese workers superior to that of the Indian workers. Dr. A. Mukhtar compared the average weight and height of 495 prisoners in a few of the Punjab jails with those of 238 workers in some of the Punjab factories and found that, man for man, an average prisoner had better health than an average factory worker. See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. VII, Part I, p. 120.

† Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. III, Part I, p. 144.

Konkan, an exceedingly poor and unhealthy area, and have a very deficient diet and a poor physique from their birth. The unhealthy nature of their work and bad housing make their condition worse. In the Ahmedabad cotton mills, the workers from Kathiawar, Rajputana and the United Provinces have a better physique than the local workers owing to differences in dietary. The Sholapur cotton mill workers have a higher standard in this respect as they come from a more healthy stock and climate and take regular exercise.* On the whole, the cotton mill workers have little stamina and little power of resisting disease. The health of the women workers is even worse owing to the treble strain of factory and household work and child-rearing, and tuberculosis takes a heavy toll from them. Moreover, women workers in the cities of the Bombay Presidency usually give opium to their children daily to send them to sleep while they are at their work.†

In the Bengal jute mills the general standard of physique and health is a little better than in the Bombay cotton mills. But here also the local workers and those from Madras have a poorer standard than those from Northern India and Bihar owing to differences of diet and constitution. Among the miners, the physique of the aborigines is fair, as they have a hardy constitution and a little better dietary and return very frequently to their homes. But that of the other miners is distinctly poor. That of the iron and steel workers and railway workers is also fair, on the whole, owing to better wages, better housing and work in the open, although even among them wide variations are noticeable. The physique of the workers in seasonal factories is not worse than that of the agricultural classes to which they belong because, although their work is indoors and frequently dusty, it is temporary and requires moderate concentration and little change in their habits.

The general physical standard of plantation workers, apart from those on estates infested with malaria and

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 30 and 390.*

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 11.*

hookworm, is fairly satisfactory and higher than that of the general population of the areas in which they work, and also from which they are drawn. Their diet is fairly satisfactory, as milk, dal (pulses) and vegetables are often added to the staple rice diet. Moreover, a majority of the planters has been paying special attention to the health of the workers, as it has realised that a healthy estate makes it easier to get workers and to keep them and that it improves production and profits. However, of all the industrial workers, the dock workers have the best physique. But this is due to the facts that the strongest men have to be selected for the work which is the most strenuous and exacting, that therefore they are compelled to adopt a liberal diet, and that their average length of service is about 10 years only, a decrease in strength compelling them to take up less strenuous work afterwards.*

It is, therefore, not surprising to find that the productive efficiency of the Indian industrial workers, taken as a whole, is lower than that of their fellows in all other leading industrial countries.† The causes of this are complex. Firstly, there is no social background for the development of efficiency. Traditions and customs impel the workers in India to strive for success in industrial pursuits as a means of social recognition in a far less degree than they do in Western countries. Secondly, illiteracy prevents them from obtaining that knowledge of things in general and technical processes in

* See *Labour Commission*, Report, pp. 246-8.

† Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 401. "The average number of looms tended by a male cotton weaver in India is less than two. In Japan the female weaver tends 5.5. The Indian worker not only tends fewer looms, but he does it in a less skilled and less concentrated way, involving less output and frequent damage to the material." Read, *The Indian Peasant Uprooted*, p. 32. In the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills each worker runs three automatic looms, while in Lancashire a woman weaver runs from 12 to 20 automatic looms according to the cloth woven. See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. VII, Part I, p. 150. The average annual output of coal per miner in India is 131 tons. In the U. S. A. Transvaal, Great Britain and Japan it is 780, 426, 250 and 132 tons respectively. The Indian output, however, has increased from 103 tons in 1923 to 131 tons. See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 234. The number of workers per heavy repair in various locomotive workshops averages 20.25 in India, 10.2 in New South Wales, 4.4 in England, and 4.08 in South Africa. See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. VIII, Part I, p. 153.

particular, which is the basis of efficiency. Thirdly, they have no opportunities, either at home or in institutions, of obtaining training in qualities such as application and steadiness which are essential for industrial efficiency.*

Fourthly, the efficiency of management, on which labour efficiency depends to a considerable extent, is low in many establishments. As machinery has to be imported from distant foreign countries and is very costly, it is some times out of date, and the same may be true of some of the technical processes.† The raw materials also may be inferior in some cases. Fifthly, the climate is unfavourable to energy during a part of the year. Sixthly, the working environment of some of the industrial establishments in India is distinctly inferior to that prevailing in most of the similar establishments in Western countries. Seventhly, the efficiency of the workers in a few industries gets impaired, because they feel acutely that while they are expected to put forth their best in the performance of their duties, they are not given a living wage, and because they are constantly worried by the necessity of devising means to make both ends meet.

But the most important cause is the low standard of living of the workers. This saps physical energy, which in turn destroys mental vigour, ambition, initiative and the desire for progress. Further, the habits and surroundings of the workers, resulting largely from their low standard of life, make them victims of several diseases, the most prominent of which are malaria, hookworm and dysentery; and their inefficiency is partly due to these preventible diseases. Thus, the workers have been moving in a vicious circle, poverty leading to wretched conditions, these to inefficiency, and this to poverty. This circle must be broken at as many points as possible, by providing a social background for industrial pursuits and primary and industrial education, by improving the working conditions, the environment and the health of

* Cf. Das, *Factory Labour in India*, pp. 126-7.

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 76.

the workers, by shortening the hours of work, and by raising the efficiency of management.

It is believed by many employers, and even by official bodies, that the workers have a fixed standard of living in their mind, and that when they can earn sufficient for that standard they do not care to put forth any additional effort,* so that an increase in the rates of wages would be harmful, because when the desired standard is reached, the workers would get slack and thus diminish production without benefiting themselves.* Even the Indian Industrial Commission in 1918 expressed the opinion that "Indian Labour is content with a very low standard of comfort. This secured, the Indian workman, speaking generally, takes advantage of the greater earning power given to him by increased wages to do less work, and shows no desire to earn more money by working more regularly and by improving his own efficiency."†

This view is not correct with regard to the great majority of the industrial workers. Ample evidence was placed before the Labour Commission showing that the real wages and the standard of living of a large proportion of the workers had risen appreciably in recent years.‡ This erroneous view has been due to the facts that a sudden increase in the income of workers cannot be accompanied by a sudden rise in their standard of living, an improvement in which takes time, and that, until this takes place, the increase in income is liable to be misspent. Moreover, as the standard of life is raised, the desire of the workers to secure greater leisure and some reduction in drudgery in the place of a part of the increase in income is healthy, and should be appreciated.§

It is, however, true that a substantial proportion of the workers still find it difficult to voice the sense of the

* This was the underlying assumption in the evidence tendered to the Commission by many employers and some Government officials, especially from the mining and plantation centres. See Vol. IV, Part II, p. 264.

† Report, p. 151.

‡ Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 304.*

§ Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 223.*

needs that they feel, and that they have only a vague feeling of dissatisfaction with the existing conditions, which does not reach a definite expression even in their own minds. This is seen from the facts that they do not rebel against low wages, that they spend an appreciable portion of their wages on drink and gambling, that the moral standards enforced by caste regulations in villages easily break down in the different conditions of towns, and that when they feel a sense of unrest, it is expressed in a demand for higher wages without definite ideas about the directions of spending them.

Efforts to build up a higher standard of living for the workers should proceed wisely, by developing those needs which have their origin in the essential life of individuals and the community, which open opportunities for the growth of that life, and which enable men to feel out towards higher levels of human life. It is not enough to supply good things to the workers, such as schools, libraries, dispensaries, welfare centres or trade unions. Endeavours to supply them must be accompanied by a realisation of their relation to the growing life of individuals and the community.* It is, therefore, necessary to examine three problems. The first is to find out the needs that are consciously felt by the workers. When this is done, it will be found that they cannot explain all the restlessness and dissatisfaction of the workers. It is, therefore, necessary to find out the needs, which are felt by them more or less vaguely, and which they cannot define. Lastly, there are the needs, the lack of which is not felt by the workers at all consciously or vaguely, but which are necessary for the development of their life and that of the community. The satisfaction of conscious needs gradually leads to the realisation of deeper ones which were entirely unfelt before.

Education is already in operation, creating the consciousness of new needs and the hope of further developments, so that it is not possible to draw hard and fast lines. But their nature may be indicated here, and

* Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, the chapter on Standard of Living.

they may be examined in some detail in the next chapter. Among the conscious needs of the workers the most prominent are those for a regular supply of better food, greater comfort in which to eat it, and housing which will yield privacy, freedom from control, and some of the happiness of the simple and quiet family life that is lived in the village homes.

The desire for greater leisure and for more pleasant ways of spending it, for recreation, playing grounds, gymnasiums, shows, music parties, and fairs is less conscious, but the quick response of the workers whenever these facilities are provided shows that their absence in towns must produce repressive effects, and that it would not be difficult to raise the workers' standard of life by providing them. The same is true of facilities for maintaining health and for medical relief. Still less conscious is the desire for freedom from the oppression caused by debt, and the extortions of the jobbers or sardars. This is so, not because custom has removed the bitterness of these burdens, but because they have been accepted as more or less inevitable.

This brings us to the third kind of the needs of the workers mentioned above. No outward changes, even if they are radical, can result in the permanent uplift of the workers, unless they are accompanied by a new spirit of self-respect and independence. So long as the workers believe that it is meritorious to spend on marriages, festivals and other special events of life, not only all savings but all credit also, any temporary emancipation from debt, complete or partial, can yield them little advantage. The same spirit of dependence, which makes custom so powerful as regards social expenditure, is a great obstacle in the way of the liberation of the workers from the domination of the jobbers and sardars.

Moreover, the growth of a spirit of independence must be accompanied by the development of character and the sense of corporate responsibility. Happy homes cannot be secured by housing and other outward improvements only. In the industrial community stable

social relations can be secured by changes in the relationship between individuals, and in conditions. A growing sense of the value of personality will provide family life a new scope for the development of initiative in the younger generation, and will gradually remove the indifference that has prevailed to a considerable extent with regard to illness, low vitality, and untimely death.*

In the villages, standards of behaviour and morals are laid down by social and religious customs and are enforced by the village communities through their Panchayats, *i.e.* councils of elders. If a villager violates any of these standards, he is not allowed to get water from the village well, none gives him employment, or sells him even the necessaries of life, and all intercourse between him and his co-villagers is suspended. If he goes to another village, he must explain his arrival, and even if he is tolerated and given some employment at first, news of his ostracism in the other village will soon arrive, and he will be turned out. Even if his antecedents are not discovered, he has to live in perpetual terror of detection. He is, therefore, glad to pay whatever fine or penalty is imposed upon him by the Panchayat for his violation of the village standards, and to be admitted again into the village community.

But, when he migrates to a town, he discovers the absence of similar standards in the industrial community that he joins, and further finds that, even if some groups in the community have brought the standards from the villages, they have no power to enforce them. His labour is needed in the factory without any regard to his observance of the standards. The water-pipe belongs to the municipality or the employer, and his fellow-workers cannot prevent him from using it. The shopkeepers in the bazaar belong to several different castes, and they do not refuse to deal with him. Even if he is cut off by the members of his own group, the liquor shop, the gambling house, or the low recreation hall provide him company. Even the oppression and

* Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 202.

control of the overseers are confined to his work in the factory.

A substantial proportion of the industrial recruits consists of the reckless and adventurous elements of the villages, and they rebel against the customary standards and assert their own will as soon as they come to the towns. The falling away from the customary usages is more gradual on the part of those who have been more under the force of habit and the influence of family and religious practices. It commences with the difficulties of carrying out the practices in the strange and altered environment of the towns; the daily strain of factory work gradually deadens the susceptibilities, and with the stoppage of the family and religious observances the life as it was lived in the villages gets broken up. The great need, therefore, is to provide for the maintenance of the standards that already exist, and for their improvement by the promotion of education and various aspects of welfare work.

This applies with as much force to women as to men workers, especially to those who are widows or deserted by their husbands. There is a certain proportion of such women in all industrial areas. The investigations of Dr. Curjel in Bengal in 1923 and certain evidence obtained by the Labour Commission, especially from the Government of Bengal*, show that many of them supplement their earnings from factory work by day by having a temporary liaison with certain men, or by becoming prostitutes at night, and they generally have children to support and to bring up. This socio-economic problem is growing, and yet it has been neglected so far, and even the Labour Commission did not examine it. There is need, therefore, to investigate the extent of this problem, and to think out the best means of assisting and lifting these women, such as protection through special housing accommodation, as has been done in Japan, and various forms of welfare work.†

* *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 9.*

† *Cf. Read, the Indian Peasant Uprooted, pp. 164-5 and Supra, Vol. V, Part II, p. 243.*

CHAPTER XIII.

Health, Housing and Welfare of Industrial Labour

The change from a rural to an industrial environment produces an unfavourable effect on the health of the workers. Living an outdoor life and doing agricultural work they can put up in the villages with a considerable degree of parasitic infection. But the transfer to large industrial centres, with confined atmosphere, crowded insanitary dwellings, and the absence of outdoor recreation, upsets the compromise that their bodies had made with the parasites that they sheltered, makes them more liable to new infections, and makes them easier victims to illness and disease. Even if the industries had an abundant supply of healthy workers, it would have been necessary to provide for the workers a hygienic environment. Far more imperative is the need to supply such an environment when, in most cases, cure has to be effected before the maintenance of health.*

Therefore, with regard to the problems of health, housing and welfare of the workers, it is all the more necessary for all concerned to take a long view and to adopt a well-conceived programme, which can be carried out only gradually, and the expenditure on which must be spread over a number of years. Any endeavours to deal with these problems piecemeal will lead to a considerable waste of funds and energy. Moreover, such expenditure is sure to be very beneficial, even economically, to the workers, their employers and the community. The birth and death rates are much higher, and the average expectation of life, at birth and different ages, is much lower in India than in Western countries. Although separate statistics are not available for industrial workers, there is no doubt that sickness and

* See Appendix L to the Report of the *Indian Industrial Commission*, p. 460 and *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 182.

disease extort a heavy toll from them and lower their productive capacity to a large extent. The economic loss caused by this as well as by the bringing up of a large proportion of children, who die without making any addition to the wealth of the community, is enormous.*

Recent developments of medical science have opened up prospects of a steady progress towards a higher standard of general health in India. The sources of epidemics such as plague, cholera and smallpox have been discovered after a great deal of patient work, and they are being dealt with, with great perseverance. But the industrial workers continue to suffer very much from the ravages of hookworm and malaria. The former is common among the industrial workers of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Assam. It can be eradicated by medical treatment which is provided in many establishments and plantations, but many workers get it again and again, as it breeds in contaminated ground and enters the human body through the skin of the feet of those who come into contact with it.† The disease makes serious inroads upon the health and efficiency of the workers and is due to the wretched sanitary conditions and the absence of latrines in many of the housing

* Compare the following resolution passed by the All-India Conference of medical research workers in 1926 and quoted in the Report of the *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India*, pp. 481-2.

" This conference believes that the average number of deaths resulting every year from preventible disease is five to six millions, that the average number of days lost to labour by each person in India from preventible disease is not less than a fortnight to 3 weeks in each year, that the percentage loss of efficiency of the average person in India from preventible malnutrition and disease is not less than 20 per cent, and that the percentage of infants born in India who reach a wage-earning age is about 50, whereas it is quite possible to raise this percentage to 80 or 90. The conference believes that these estimates are underestimates rather than exaggerations, but, allowing for the greatest possible margin of error, it is absolutely certain that the wastage of life and efficiency which results from preventible disease costs India several hundreds of crores of rupees each year. This conference believes that it is possible to prevent a great proportion of this waste at a cost which is small in comparison with the expenditure. The recent census shows that the position in India is one of great emergency. This conference recognises that the problem is very complicated and involves not only medical research, but also questions of public health, medical relief, medical education, propaganda, and social and economic considerations."

† *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VI, Part I, pp. 9 and 71.*

areas. The workers can easily be induced to make use of latrines if they are kept clean. Municipalities and other local bodies are responsible for the supply of suitable and sufficient latrine accommodation in the housing areas in their jurisdiction, and a greater attention on their part to this matter, combined with the assistance of the employers, will evoke a ready response from the workers.

It is also necessary to withdraw the exemption that has been hitherto granted to tea factories from the Factories Act, regarding the provision of latrines, on the grounds that they are seasonal and that the workers have free access to the jungle. Further, in many cases the water supply is not pure, and no bathing and washing facilities are provided. The use of the ordinary surface tank, or pond, or stream, may cause outbreaks of dysentery and other ailments. Therefore, pipe-water should be provided wherever possible, and failing it, tube or artesian wells free from surface pollution. If surface wells must be used, they should be kept in proper repair and regularly examined by the sanitary inspectors. Suitable and adequate bathing and washing facilities should also be provided.

Malaria prevails among the workers all over the country, and the economic loss resulting from the deaths and ill health that it causes is incalculable. Malaria-ridden factories, mines and plantations are naturally unpopular with the workers. The effective control of malaria will bring about a radical transformation in the health conditions of the workers, will make them more efficient and contented, and will reconcile the new recruits much more to the new conditions of life. The ordinary medical officers attached to industrial establishments have little time to give to the investigation of the disease or to practical preventive work. Therefore, the Provincial Governments, local bodies, and employers should develop a much more energetic policy of prevention than they have hitherto done. Every Provincial Department of Public Health should have a malaria expert to give sound advice to municipalities, other local

bodies and employers, regarding malaria problems, and to train medical officers in the methods of malaria prevention work. Railway authorities, Mining Boards of Health and associations of planters also should employ malaria experts and adopt an active policy of prevention. Further, Government should arrange for a much larger cultivation of cinchona and for the distribution of cheap quinine among the workers.

In most provinces Public Health Departments have recently made substantial progress and have successfully conducted health propaganda. This work should be developed further, and in the more industrialised provinces women Assistant Directors of Public Health should be appointed to look after the health of women and children. Further, every municipality should have its own medical officer of health, who should be given security of tenure and adequate control over the municipal health organisation. His recommendations should be properly attended to, and he should be assisted by an adequate sanitary staff. In all areas, which are outside municipal limits but in which industries are growing, there should be similar organisation and work. Finally, in the opinion of the Labour Commission it is necessary to pass comprehensive Public Health Acts in all provinces, because the existing Act and the sections of the Municipal and Local Boards Acts dealing with public health problems are disconnected and incomplete.* All these recommendations are at present under the consideration of the Provincial Governments.

With regard to plantations, the Commission has recommended that in each suitable planting area a Board of Health and Welfare should be created by law, consisting of a majority of the representatives of planters, a district officer from the districts included in the area, the Director of Public Health or one of his Assistants, the district health officers, and members nominated by the Provincial Government concerned, to represent workers, at least one of these being a woman.

* See Report, p. 254.

Each Board should be financed by means of an annual cess levied on all the plantations included within its area, and should have as its chief executive officer an experienced doctor possessing qualifications in public health. The Boards should deal with matters such as the supply of pure drinking water, sanitation, drainage, conservancy, medical aid, and the laying down of minimum standards of new housing accommodation and maternity benefits, by means of regulations to be sanctioned by the Provincial Governments concerned. The Boards should launch prosecutions for violations of the regulations, and if the Boards fail to do so, they should be launched by Government inspectors. The Director of Public Health, his assistants and the district health officers should be ex-officio inspectors of plantations and should deal with violations of public health laws and regulations on plantations.* Legislation to give effect to these recommendations is receiving the attention of the Provincial Governments concerned.

In the Asansol and Jharia mining areas, Boards of Health have been established by the Governments of Bengal and Bihar since 1915, and these have proved fairly successful in preventing or dealing with outbreaks of the epidemics of cholera and smallpox, to which these areas have been specially liable, by improving medical facilities, sanitation and housing for the workers, and by providing maternity relief and child welfare centres.† Therefore, the Commission has suggested that the Boards should be renamed Boards of Health and Welfare so that no doubt may exist about their legitimate activities, that the Boards should be enlarged by increasing the representation of the mineowners, by giving representation to the workers in consultation with their unions wherever they exist, and by the inclusion of at least one woman, and that similar boards should be established in the other mining areas. It has further suggested that provincial and district public health

* See Report, pp. 418-22.

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 181-2, and Vol. IV, Part I, p. 196, et seq.*

officers should be given the power and duty of inspection of mines regarding matters of health.* Legislation covering these recommendations is being considered by the Provincial Governments concerned.

In most industrial centres the number of markets is inadequate, and those that exist are not properly supervised or maintained in a sanitary condition. Food-stuffs, vegetables and fruit are kept for sale in the open, often near road gutters, and are liable to be quickly contaminated by disease germs. Municipal councils should, therefore, construct a sufficient number of sanitary markets and exercise supervision for the purpose of keeping the food brought there for sale properly covered and free from disease germs. Employers and trade-unions should establish co-operative stores for the sale of clean food, which can be sold at prices a little lower than market prices, so that the middlemen's profit would be avoided. Adulteration of food-stuffs is another great evil from which the workers suffer much at present. Pure Food Acts have been passed in two provinces, but their provisions can be applied only to those municipal areas whose municipal councils desire to do so. Similar acts should be passed in all provinces, and they should be applied to all municipal areas. They should lay down adequate standards of purity, and the penalties imposed by them for violations of these standards should be severe enough to serve as deterrents. Provincial Governments are contemplating legislation to carry out this recommendation.

As deficient diet is an important cause of the poor health and physique of many of the workers, a well-staffed and well-equipped institution for research in dietary and nutrition should be established in India. Similar institutions, some of them conducted by Governments, have done valuable work in most Western countries. Some nutritional research is being done at the Deficiency Diseases Enquiry Laboratory at Coonoor under the auspices of the Indian Research Fund Association, but

* Report, pp. 132-3.

it is handicapped by an inadequacy of staff and resources. The institution to be established should do publicity work, in addition to research, as the workers are in great need of guidance with regard to their dietary.

It is also necessary to increase the staffs of the Provincial Public Health Departments to enable them to tackle problems of industrial hygiene and diseases. Although the prevalence of industrial diseases in India has not yet been investigated, there is some evidence to show that they do exist, and medical inspectors of factories and mines, when appointed, as suggested in a previous chapter, should pay special attention to them. Finally, the existing Indian Research Fund Association should be financed to conduct research into industrial health problems, such as the effect of hours and temperature on production, the suitability and adequacy of the present rest intervals, and the relation between fatigue and accidents, as owing to intense world competition, industries in India must be carried on as efficiently as possible.* Steps are being taken by the Government of India to formulate proposals to give effect to these recommendations when the financial conditions improve.

Medical relief, available to the workers, may be grouped into three classes. Firstly, in large towns, the workers, forming only a small part of the total population, owing to the gradual development of industries, use the medical facilities provided in hospitals and dispensaries by Government, municipalities and religious and charitable bodies, but find them inadequate for their needs. Secondly, in towns in which the workers make up the major portion of the population, owing to the rapid growth of industries, it is found that the medical facilities have not been expanded sufficiently to meet the needs of the growing population.

However, in both these cases the deficiency has been met to some extent by the provision of medical aid by the employers, with noticeable effects on the efficiency of their workers. But the quality of the aid varies

* See *Labour Commission*, Report, pp. 252-3.

frequently from one establishment to another. Two useful tests are the condition of the dispensaries and the qualifications and bearing of the doctors in charge of them. Some dispensaries are untidy and in a state of disorder, and their doctors are poorly qualified and do not enjoy the confidence and respect of the workers. They follow the managers at a respectful distance, and cannot be drawn into conversation for the purpose of securing information regarding the health of the workers and the extent of the use made by them of the medical facilities. It is clear that such dispensaries and doctors cannot go far in providing medical aid to the workers. Other dispensaries are well stocked and well kept, and their doctors are well qualified and experienced, enjoy the confidence of the workers and the managers, and can readily give useful information about the health of the workers. The medical aid provided by these has proved valuable.

In this connection, the Labour Commission has suggested that the whole position with regard to medical facilities, in both the above classes of industrial areas, should be examined, and that an estimate should be made of the needs of each area in this respect, by the district Civil Surgeons of the Provincial Governments, and that their reports should be considered in each province at a joint conference of the Government, the local and municipal authorities and the employers with a view to the formulation of a joint policy and to joint action for the gradual extension of medical facilities.*

Thirdly, when a new industrial concern is established in a rural area far away from any medical institution, the owner of the concern must make himself responsible for the supply of medical assistance to his workers, and this has been fully recognised and acted upon by the Tata Iron and Steel Company at Jamshedpur and by the majority of the planters. Among the latter the unit of organisation often consists of a group of 10 to 15

* Report p. 259.

plantations controlled by a well qualified doctor who is made responsible for the medical and health needs of the whole group. On the smaller plantations, however, the medical facilities are frequently inadequate, and on a few of them the facilities are not provided at all. These inequalities can be eliminated by better co-ordination and organisation among groups of plantations. It is more economical, as well as more beneficial to the ailing, to concentrate medical treatment in a large centrally situated hospital than to establish small hospitals in individual gardens. A few such organisations have already proved successful, and more should be brought into being.

Owing to ignorance and prejudice against Western medicine, the workers in the past did not make full use of the medical facilities that were provided, but recently their attitude in this respect has undergone a remarkable change, their prejudice is crumbling away, and their use of these facilities is now increasing rapidly. Women have been more reluctant than men to avail themselves of the facilities. But they also have now begun to appreciate them, and are taking an increasing advantage of ordinary and maternity hospitals and dispensaries, particularly in those areas in which the purdah system is practically non-existent.

The problem of housing the industrial workers is also most important, partly because the existing wretched housing conditions have marked detrimental effects on their health and efficiency, and partly because the recent unrest among them has been due to their growing discontent with their low standard of living, and to their feeling that the standard cannot be improved unless their homes can give them certain comforts which are not available to them at present. The unrest can be assuaged only by using their discontent and awakening to make them realise what can be done to improve their housing conditions, and what they themselves can do in this respect.

In most industrial centres, population has grown rapidly and outstripped the available housing accommoda-

tion owing to limited space and high land values, thereby causing congestion, filthiness and outbreaks of epidemics, and increasing the rates of sickness, general mortality and infantile mortality. Further, absence of control by any authority over the selection of sites for the location of industrial concerns has increased congestion and its consequences, as large numbers of workers anxious to live in the vicinity of their work have tried to obtain housing accommodation in the centre of towns, which had already been experiencing a scarcity of houses.

In the great majority of industrial areas, workers live in single rooms at the rate of 6 to 9 persons per room. To make the fullest use of all the available space, houses are built very close to each other, often back to back, and they can be reached only through narrow winding lanes. Heaps of rotting rubbish, sewage pools which have practically no outlet except when they overflow their banks in heavy rain, and an absence of latrines indicate the utter absence of sanitation.* The houses generally consist of a single room, without a plinth and windows, ventilation and light being provided only through a low door. But even this ventilation and this light are partially cut off by the use of old kerosene tins, gunny bags and clothes as screens for obtaining some privacy. In such houses the workers have to eat, sleep and live. The houses are apt to become veritable death traps, from which it is only natural that the workers should endeavour to escape, by returning whenever possible to their villages where the strong sunshine in vast open spaces is nature's disinfectant. Hence the housing problem is far more complicated in India than in the West.† The only bright spot in this dark situation is the provision of housing in some centres by a few

* Absence of latrines is responsible for the high incidence of the hookworm disease in several parts of India.

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 176. The importance of sunshine is specially great to Indians because they have been bred up in continuous sunshine throughout the ages and have become dependent on it as a prime necessity of their existence. See Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries*, p. 109.

enlightened employers. The quality of this housing varies, but the poorest quality of this is generally better than the best quality of the housing accommodation provided by private landlords.

In Bombay city the workers live in corrugated iron sheds, 'Zavli' sheds made of dry cocoanut leaves, and tenement buildings having from 3 to 5 storeys, specially constructed for and occupied by the poorer classes, and known as chawls. Each line of iron sheds consists of about a dozen rooms (10 ft. × 10 ft.) with a narrow verandah. These dwellings are very uncomfortable and dark. The Zavli sheds are equally uncomfortable and lack sanitary arrangements. The object of chawls is to house large numbers of workers as cheaply as possible, each small room being occupied by at least one family. The alleyways between them are narrow. Clothes and dishes must be washed over an open drain in the centre. Each floor has one water-tap at the end to supply water to sixty or more families living on the floor. In the alleyways, and in the narrow spaces between the central drain and the walls, there are heaps of rubbish, banana skins, vegetable stems and peelings, remains of rice, old rags etc., and among all this are chickens, cats, dogs and children. The number of latrines is inadequate, they stink horribly, and cleansing and sanitation are sadly ignored.

The construction of the chawls, which have either tunnel-like central passages giving access to rooms on either side, or very narrow verandahs in front of back-to-back rooms, is not suited to the habits of the occupants. Light and ventilation, already unsatisfactory owing to the great height of the chawls and the insufficient spacing between them, are made more so by the occupants' habit of stuffing windows and enclosing verandahs with matting, boards, or old rags to secure privacy. Therefore, the rooms are dark. They are also small with a floor space of 10 ft. × 10 ft. The practice of subletting, to reduce the burden of rent, which varies between Rs. 3 and 15 per room according to the less or more central situation of the chawl, or

because workers regard money spent on rent as money badly spent, is common and makes the chawls terribly overcrowded.*

These conditions, unpleasant and harmful enough for the men workers, are much more so for the women workers. A large portion of the former sleep and spend most of their time out of doors, chiefly on the street pavements. But the women have to live and sleep in the ill-ventilated rooms with their children, several of them occupying each small room. Early in the morning they have to get up to take their turn at the pipe to procure water for the day for drinking, cooking, bathing, and cleaning pots. Then they have to kindle the fire to cook their food, and to put up with the pungent smoke coming from the lighted cowdung cakes or wood. After such a night and morning, they have to go to their respective mills and to work in their stuffy atmosphere till the evening.

To relieve the overcrowding in these chawls, the Development Department of the Government of Bombay after the war built over 200 concrete chawls, providing more than 16,000 rooms in four different parts of the city, with good light, ventilation, sanitary arrangements, water supply and roads. But they have been unpopular with the workers, and more than half of the rooms have remained unoccupied owing to the absence of cheap means of communications between them and the mills, of protection against thieves, and of medical facilities, and owing to the scarcity of shops. If these shortcomings are removed, these chawls are very likely to increase in popularity with the workers of Bombay city. Some of the employers also have provided housing in the form of single room tenements, which

* The lady doctor appointed by the Government of Bombay stated that she found six families with a total membership of 30 living in a single room measuring 15×12 ft. See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 23. According to the 1921 Census, in 135 cases single rooms were occupied by six families and $\frac{1}{3}$ of the Bombay population lived in single rooms with an average of 4 persons in each. In London only 6 per cent of the population lives in one-room tenements with an average of 2 persons in each. See Broughton, *Labour in Indian Industries*, p. 118.

are somewhat better than the chawls owned by private landlords, to a minority of their workers.

There is a great shortage of land for housing in Calcutta and Howrah also, and so land is very dear, and the overcrowding has become serious. The workers in Calcutta have to secure rooms in buildings roughly put together like a series of boxes, opening outwards into the thickly crowded and insanitary lanes that fill spaces behind and between the main roads. Cholera, typhoid fever, small-pox and other epidemics periodically take a heavy toll in this area. The Improvement Trust has only partially succeeded in improving these conditions by constructing roads through some of these slums. In Howrah and along the Hooghly, private landlords, most of them mill sardars, have constructed huts, known as bustees, in the vicinity of mills, and let them at high rents which take away a large portion of the workers' wages; or the owners let out small plots of land on which the workers build their own huts. These bustees have some privacy, but their sanitary condition is appalling.

Realising these wretched housing conditions of the workers, the loss caused by the outbreak of epidemics, and the difficulties of obtaining and keeping the requisite number of workers, many firms in Calcutta, Howrah and along the Hooghly have provided housing for their workers, either in the mill compound or close by, in the form of ground floor single rooms, built in long rows and known as lines. Some of the firms charge no rent for the rooms, others charge a small rent varying between annas 8 and rupees 2 per month, and spend all the rent proceeds in the management and maintenance of the lines, or secure a small profit. Although the quality of the lines varies from firm to firm, on the whole they are much better than the privately owned bustees, having a fairly adequate water supply, sanitary arrangements, surface drains and conservancy. The chief defects of these lines are that owing to the scarcity of land, the space between the lines is often too small and the rooms are frequently too

small to be healthy. However, the lines provide accommodation only to a minority of the workers, the majority having to live in bustees.

Ahmedabad city has streets, alleys, lanes and courts so closely packed together, and so crowded that visitors find large masses of people moving in all directions and suddenly disappearing somewhere to make room for more people. The city is most congested, and a dense and dusty atmosphere pervades the whole area. Some of the workers, especially casual ones, still live in small and low huts of brick or mud falling to pieces, or unplastered bamboo battens, roofed with corrugated iron sheets, but these are now disappearing. The majority of the workers now live in one-storey, one-room houses, which have never been sound or have become dilapidated, and which are insanitary, badly ventilated and crowded, and without an adequate water supply and latrines. Frequently the open drains become choked and are allowed to remain so, giving out a foul-smell, and stagnant pools of water, as well as heaps of decaying vegetables and rice, full of flies, are spread over the lanes and open spaces. The consequences are a high incidence of sickness and a high general and infantile mortality. Some of the cotton mills have provided housing accommodation to a minority of their workers, but its standard, although better than that of the housing provided by private landlords, varies and in most cases is below the minimum standard requisite for health.*

The housing conditions are somewhat better in Sholapur than in Bombay and Ahmedabad. The town is less congested, a large proportion of the workers live in two-roomed tenements, sub-letting is infrequent, and all the mills have provided housing for a portion of their workers, a large proportion of this housing being of a reasonable standard.

It is impossible to give an adequate idea of the crowded hovels of Cawnpore. Many of its lanes are so narrow "that a man has to turn sideways to pass

* Notable exceptions are the quarters provided by the Calico, Jubilee and Asoka Mills.

through them.”* The major portion of the town consists of bustees, which in most cases are so dilapidated, insanitary and lacking in ventilation and drainage, as to be unfit for human habitation. Most of the houses consist of a single small room shared by 2, 3 or even 4 families. Here also some employers, notably the British India Corporation, have endeavoured to provide improved housing, but so far they have done so for a minority of the workers, and the housing problem continues to be acute, because the employers have found it most difficult to obtain suitable land at reasonable prices.

An Improvement Trust has existed in this town since 1919, and has relieved congestion in the more overcrowded parts of the town to some extent by demolishing dilapidated houses and constructing roads, but it has not been made responsible for the construction of new houses, and it is not empowered to acquire land by compulsion for the housing schemes of companies, firms or associations.† Unless the Trust is given this power and uses it freely in favour of the employers, and unless the municipality is willing to supply water, lighting and sanitation free, no improvement in the situation seems possible.

In Madras city a quarter of the entire population lives in single-roomed houses, known as cheries, at the rate of 6 persons per room. The scarcity even of such accommodation is so great that an appreciable number of workers have to live and sleep on the verandahs of godowns or on the roads. The Labour Department of the Madras Government and the Buckingham and Carnatic mills have provided some decent housing, but this has not relieved the shortage to any extent. The same tale of neglect, insanitation and squalor has to be told about other industrial centres also, such as Nagpur, Karachi, Madura, Coimbatore and Tuticorin.

* Mr. Wiser quoted by Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 152.

† Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 150-2 and p. 281 *et seq.*

The Tata Iron and Steel Company and the Tin Plate Company at Jamshedpur have accepted responsibility for supplying decent housing to their workers, as the industries have been established in a rural and undeveloped area, and have already done much to fulfil it by providing good houses to a substantial proportion of their workers, and by granting loans at a very low rate of interest to many workers to build their own houses according to approved plans, the loans being gradually recovered by means of monthly deductions from their wages.* There is much scope for the adoption of this system by employers in others industrial areas. However, even in Jamshedpur the housing condition of an appreciable portion of the workers, for whom no provision has been made by the employers, is unsatisfactory.

In the mining areas the provision of good houses is difficult, owing to the shortage of sites possessing solid foundations, and subsidences, which periodically result from underground work, destroy some of the suitable sites and damage some of the existing houses. The difficulties have been accentuated by the closure of the poorer mines and the increase in the numbers working in the better mines, by the practice of miners coming from the same village or neighbouring villages of crowding together in the rooms of one block, although more accommodation is available at some distance, and by the practice of those who work on different shifts, of living in one set of rooms alternately although more rooms are available.† Rent-free houses for all the miners living in the mining areas are usually provided by the companies. These houses commonly known as dhowrahs, although made of brick and cement concrete, are often dark and badly ventilated owing to the absence of windows, and the latrine accommodation and bathing and washing facilities provided by them are frequently insufficient. A large proportion of the miners, however, live in their own neighbouring villages, walking to and from the mines daily. This system should be encouraged because their

* See Gupta, *Labour and Housing in India*, p. 185.

† See *Labour Commission Report*, p. 279.

conditions of living are on the whole superior to those of their fellows who reside in the houses supplied by the companies.

However, in some of the mining areas, the Mines Boards of Health, mentioned before, have been trying to improve housing conditions, but have been much handicapped in raising standards in this respect by the prolonged financial depression from which the mining industry has been suffering. The standard of accommodation approved by the bye-laws of these Boards *viz.* a room with a floor space of 100 sq. ft. and a height of 7 ft. per family is too small for the tall and well-built Santali miner, his wife, 3 children and one or two dependents, and should be raised.

On the plantations housing is provided rent-free by the planters to all resident labourers. Most of the houses are made up of mud plaster with thatched roofs, and repairs are carried out by the labourers themselves during the slack season, thatch being given free to them by the employers.* The houses are usually constructed in long blocks of 8 to 12 rooms, but many of them do not have sufficient space between them and have been constructed back to back. As verandahs have not been added to them, the labourers do not get the privacy which they appreciate so much. Wherever high ground has not been chosen for the construction of the houses, the prevalence of malaria is found to be considerable. Most of the houses have no plinths and insufficient floor space, light and ventilation.†

The above survey makes it clear that employers have done much more than municipalities and Government to tackle the problem of housing the industrial workers, but so far they have touched only the fringe of the problem and provided housing only to a minority of their workers ranging from 10 to 40%. This has been due partly to the lack of co-operation from the municipalities and Government, partly to the inability of many

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VI, Part I, pp. 6-7.*
† Cf. *Labour Commission Report, p. 408.*

of them to take sufficiently long views, and partly to certain intrinsic difficulties of the problem.

To consider the last, first. The natural desire of the workers to live near relations and friends, whether or not they work in the same factory or even in the same industry, and the restrictions imposed by caste distinctions explain much of their unwillingness to live in houses supplied by their employers. However, much can be done to remove this unwillingness by grouping houses in such a way that members of one caste or race can live together and, if the houses have two or more stories, by placing members of the higher castes on the upper floors and those of the lower castes on the lower floors. It is true that the desire to live in racial and caste groups does not deserve sympathy and must be eliminated by means of education. But this must be done gradually, and there is danger in forcing the pace unduly.

The reluctance of the workers is also due to the supervision which the employers have to exercise over the use by the workers of the houses provided by them in order to keep them in a sanitary condition. The sanitary inspections, and the restrictions which the supervision involves, are usually carried out in rough and ready ways and sometimes even in a rather high handed manner. If they are carried out sympathetically and with the use of persuasion, the fear and dislike of the workers will gradually disappear.

Further, supervision to be effective must be accompanied by the power of expulsion, which may impose great hardships even upon individual workers. In their villages they are habituated to hard work for a certain period followed by a period of slackness and even laziness. If they follow this habit in industrial centres, they may lose their jobs and may be made still more miserable by their expulsion from the houses provided by the employers. But this power of expulsion held over large masses of workers may prove far more dangerous and may be used by the employers to break strikes, to prevent a healthy growth of trade unionism among the workers, and to prevent the growth of a spirit

of independence among them.* It is, therefore, necessary to limit this power by associating municipalities with the employers in the work of constructing houses for working classes. Moreover, if the employers charge rent and limit the number of people occupying each room, the workers, who have never paid any house rent in their villages, prefer renting a more costly room outside and sharing it with many others, although it may be insanitary and overcrowded.

Moreover, in many industrial areas it is very difficult to obtain sites for housing at reasonable prices. In several areas, the available land is agricultural and cannot be used for building. Further, even if the houses are let only to the workers of the industrial establishments which have supplied them, they often get crowded with relations and dependents, and owing to the practice of sub-letting, with workers who belong to other establishments and who are passed off as brothers of the tenants. In some centres too, the houses may be used by the overseers of other factories as convenient means for enticing labour away.† Finally, to meet some of these difficulties and to make their buildings attractive to the workers, most employers have to charge a low rent, far below the economic rent, or even a nominal rent, so that they get a small return, and in some cases practically no return, on their capital invested in the buildings. It is, therefore, natural that most employers should be slow in experimenting with costly housing schemes.

At the same time the facts that large numbers of workers come from an environment, speak vernaculars, and follow social customs, different from those of the people among whom they come to live, and that the industrial areas to which they migrate are already overcrowded and lacking in proper sanitary and other facilities for health, make the responsibility of the employers, under whom they labour, a very real one in the matter of supplying decent housing to them. Moreover, the

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence*. Vol. I, Part 1, p. 24 and Gupta, *Labour and Housing in India*, p. 173.

† Cf. Kelman, *Labour in India*, p. 141.

employers who provide such housing are sure to benefit, in the long run, from securing greater permanency, punctuality, regularity of attendance and efficiency from their workers, owing to a substantial improvement in the health and physical strength of the latter, as well as to the proximity of the houses to the factories.

But the co-operation of the municipalities and Provincial Governments in this work is essential. The whole community stands to gain from healthy and sanitary housing of the industrial workers. Municipal councils are primarily responsible for the health of their citizens, and this responsibility cannot be fulfilled unless decent and healthy housing is provided to the industrial workers. Hitherto, however, almost all the municipal councils have woefully failed in this duty. It is true that their financial resources are limited, that the imposition of additional taxation by them would be very unpopular, and that they are deficient in the executive capacity that is needed for tackling large and complicated housing problems. But they have failed, not only to evolve and carry out housing schemes, which require funds and high executive capacity, but also to make use of the powers and the machinery that they already possess for controlling the construction of new buildings. The building bye-laws of most of them are honoured more in their breach than in their observance.* Hence, new buildings are being constructed everywhere, which are almost as wretched as the old ones, and which are increasing the congestion and overcrowding that already prevail. The Provincial Governments also have neglected the proper development of industrial areas and have not given to the municipal councils the encouragement and guidance which they have a right to expect in this matter.

The Labour Commission has suggested that a survey of the housing requirements of industrial areas should be made by each Provincial Government, and that the information should be considered at a conference of each

* See Gupta, *Labour and Housing in India*, p. 155.

Government, the municipal authorities and the employers with a view to arriving at decisions regarding practicable schemes.* The municipal authorities should be made responsible for the proper development of industrial areas, especially the portions set apart for housing schemes, and the supply of adequate arrangements for sanitation. They should appoint qualified health officers, improve health organisations, rouse the sanitary conscience of the inhabitants by organising propaganda work and health weeks, and improve and apply energetically all bye-laws and regulations pertaining to housing, sanitation and health. To avoid an increase in overcrowding they should examine carefully all applications for permission to construct new houses or to modify old ones. If the municipal councils have even a few members determined to agitate about these matters, it will be comparatively easy to rouse the social conscience of the community and to compel it to tackle the housing problem seriously.

Employers should co-operate with the municipalities by sharing in the financial burdens, and the Provincial Governments by selling or leasing land and by creating a Ministry of Health in every province. The ministry should fix minimum standards regarding floor and cubic space, ventilation, lighting, latrines, water supply and drainage for houses erected for industrial workers, and all municipal authorities should be made to include them in their building bye-laws under a comprehensive Public Health Act which should be passed in each province. The ministry should also guide the employers in the execution of housing schemes by preparing plans of different and cheap types of houses, and by giving them needed advice. In the plans, the addition to the single living room of a small room for cooking meals and keeping pots and pans and a verandah in front for privacy, which the workers desire so much but which is denied to them at present, and the provision of decent latrines should be regarded as essential.

* Report, p. 287.

With regard to plantations, the Boards of Health and Welfare, whose appointment has been suggested before, should fix minimum standards of floor space, light and ventilation, and should be empowered to prohibit habitation in houses which cannot be made sanitary. Different plans of houses to suit varying conditions should be prepared by them and sent to the planters.

In each province a Town Planning Act should be passed providing for the planning and acquisition of areas suitable for housing industrial workers and the clearing up and re-organisation of overcrowded and insanitary areas. Schemes approved by the Ministry of Health should be given financial help by Government. The Act should also provide for the zoning of industrial and urban towns under which the construction of new factories should be permitted only in areas reserved for industrial purposes, and other areas should be reserved for the housing of the workers.

The Improvement Trusts established in some cities such as Bombay, Calcutta and Cawnpore have done useful work in clearing up slums and preparing sites for housing, but so far they have done little to provide houses for the workers, and have left this task to the municipal authorities and private landlords. Hence congestion has tended to increase in the neighbourhood of improvement schemes. It is necessary, therefore, to make the provision of such housing in co-operation with the local authorities, Government and the employers, one of their statutory duties. Moreover, the working classes should be given proper representation on them, their working should be made more popular, and their heavy expenditure should be curtailed by reducing the number of whole-time and highly paid officials.* Improvement Trusts should be established in other industrial centres, such as Howrah and Ahmedabad, in which there is much congestion and slum area. Provincial Governments are considering legislation to carry out all the above recommendations regarding the housing of workers.

* See Gupta, *Labour and Housing in India*, p. 168.

The difficulty of obtaining suitable land for the housing of workers at reasonable prices has already been mentioned. In many cases the owners of such land demand exorbitant prices. The Land Acquisition Act enables Government to acquire land compulsorily from its owners if it is needed "for the construction of some work likely to prove useful to the public." But hitherto housing schemes for workers have not been regarded as coming under this category. The Labour Commission has recommended, therefore, that the Act should be modified so as to enable Government to acquire land at reasonable prices for employers desirous of constructing houses for their workers, provided that their schemes are approved by the Ministry of Health.* A bill to amend the Act in this manner has been drafted by the Government of India and will shortly be introduced in the Central Legislature.

Government and municipal authorities should stimulate the establishment of co-operative building societies by allowing them to construct houses on sites prepared by the authorities, and the employers should promote them by giving loans or subsidies. The authorities should also construct plinths in areas prepared for housing by the provision of sanitary facilities and water, should lease the sites to workers, and should grant them loans for constructing houses according to their own choice under the supervision of the authorities.

We may now turn to welfare work, which may be defined as work for improving the health, safety, general well-being and the industrial efficiency of the workers beyond the minimum standards laid down by the Factory Act and other labour legislation.† The necessity for welfare work arises out of the modern system of production which destroys all personal touch between the employers and the workers. It may be divided into intra-mural and extra-mural *i.e.* work inside and outside the factory and may be rendered by the employers, the

* Report, p. 291.

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 194-5.*

State, and the workers, or by philanthropists and social workers.

It may take the form of providing more space, more light, better ventilation, more suitable temperature, better water supply, and better sanitary conveniences than are laid down by the Factory Act. It may also take the form of the provision of dining rooms, tea-shops and canteens supplying wholesome and fresh food, bathing and washing facilities, crèches, day schools for children and night schools for adults, reading rooms and libraries, co-operative societies, cheap grain and cloth shops, medical help, first-aid appliances, housing, open-air and indoor games, magic-lantern and cinema shows, dramatic performances, excursions, open-air lectures and other facilities for recreation and exercise, celebration of religious festivals, sickness benefits, leave on pay, maternity benefits, and mothers' allowances, although the provision of these facilities is not enjoined by the labour legislation of this country.

The aim of welfare work is threefold. It is partly humanistic, to enable the workers to enjoy a richer and fuller life. It is partly economic, to improve the efficiency of labour, to increase its availability where it is scarce, to secure a better class of workers even if it is not scarce, and to keep them contented so as to minimise the inducement to form or join unions and to resort to strikes. The aim is partly civic, to develop a sense of responsibility and dignity among the workers, and thus to make them worthy citizens.

Before the war, welfare work hardly existed in India owing to the ignorance and apathy of the workers, the short-sightedness of the employers, the neutrality of Government, and the indifference of the public. But it began with the war, and in spite of the continuance of economic depression it has been expanding steadily, and although it is yet far below the English and American standards, it has come to stay and is bound to progress. Several causes have brought about this development. The pace of industrialism has quickened much since the war, and workers have become discon-

tented with their conditions and conscious of their rights and power; an increasing number of employers have begun to take a long view of their interests and responsibilities; Government has begun to take an active interest in welfare work largely owing to the efforts of the International Labour Conferences; public opinion is being roused and educated in the matter; and social service agencies are being established, and social workers are coming forward to develop it.

Varied welfare work is being done by several employers at various centres, the most notable instances being the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills (Binny and Co.), Madras, the Empress Mills, Nagpur, the Jute Mills at Kankanarah (Jardine, Spinner and Co.), Currimbhoy Ebrahim Workmen's Institute, Bombay; Angus Jute Mills, the paper mills at Titaghur (Thos. Duff and Co.), Tata Iron and Steel Works, Jamshedpur, Kirloskar Iron Implements Works at Kirloskar Wadi, and the woollen and leather factories of the British India Corporation, Cawnpore.* Also several municipalities, Port Trusts, Public Utility Services and the Railway Administrations have been doing similar work. Finally, several social service agencies such as the Servants of India Society, the Social Service Leagues in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, the Sevasadan Societies in Bombay and Poona, the Bombay Presidency Women's Council, the Maternity and Infant Welfare Association, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Depressed Classes Mission Society and various Missionary Societies are doing valuable welfare work partly independently and partly in co-operation with the employers of labour. They have embodied in them the strongest Indian traditions of unstinting service and the Western practical experience of social welfare.

* Sir Sorabji B. Mehta, Manager of the Empress Mills, Nagpur, has given a detailed and interesting account of the welfare work done in his mills in his memorandum, *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. III, Part I, p. 68 *et seq.* For an account of the welfare work of the Tata Iron and Steel Company, see Vol. IV, Part I, pp. 151-7, of the Angus Jute Mills, see Vol. V, Part I, pp. 404-6, and of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, see Vol. VII, Part I, pp. 139-40.

The real value of the welfare work of all these agencies lies in establishing higher standards of working and living conditions which, by becoming general, will ultimately lead to the raising of the minimum standards laid down by legislation.

Trade unions, however, are apt to regard welfare work by the employers with suspicion in the belief that the aim of the latter in doing this work is to keep their workers away from trade unions. When the trade unions themselves do welfare work they come into competition with the employers. Further, the unions are afraid that the workers, led away by the attractions of welfare activities, may fail to appreciate the important consideration that no amount of welfare work can take the place of decent wages. Moreover, they feel that the welfare activities of the employers are mere concessions and not the workers' rightful dues like wages, and that, therefore, the activities are liable to be curtailed or even withdrawn by the employers according to their inclinations, especially during a period of a strike or a lockout. If the workers are dependent upon their employers for housing, medical help, education of children, sickness and maternity benefits, etc., the withdrawal of these facilities during a strike or a lockout will weaken the unions very much in their struggle with the employers. Trade unions, therefore, desire welfare work to be done by themselves, the State, or independent public bodies. Finally, they think that if the employers do welfare work in a spirit of rivalry among themselves, some of the union members working under one employer may obtain larger benefits than the others working under another employer, and that thereby their own solidarity would be adversely affected. They, therefore, want welfare work to be standardised.

This attitude of suspicion is unfortunate because, of all the agencies for welfare work, the employers are the best owing to their financial resources, their administrative experience, their intimate knowledge of the needs of the workers, and their daily touch with them. It is, therefore, fortunate that the suspicion can be removed

by the adoption of a right attitude by the employers. If they undertake welfare work with pure motives, and neither in a spirit of rivalry among themselves nor in a spirit of hostility towards the trade unions, their welfare activities will be approved and welcomed by the unions.

The importance of welfare work is greater in India than in the West.* Indian workers regard industrial employment as a necessary evil from which they are eager to escape as early as possible. Moreover, removed from the village community and thrown into a strange and uncongenial environment, they are liable to become easy victims of drink, gambling and other vices which tend towards their demoralization and ruin. A contented, stable and efficient labour force, therefore, cannot be built up without an improvement in the conditions of their life and work in industrial centres.

However, as they constitute only a small proportion of the population, it will not be justifiable on the part of the State to undertake any large extension of welfare work for their benefit only. At present, therefore, welfare work should be developed chiefly by the employers, who will find expenditure on it a prudent and profitable investment, leading to an improvement in the steadiness and efficiency of the workers. This extension, however, must not be at the expense of the wages of the workers. So far, welfare work has been usually accompanied by wages higher than those paid in similar concerns in which there has been no welfare work. Moreover, welfare work can never be successful and popular among the workers, unless the employers realise that it can never be a substitute for stability of employment, just and fair treatment, and sympathetic attitude in actual relations, and that it is neither a luxury, nor a philanthropy, nor a means to divert the workers from the trade union movement.†

A few industrial concerns, as explained above, have already made good provision for the welfare of their workers, but many have neglected it, and there has been

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 195.*

† See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 436.*

no co-operation among the employers for initiating and developing it. Difficulties such as the illiteracy, the temporary and floating character, and the differences of race, language and religion of the labour force, no doubt exist.* On the whole, however, there has been a general improvement in this respect, owing partly to the growing appreciation on the part of the employers of the great importance of promoting the health and comfort of their workers, and partly to the growing reluctance of the workers to submit to unsatisfactory conditions of life and work. What is now needed is, firstly, to raise the backward employers to the general level in this respect and, secondly, to raise the general level which has already been left behind by the more progressive employers. The Labour Commission has, therefore, suggested that the Provincial Governments should be given the power to issue, as in England, welfare orders under the Factories Act to groups of employers, requiring them to provide certain facilities for their workers.† The more important of these may be considered here.

¶ In all industrial establishments one or more first-aid boxes of a prescribed standard should be kept in a proper condition, according to the number of the workers employed, and there should be persons on the staff able to use them properly. †

The exclusion of infants and young children from factories has not yet been provided for under the Factories Act, as a large proportion of factories do not yet provide crèches for children, although crèches are very valuable in securing more regular work from the women workers.‡ Prohibition of their admission into factories would at present be tantamount to prohibiting the employment of a large proportion of mothers of small children. The women are wanted for work, and they have to work in factories because their husbands cannot earn enough for the subsistence of their families. There

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 22-3 and 53.*

† Report, p. 64.

‡ See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 198 and Vol. V, Part I, p. 106.*

are no relatives, too old or too weak to work, to take charge of the children, because they are left behind in the villages. The children cannot be left unwatched in the homes, and any children who are old enough to look after them are also old enough to do half-time work in a factory and thus to supplement the family income. The only alternative to bringing them into the factories is to lock them up in the cell-like homes, doped with opium, so as to keep them quiet and to prevent them from crying for food. Many infants are given opium daily, leading to their physical and mental degeneration and under-development.

Some of the crèches are well equipped and managed, the others are not. Even when good crèches are provided, the women workers are often unwilling to keep their children there, because they dislike entrusting them to unknown nurses, often belonging to a different caste and sometimes to a different religion, and like to have them under their own eyes, or in places where they can easily reach them without having to come under the gaze of the matrons managing the crèches. Much tact is necessary to overcome the suspicions of the mothers, and the success of a crèche depends largely on the personality of the lady supervisor. Progress in the provision of crèches has been negligible in all provinces except Bombay and the Central Provinces, and in a majority of factories, infants and young children are found lying or sitting on the floor or sacking beside their mothers' machines, in bobbin boxes, in canvas hammocks hung below or above the machinery, or in other unsuitable places, or hanging on to their mothers' saris, or running about and getting in the way, all suffering from the noise of the machinery and the dust and fluff in the air and exposed to the danger of accidents.*

The provision of crèches, therefore, should be made compulsory by law in all factories employing 200 or

* It is only the mills of Bombay city that infants and young children have not been allowed to enter for some years. In Ahmedabad and Sholapur considerable progress has recently been made in preventing them from entering mills. See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 64.*

more women. The Provincial Governments should be empowered to apply the compulsion to other factories if they think it necessary, and all other employers should be persuaded to establish them, whenever they engage a substantial number of women workers. Women factory inspectors, whose appointment has been suggested before, should organise and periodically inspect them.

Good crèches can be provided at a moderate cost. An initial expenditure of a little less than Rs. 500 and a monthly recurring expenditure of about Rs. 100 will secure the best hygienic conditions with little change from the simple Indian ways of life. Moreover, if they are managed by suitable nurses possessing a kind disposition, and if nursing mothers are freely allowed to visit them for short periods at regular intervals, the existing prejudice of the women workers against them will gradually disappear, and they will become increasingly popular. Till this reform is carried out, the least that can be done is to provide simple frames or hammocks suspended from the pillars or walls of factories and to teach the women to keep their infants in them.

Indian women are usually reluctant to use the services of male doctors, as many of their complaints are of a more or less intimate nature. In very many cases, rather than allow themselves to be examined by a male doctor, they try to treat themselves, often with dire consequences, or ignore their ailments completely. Every hospital and every group of dispensaries, therefore, whether provided by the employers or municipal bodies, should have a woman doctor, who should be in charge of women's clinics, maternity wards, child welfare centres, crèches, trained midwives and untrained dais, and who would completely alter the attitude of women workers towards the medical aid that is made available to them. Until such appointments are made, tactful explanation and chaperonage can do much to reduce the unnecessary sufferings of the women.

The very high rate of infant mortality in the towns and cities of India shows the necessity of organising child welfare and maternity relief centres. A Government diploma for women health visitors should be created, and all women desiring this position should be made to secure it.* Factories should organise themselves into groups, each factory having its own welfare centre and diplomaed health visitor under the supervision of a woman doctor employed by each group. The woman Assistant Director of Public Health, whose appointment has been suggested earlier in this chapter, should co-ordinate and guide the development of welfare schemes for the benefit of women and children. The Provincial Governments, local bodies, and employers should cooperate in this development, and the Governments should give percentage grants for projects approved by them. Suitable women should be trained as midwives in maternity hospitals and should then work in child welfare and maternity relief centres under the health visitor, attend confinements in the workers' homes and obtain skilled assistance wherever necessary. Most of the Provincial Governments have expressed their readiness to give effect to these recommendations when the financial conditions improve.

Some of the bigger employers and many planters have adopted maternity benefit schemes for their women workers, but the payment of benefits is not compulsory.† The absence of compulsion has been due to the feeling that the conditions in industrial establishments in this respect are not much different from those in other occupations in which women work, to the difficulty of interfering in the private lives of the workers who may dislike the attentions of women social workers, to the reluctance of women to be examined by men doctors, and to the paucity of women doctors. However, article 3 of the Draft Convention adopted by the Washington Labour Conference of 1919 has laid down that in any

* Cf. *Labour Commission* Report, p. 262.

† *Vide Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. V, Part I, p. 285, Vol. IV, Part I, p. 151, Vol. VI, Part I, pp. 12 and 71-2 and Vol. VII, Part II, p. 175.

industrial concern a woman must not be allowed to work during the 6 weeks following her confinement, that she must have the right to leave her work if she produces a medical certificate stating that her confinement will probably occur within six weeks, and that if she is absent from work owing to the above reasons, she must be given benefits sufficient for the proper maintenance of herself and the child either out of public funds or under a system of insurance, and also free medical attendance by a qualified doctor or midwife. Article 4 of the same convention has laid down that if a woman absents herself from work for reasons stated in Article 3, or owing to illness caused by pregnancy or confinement, her employer must not give her notice of dismissal, until her absence exceeds a maximum period determined by a competent authority.

Although the Government of India has conducted various enquiries regarding the feasibility of passing legislation to give effect to these two articles of the convention, and although social workers in conferences and several nationalist leaders have urged the enactment of such legislation, no action has yet been taken except in the Bombay Presidency and the Central Provinces in which legislation with a very limited application has been passed.* But, as the Labour Commission has pointed out,† it is now feasible to adopt throughout India legislation enforcing a maternity benefit system for women permanently employed on full-time work in perennial industrial concerns, as the supply of women doctors and social workers has been rapidly increasing, and as the hostility of the workers to outside interference in their lives for their own benefit has been steadily diminishing.

However, until a complete scheme of insurance against sickness, which would include confinement, is adopted, it would not be feasible to make the State and the women workers share with the employers the cost of the maternity benefit scheme. The administration

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 37 and 392.*

† See Report, p. 263.

of such a sharing would result in a disproportionate cost to the State. The share of the women workers would have to take the form either of payments throughout their working career, or larger payments during pregnancy. But both the methods would create difficulties, because the first would mean continuous contributions even beyond the age of child bearing, and also payments by those who did not have children, and the second method would require an early certification of pregnancy, which is impracticable at present. The whole burden of the maternity benefits, therefore, must fall for the present upon the employers until a general scheme of sickness insurance is put into force, when the State and the women workers can be made to contribute. The fear that this will induce the employers to engage men in place of women to a substantial extent, and thus lead to a reduction in the employment of women, is groundless, because the employers will find the labour of women, in spite of the cost of the maternity benefits, cheaper than that of men for those kinds of work for which the labour of women is suitable.

The rate of the benefit should be the average daily earnings during the preceding 3 months, or 8 annas per day, whichever is less, and the benefit period should be 4 weeks before and 4 weeks after child-birth. A confinement bonus should be given in addition, if the services of a trained midwife, or hospital treatment, are utilised. The administration of the Act to be passed for this purpose should be in the hands of the factory inspectors, or of women inspectors wherever they are appointed. Legislation to enforce the above recommendation is receiving the attention of Provincial Governments.

Turning to the necessity of providing the workers against sickness, it is found that the extent of sickness among Indian workers is much larger than that among their Western fellows, that the medical aid available to them is much less, that their low wages compel them to borrow money during illness lasting beyond a few days, and that illness is an important cause of their indebtedness. The Government of India was con-

vinced in 1928 that the introduction in India of any scheme of sickness insurance, in accordance with the convention adopted by the International Labour Conference, was not feasible owing to the difficulties of following the sick workers to their village homes, providing them with adequate medical aid there, and arranging for medical certification in cases of continued illness, and owing to the unwillingness and inability of the insured workers to bear even a part of the cost of insurance, and the very heavy expenses of administration.*

The Labour Commission has suggested the appointment of a Committee of the Central Legislature for conducting statistical enquiries in selected areas to find out the extent of sickness among the workers, with the assistance of railways, Government factories, the employers who have adopted sickness benefit schemes, and those who are prepared to conduct experiments. On the basis of this information another Committee should consider the drafting of schemes under which the employers and workers may be made to contribute to a sickness insurance fund, and the sick workers may be given sick leave for a maximum period of one month for one year's work, with a proportion of their wages to be paid out of the fund by the employers. The fund should be supervised and audited by the Provincial Governments to prevent the employers from appropriating accumulated balances in the fund.

The practice of giving free food to the workers when sick in hospitals and of giving an allowance to a relative for working as a sick attendant, that prevails on some plantations, should be made general. The allowance, however, need not be paid to the relative, whenever nursing is provided by the hospitals.

Any general scheme of old age pensions, or provident funds, for industrial workers is impracticable at present owing to their migratory habits, although a few employers, Railway Administrations, and Government De-

* See *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 172, Vol. II, Part I, p. 193 and Vol. V, Part I, pp. 44-5,

partments have adopted schemes of this nature. But there can be no doubt about the great need of such a provision. While workers can save hardly anything for their old age owing to low wages and debt, they find that the joint family system, and the provision that it makes for aged members, gradually break down under the stress of industrialism, that their connection with their villages becomes less and less, and that they cannot keep possession of all or any of their ancestral plots of land. Consequently, many of them have to suffer great hardships, when they become unable to earn their living owing to old age. However, all that can be done at present in this respect is to induce as many employers as possible to take a long view and voluntarily to adopt schemes of old age pensions or provident funds for their workers so as to increase their efficiency by attracting a better type of workers and keeping them contented. Government should help such schemes by monetary grants and other ways wherever possible.

Finally, efforts should be made to diminish the consumption of intoxicating liquors by the workers by a further reduction of the number of liquor-shops and of the hours during which they may be kept open in all industrial areas. This will increase the welfare and efficiency of the workers, firstly, by diminishing the harmful effects of indulgence in drink and, secondly, by enabling the money otherwise wasted on drink to be spent in profitable ways. A substantial proportion of the workers indulge heavily in drink, and the misery caused by it is considerable. Further, a proportion of the workers in some centres, particularly in Bengal, continue to indulge in the consumption of opium, although its price has been recently raised by Government to check its consumption.*

The indulgence is largely due to the wretched and dull lives that they have to lead and the poor quality of the food that they have to eat in industrial areas. Therefore, better housing, better facilities for spending

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 116-7.*

leisure, such as play-grounds, gymnasiums, cinema shows, libraries and reading rooms, and better facilities for obtaining nourishing food and eating it in comfort, such as canteens for the supply of meals and light refreshments, and sheds in which food can be eaten and rest can be taken in comfort, will not only have a direct effect on the welfare and efficiency of the workers but also an indirect but important effect on them by reducing the temptation to them for indulgence in drink. A few employers, as stated before, have already provided these facilities with much benefit to themselves as well as their workers, and it is the duty of social workers and factory inspectors to induce as many employers as possible to follow their example.

CHAPTER XIV.

Relations Between Industrial Labour and Employers.

Strikes on a small scale occurred in factories in India even during the early development of modern industrialism, but there is hardly any record of them. The first strike about which reliable information is obtainable occurred in a textile factory in Bombay in 1882. This was followed by a few infrequent strikes. The first big strike, officially recorded, occurred at Ahmedabad as a protest against the substitution of a fortnightly payment of wages in place of the weekly payment that had existed before, but the strike failed. Another big strike occurred in Bombay in 1897, because the Bombay Millowners' Association discontinued the daily payment of wages that they had temporarily introduced during the plague epidemic and restored the old system of monthly payment. This strike also was unsuccessful.

From this time up to the war strikes rather increased in number. Industries expanded more rapidly than the supply of labour, so the workers set up a demand for higher wages and supported it by means of strikes. Moreover, several strikes occurred, especially in 1905 in Bombay, owing to the introduction of electricity and excessive hours of work. In 1908, there was a big strike among the textile operatives in Bombay in sympathy with Mr. Tilak, a national leader, who was sent to prison for sedition.

Wherever the employers found it difficult to obtain sufficient labour, they endeavoured to conciliate their workers by meeting their legitimate demands half-way. But wherever labour was abundant, the employers attempted to defeat the common action of the workers, brought about by ties of relationship, caste or village, by bringing labour from a distance to take

the place of the local labour, or by giving accommodation to their workers in houses specially built for them so as to obtain a greater control over them. But these attempts were not very successful.

Before the war, however, on the whole strikes were infrequent, as the workers lacked organisation and leaders, had an entirely passive outlook on life and regarded a return to their village homes as the only solace for the hardships of industrial work.

Since the war, and especially since the end of it, the relations between workers and their employers have become much more strained, and disputes between them have become much more common, owing to the growth of trade unionism, the rise of labour leaders, the awakening among the masses, caused by the war and the nationalist movement, to a sense of their disabilities and the hopes of a new social order held out by the Workers' Revolution and Soviet rule in Russia.* Moreover, during the war industries expanded to a great extent owing to the demand for material needed for the prosecution of the war and increased demand for substitutes for the goods which could not be imported owing to the submarine campaign, the shortage of shipping and the pre-occupation of the Western manufacturing countries with the war, and this expansion temporarily produced a scarcity of labour which was increased by the influenza epidemic.

During the war a considerable proportion of strikes proved successful, because the employers, eager to make the most of the opportunities that then existed for earning large profits, dreaded any prospects of a stoppage of work and so were often willing to give in to the demands of their workers. But when the trade boom came to an end and large profits disappeared and a period of economic depression set in, the employers began to resist the

*The statistics supplied by the Governments of Bengal and Bombay to the Labour Commission regarding the number of strikes in the jute and cotton mill industries, the number of workers involved, and the number of working days lost since 1921 show that since that time a chronic state of unrest has prevailed among the jute workers of Calcutta and the cotton workers of Bombay city. See *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 117 and Vol. V, Part I, p. 126.*

demands, so that nearly two-thirds of the strikes occurring since then have failed. Further, many employers have pursued a shortsighted policy, allowing even the legitimate grievances of their workers to accumulate and attending to them only after the workers had resorted to strikes. An unpleasant characteristic of the latest strikes has been the intimidation and coercion of men willing to work, in their lodgings as well as on their way to and from their work. Picketing at the places of work has been allowed by the police, and in two or three cases employers have resorted to counter-picketing.*

The causes of strikes have been economic as well as non-economic. Among the former are disputes regarding wages, bonus, leave, hours of work, ill-treatment of workers by overseers, and demand for the reinstatement or dismissal of one or more individuals. Important economic causes up to the end of 1922 were a lag in the rise of wages behind the rise of prices and long hours and unsatisfactory conditions of work. By 1923 prices fell considerably, wages rose, hours were diminished and conditions of work were improved, and the quinquennium 1923-27, during which fluctuations in prices were small, saw a substantial falling off in the frequency and intensity of strikes. But by 1928 prices and profits began to fall more, and the efforts of the employers to counteract the depression by better methods of production and a reduction of personnel and cuts in wages resulted in another period of serious industrial strife.† The slump in prices has raised the real wages and the standard of living of the workers, and they will not give up this benefit without a struggle. Therefore, when prices rise again, labour unrest is likely to become still more serious.

Although most of the large strikes have primarily been due to economic causes, political leaders have, in many cases, used their influence with the workers to

* Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 132.

† In Japan also strikes gradually increased in number from 1914 to 1920 and diminished in number during 1920-26. Since 1926 industrial strife has again become more serious, Cf. Harada, *Labour Conditions in Japan*, p. 176.

intensify the strikes by bringing in non-economic considerations. Among these may be mentioned demands for permission to attend the trials of workers prosecuted by the police for taking part in the Non-Co-operation and Civil Disobedience movements, refusals to handle foreign goods, orders prohibiting political demonstrations by workers, demands for the release of workers arrested for rioting or disorderly conduct, demands for the withdrawal of proceedings against workers accused of assaulting European managers, and refusals of managers to re-employ workers dismissed for serving as congress volunteers.*

Very recently stoppages of work known as *hartals* have become common as protests against the action of Government or the police. The spread of communistic doctrines among the workers has also intensified several disputes, particularly in Bombay.† Moreover, speculators on the share and commodity markets have endeavoured to intensify them by spreading rumours among the workers and assisting them with money, owing to the influence that strikes have upon prices in these markets.‡ Further, dissatisfied, suborned or dismissed sardars and jobbers have abused their power over workers and initiated and maintained strikes. Other non-economic causes have been demands by Muslim workers for a special recess for prayers on Fridays and for a special burial ground, rumours of assaults on workmen at considerable distances from the mills, prosecutions and convictions for using disabled animals for transport, demands for the release of the workers arrested on charges of theft or for the withdrawal of theft cases, and demands by the authorities for certain particulars, such as home addresses, etc. about workers.

The Industrial Disputes Enquiry Committee appointed by the Government of Bombay, mentioned in 1922 the following as the chief characteristics of Bombay

* See Gilchrist, *Wages and Profit-Sharing*, pp. 266-8 and *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 123-4 and 156.

† See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 425.

‡ Cf. " " " " Vol. V, Part I, pp. 156 and 359.

strikes, and they continue to be the characteristics, in the main, of strikes in India. (1) The frequency of strikes without notice. (2) The lack of clearly defined grievances before resorting to strikes. (3) The multiplicity of demands brought forward after the commencement of strikes. (4) The lack of effective organisations to give shape to the demands of the workers and to secure their compliance with any settlement that may be arrived at and (5) The growing cohesion among the employers and among the workers, and the ability of the latter to continue strikes for prolonged periods in spite of the absence of any visible organisation. Further, many of the strikes have had extraordinary duration owing to the facts that the strikers were not solely dependent upon earning industrial wages and returned to their villages to resume their traditional occupations, and that those who did not actually do so were keyed up by the confidence that they could do so if they desired.*

Owing to the growing frequency and importance of disputes between the employers and workers the Government of India has established a Labour Bureau, the Government of Bombay, a Labour Office,† the Government of the Punjab, a Board of Economic Enquiry, and the Governments of Madras and Bengal have appointed a Labour Commissioner and a Labour Intelligence Officer respectively, for collecting reliable statistics and information regarding workers' cost of living, wages, hours of work, family budgets, strikes and lockouts, for taking part in the settlement of disputes, and for suggesting new legislation and modification of existing laws.

To turn to the schemes that have so far been devised for preventing industrial disputes and settling them

* See India in 1929-30, p. 171.

† The Bombay Labour Office has to its credit most of the statistical investigations into labour conditions made in India since 1921, and through its *Labour Gazette*, published monthly, it has supplied to a wide public the index numbers of the cost of living of the Bombay working classes and the index numbers of wholesale prices in Bombay that it has been constructing, and information on various labour questions affecting India in general and the Bombay Presidency in particular.

if they cannot be avoided. Since 1920, in several Government and private industrial concerns, works committees, consisting of members elected by the workers to represent them and those appointed by the management to represent it, have been in existence. These enable the workers to bring their grievances to the notice of the management through their representatives on the committees, and also enable the management and the workers to keep in better touch with each other, leading to a better appreciation of each other's difficulties and minimising the chances of misconceptions and strained relations. Although the Bombay Industrial Disputes Committee of 1922 expected much from such works committees and advocated their formation wherever possible, they have so far obtained little success for reasons to be considered later.

At Ahmedabad, since 1920, a permanent arbitration board has been in existence, composed of one representative each of the Millowners' Association and the Labour Union of the workers belonging to the different mills. All the demands of the workers are first discussed between them and the managers of the mills to which they belong. If the discussion fails to produce a settlement, the matter is discussed between the Millowners' Association and the Labour Union, and if this also does not lead to a settlement, the matter is finally considered by the arbitration board. If the two arbitrators do not agree, the question is referred to a third person in whom both have confidence, and his decision is binding. This machinery has proved successful owing to favourable local conditions which do not exist anywhere else. They are, firstly, that the employers and most of the workers have the same vernacular, religion and ancestral homes and, secondly, that Mahatma Gandhi, the labour representative on the Board, has enjoyed a wonderful personal influence with the employers as well as the workers, owing to his political and spiritual ideals and unquestioned impartiality. There has, however, often been considerable delay in the operation of this machinery owing to

the pre-occupation of Mahatma Gandhi with various other activities.*

Several persons, generally Government officials, have, since 1920, intervened in some disputes as conciliators or, by request, as arbitrators and have succeeded in settling several of them. Courts and Committees of Enquiry were also appointed by some Provincial Governments and obtained a fair measure of success.†

As a result of the recommendations of these Courts and Committees, and after prolonged discussions between the Government of India and the Provincial Governments, the Trade Disputes Act was passed in 1928, to remain in force till 1934. The desirability of such an Act was first considered in 1920 when the public in India, as elsewhere, became anxious about the industrial disharmony and strife that followed the end of the war. At that time, however, it was believed that legislation for the settlement of industrial disputes was not likely to be successful. But the development of trade unionism and the growing influence of public opinion on the conduct of the disputes in the years that followed made the Government of India change its opinion and get the above Act passed by the Central Legislature.

The Act, like similar legislation in England, has not provided for compulsory arbitration, but considers public opinion as an important influence in ending disputes. It has provided, therefore, for the appointment of Courts of Enquiry, or Conciliation Boards, by the Provincial Governments and the Government of India. The former consist of one or more independent individuals, the latter, of an independent chairman and other members who may be independent or who may represent the disputing parties. Their function is to examine the disputes referred to them, to attempt to settle them, and to help the formation of a well-informed public opinion on them by a clear framing of the issues involved in them and by discussing the merits of the issues. The Courts of

* Cf. *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 138 and 142.

† See *Labour Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 136-7, Vol. III, Part I, p. 193 and Vol. V, Part I, p. 125.

Enquiry as well as the Conciliation Boards are empowered to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of evidence, and although they can be appointed without the consent of the parties to the disputes, neither party is bound to accept their findings or recommendations. This is the first part of the Act.

Its second part makes punishable, by a fine or imprisonment, sudden strikes in public utility services and provides that one month's notice of quitting work must be given by workers engaged for monthly wages in the postal, telegraph, telephone and railway service, in industries supplying water or light to the public, in any organisation of public conservancy or sanitation, and in any industry which the Government of India may declare to be a public utility service. This is meant to give time for the consideration of the grievances of the workers and to maintain public health and safety whenever any disturbance in the supply of the necessary amenities of civilised life is threatened.

The third part declares illegal, stoppages of work by means of strikes or lockouts with objects other than the promotion of an industrial dispute, or for coercing Government directly or by imposing hardships upon the public, deprives persons taking part in such stoppages of the protection given by the Trade Unions Act and provides for their punishment, and protects persons declining to take part in the stoppages from trade union disabilities which may otherwise be inflicted upon them. The first part of the Act has so far been invoked on three occasions, but the results have been rather disappointing. No prosecutions have so far been launched under the other two parts of the Act.

In dealing with industrial strife, the development of an environment unfavourable to disputes is far more important than the setting up of machinery to settle them. An important cause of labour unrest in India is the absence of close touch and understanding between the employers and the workers, due to differences of race and language. A large proportion of the industrial establishments are managed by foreigners. Even when the

managers are Indians, they and the workers in most cases belong to different races or castes and have different traditions.* Moreover, the former have very often a poor knowledge of the language of the latter. No one, therefore, should be appointed a manager unless he has an adequate knowledge of the language of the workers, especially as the illiteracy of the latter makes it impossible for him to convey rules and orders to them by means of writing.

Moreover, the interposition of firms of managing agents between the shareholders and the workers prevents the former from determining and even influencing policy regarding the welfare of the latter. Much more dangerous is the existence of undependable intermediaries such as jobbers, sardars, etc. between the managers and the workers. Some of the important functions of the managers are delegated to them, they possess even the power to employ and to dismiss the workers, and being responsible for conveying the orders of the managers to the workers, and the grievances and demands of the latter to the former, they often twist the orders and the complaints in the process of conveying them to suit their own views. Consequently, most workers have the feeling that no useful purpose would be served by endeavouring to place their grievances direct before the managers over the heads of these intermediaries.

It is most essential, therefore, that all managers should be keen and able to establish a direct and close touch with all their workers. The promotion of stable trade unions possessing ready access to the managers, the appointment of labour officers to take over from the jobbers and sardars the functions of engaging and dismissing workers, and the creation of works committees are the best means of establishing this touch. Wherever trade unions exist, the employers should endeavour to secure their help in the functioning of the works committees which must not be considered, as has been erroneously done in the past in many cases, as substitutes for,

*See *Labour Commission Report*, p. 340.

or rivals of, trade unions, and the employers should give the unions all reasonable facilities for their own development. This will remove the hostility of the unions towards such committees. Moreover, the managers and labour officers must do their best to understand the workers' point of view and to make the committees successful. The latter should press the demands of the workers upon the attention of the former, if they are satisfied that the demands are reasonable.

These means for the avoidance of industrial disputes must be accompanied by those for settling the disputes, if they occur. The lack of internal machinery within industries for settling disputes has become prominently noticeable in recent industrial disputes.* The creation and maintenance of such internal machinery is far more important than the maintenance of external machinery independent of the industries concerned for three reasons. Firstly, it is difficult to bring the external machinery in the shape of a Court of Enquiry or a Conciliation Board into use except when a dispute has already reached an advanced stage and has taken, or is about to take, the form of a strike. But by this time a spirit of bitterness and rage takes the place of the original readiness for a compromise, and this increases considerably the difficulties of bringing about a settlement. Secondly, the authority operating the internal machinery would have a better knowledge and understanding of all the circumstances and causes of a dispute than any authority wielding the external machinery. Lastly, the work of conciliation, to produce the best results, must be continued even after the dispute has been settled, but the external machinery cannot accomplish this.

The Labour Commission has suggested that the internal machinery should take the form, partly of a smaller body in each industrial establishment, in the shape of a joint committee of the representatives of the employer and the workers and, as a dispute in one concern is likely to spread to other similar concerns,

**Vide Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 152.*

partly of a larger body in the shape of a joint council representing the employers and the workers in each industry in each centre. The smaller body can be the same as the works committee mentioned above, if it exists and has been functioning effectively, and should deal with disputes arising in its own industrial establishment. The larger body should dispose of general disputes affecting the whole industry, and should also serve as an appellate body with regard to disputes in individual concerns.* It is most important that this joint machinery should be brought into operation as speedily as possible during the early stages of a dispute.

The creation of this machinery requires organisation among the employers as well as the workers in each industry. In the larger industries the organisation among the former is quite sufficient. That among the latter is inadequate, but in the chief industrial centres it is sufficient to justify the starting of the joint machinery, and the working of the machinery would promote organisation among the workers by developing their sense of responsibility.

Recently a demand has been set up in certain quarters for the enactment of legislation providing for the compulsory reference of all industrial disputes to arbitration and for the enforcement of the decisions of the arbitration courts upon the disputing parties, on the ground that the workers cannot express their grievances clearly and urge their reasonable demands effectively owing to their want of organisation.

But the primary objection to such compulsion is that it would generate in most industries a tendency to depend upon some external authority for the maintenance of industrial harmony and to discourage the settlement of disputes by the industries themselves, thereby producing very harmful effects upon the vigour of such industries. Discretion, therefore, must remain with Government to decide when disputes should be settled by the industries themselves, by means of their internal

* Report, p. 344.

machinery, and when the external machinery provided by the law should be brought into operation to settle them. It would also be impossible to compel large bodies of workers to accept the awards of arbitration tribunals and to work under conditions determined by the awards, if they regard such awards as unfair. Moreover, it would be impossible to compel employers to work at a loss in pursuance of the decisions of such tribunals. Further, such awards, like judicial judgments, must be given by the application of principles already accepted by public opinion and embodied in legislation. But, there is still no generally accepted principle even for determining an equitable wage.*

However, workers engaged in public utility services stand on a different footing and, as mentioned above, the Trade Disputes Act has laid down that they must not stop work without previous notice. But the Act has not provided in return for an impartial examination of their grievances and disabilities. It is essential that it should provide adequate machinery for this purpose. This no doubt involves the danger that the public service industries may not care to settle their disputes themselves by using the internal machinery, and may apply for the operation of the external arbitration machinery provided by statute, without sufficient reasons. But the danger can be largely overcome by allowing the use of the external machinery only if the parties to a dispute have failed to settle it themselves within a reasonable period, and if the application invoking the operation of the machinery is extensively backed up, and by demanding a deposit of money with every application and confiscating it if the application is found to be vexatious.† It is also desirable to set up permanent tribunals instead of the *ad hoc* ones appointed temporarily to deal with particular disputes as provided by the Trade Disputes Act, because they would avoid delay and possess a better knowledge and experience of industrial problems. The Government of India has announced that it has noted

*Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 347-9 and 353-4.*

†Cf. *Labour Commission, Report, p. 346.*

all the above suggestions for consideration when the time comes to replace the Trade Disputes Act of 1929 which expires in 1934.

Certain other defects in the Act have also come to light, and it is desirable to eliminate them as soon as possible. Firstly, the Act should provide for the appointment of a Court of Enquiry even after a strike has ended, because some of the strikes may be settled for the time being, leaving open sores which need healing by means of an impartial enquiry, and because it may be necessary to investigate allegations of the fomentation of strikes by means of financial help or otherwise, by speculators on the stock and produce exchanges, for influencing the prices of certain shares or commodities to suit their private ends. Secondly, the definition of public utility services needs widening so as to include the supply of articles essential for everyday life such as food, milk, coal and oil, and the working of ferries, river services and tramways. There are many precedents for the inclusion of such services, and the inclusion of some of them is quite necessary in some provinces.

Thirdly, sympathetic strikes should be declared illegal except in the same industry and in the same area. Sympathetic strikes are permissible where real sympathy prevails, and the above exception would meet such cases. But the great danger is that the credulity of ignorant workers in other industries and areas may be worked upon by outside instigators, by means of imaginary grievances and spacious promises, till they flare up and go on strike. They may be kept out of work for several weeks and may then be made to resume unconditionally without obtaining any redress of the grievances, or fulfilment of the promises, or even strike pay from the strike leaders, who may thus exploit them blatantly, dishonestly and cruelly to promote their own private ends.*

* Read, for example, the account of the strike of oil workers at Budge Budge in Bengal in sympathy with that of tin plate workers at Jamshedpur in Bihar, given in *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 150-2.

Fourthly, the maximum penalty of 3 months' simple imprisonment, or a fine of Rs.200, under the Act is too low to act as a deterrent to outsiders possessing substantial financial or political strength, and should be raised substantially. Finally, while the leaders of *mala fide* disputes (e.g. strikes for purely political purposes) can be dealt with under the Penal Code, it is necessary to enable the industrial law to cope with outsiders who instigate *mala fide* strikes for other than labour ends and try to give them a *bona fide* appearance by bringing forward imaginary grievances as subterfuges. This may be done, partly by declaring all strikes without notice of a certain period illegal, and partly by making persons giving financial assistance to strikers liable to heavy penalties as has been done in New Zealand, New South Wales and Western Australia. Legislation, however, should be aimed at the leaders and instigators of *mala fide* strikes and their instruments, and not at the workers as a whole.*

Finally, it may be pointed out that a very important aspect of Government help in settling industrial disputes in Western countries *viz.* conciliation has so far hardly been used in India.† Government and the public have remained ignorant or passive spectators of the early stages of disputes when it was easy to settle them, and tribunals have been appointed only after disputes had reached their height and settlement had become very difficult, Government intervention, therefore, necessarily taking the form of arbitration instead of conciliation. In the early stages of disputes Government help for conciliation is bound to prove very useful. Every Provincial Government, therefore, should use discerning and experienced officers to bring the disputing parties together as early as possible, to explain to each of them the other's standpoint and to make definite suggestions for a compromise, and should not exercise

* See Gilchrist, Conciliation and Arbitration, Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour, No. 23, pp. 91, 105, 116 and 130 and Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part I, p. 157.

† See Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. VII, Part II, pp. 250, 251 and 258.

the powers conferred by the Trade Disputes Act until such conciliation machinery is used and fails. In Western countries, there is much less dependence upon public enquiries by tribunals than upon the endeavours of conciliation officers to induce the disputing parties to settle their quarrels themselves. India, by means of the Trade Disputes Act, has incorrectly tried to do otherwise, but now must attempt to introduce this valuable reform.*

The conciliation officers would also be able to keep the Provincial Governments well informed of the nature and merits of disputes in their early stages and to advise the Governments about the stage when their intervention would prove useful. At present, when disputes reach their crises and Government intervention is called for in the interests of law and order, the Governments usually find their knowledge about the disputes very inadequate, especially as it has been supplied by the Police Department from a single viewpoint, *viz.* the preservation of peace and order.

**Cf. Labour Commission, Report, pp. 347-8 and Evidence, Vol. I, Part I, p. 145 and Vol. V, Part II, p. 220.*

CHAPTER XV.

Industrial Labour and the Community.

In the preceding pages we have examined the main problems of industrial labour in India and suggestions for various reforms, including those made by the Labour Commission. Some of them will make heavy demands on the pockets of the community, others will be comparatively inexpensive. All will need a sense of responsibility and a spirit of good will towards the workers on the part of the community and a readiness to experiment for improving their lot. To give effect to them the community will have to find out and train the right workers—factory inspectors, labour officers, welfare officers, medical officers and labour investigators. Secondly, it will have to put new life into the existing social service organisations, to create new ones, and to make all of them undertake service for the industrial workers.* Thirdly, it will have to provide for the supply of more extensive and more accurate information about the lives of the workers, because it is only on this basis that a sound industrial labour policy can be developed.

Even the Labour Commission was much handicapped by the paucity and unreliability of such information. It has, therefore, suggested that legislation should be passed by the Central Legislature empowering competent authorities to collect information from employers regarding the earnings, attendance and housing and living conditions of workers, from merchants regarding prices, from money-lenders regarding loans to workers and from landlords regarding rents; that corresponding to the Labour Office in Bombay, a Labour Bureau should be established in Bengal, the other chief industrial province,

* Very few of these organisations gave evidence before or supplied any useful information to the *Labour Commission*.

for collecting extensive statistical information;* that the Government of the Punjab should assist the Punjab Board of Economic Enquiry to enable it to conduct investigations with regard to industrial labour in the Punjab; that a similar board may be established in the Central Provinces; that Government should set up enquiries into family budgets in Delhi, Madras, Cawnpore, Jamshedpur and a centre in the Jharia mining area; and that intensive enquiries in limited fields should be conducted by private investigators under the auspices of Universities, social and religious bodies, and employers, after receiving a course of training at the Bombay Labour Office or some other authority which has carried out a successful enquiry.†

For the administration of all labour subjects such as the administration of the Factories Act, the Trade Unions Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act: for the collection and publication of labour statistics and general intelligence: for the provision of conciliation in trade disputes, and for serving as an advisor to Government in all labour matters, the Commission has recommended the appointment in each province, except Assam, and also under the Government of India, of a full-time Labour Commissioner who should hold the appointment for a comparatively long period. Assam is excepted because the number of industrial workers in this province is small, except those working on the plantations, and for these, as seen before, the Commission has recommended the appointment of a Protector of Immigrants.

The Commission has further suggested the creation under statute of an Industrial Council consisting of representatives of the Central and Provincial Governments and of equal representatives of the employers elected by their associations and of the workers elected by registered trade unions, and nominated by Government wherever such unions do not exist. The functions of the council would be to propose labour legislation to

* Cf. *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. V, Part II, pp. 219-20.*

† Report, pp. 446-50.

Government and to examine proposals for such legislation referred to it by Government, to advise Government on the framing of rules and regulations under labour laws, to advise Government and others regarding the collection of labour statistics and the co-ordination and development of economic research, to keep in close touch with the International Labour Organisation, to develop co-operation and mutual understanding among those connected with the initiation and promotion of labour policies, and to interchange information and experience regarding labour experiments.*

As regards the enactment of labour legislation the Commission has recommended that it should continue to be in the hands of the Central Legislature. All the witnesses who gave evidence before the Commission were strongly in favour of the continuance of this course. The reason is that without uniformity of labour legislation in the whole of India, it would be difficult to give adequate protection to the workers. The world has now realised that labour legislation, to be adequate, must be adopted internationally, because the backwardness of one country in this respect makes it difficult for other countries to progress owing to unfair competition, and the effect of this awakening is seen in the setting up of the International Labour Organisation at Geneva.†

To leave legislation to the provinces now, would mean going back, because the provinces would either have to abandon progressive legislation, or by adopting it to expose their industrialists to the unfair competition of their rivals in the other provinces that have refused

*Report, pp. 467-74.

†For the details of the action taken by India on the Draft Conventions of this organisation, see *Labour Commission, Evidence, Vol. II, Part I, p. 231 et seq.*

‡"International standards have been established for labour, not through altruism so much as through commercial expediency. The pressure for better labour conditions in Japan has come, not only from Japanese labour but also from both labour and capital in the countries of higher standards. It was the pressure of international opinion that finally brought about the abolition of night work for women and children in the textile mills of Japan and consequently shortened the working day in that important industry, that raised the legal age limit for child labour in Japan and that has set the stage for the abolition of underground work for women in Japanese mines." J. E. Orchard, *Japan's Economic Position*, p. 382.

to adopt it, and even to run the risk of finding their own industries moving to the other provinces. Moreover, the preceding pages make it clear that although industrial conditions vary from province to province, the variations are not so pronounced as to justify the adoption of different standards in different provinces for protecting the workers. At the same time, to enable experiments, the scope for which is considerable, to be made in new directions on a provincial scale, the Commission has proposed that the Provincial Legislatures also should be empowered to legislate on labour matters provided that their work does not clash with or lower the efficiency of the Central legislation and its administration.*

It is also desirable to centralise the administration of the labour legislation so as to prevent unjustified variations in the standard of enforcing it in different provinces, to secure those responsible for the enforcement from undue local influences, and to enable them to make the best use of their common experience. However, if future constitutional developments make this impossible, means should be devised to ensure that the provincial administration of the labour legislation is made effective in all parts of the country.

Further, to ensure salutary and progressive labour legislation it is necessary to provide adequate representation to labour in the Central and Provincial legislatures, so that its representatives can voice its needs and aspirations and bring forward definite proposals for fulfilling them. Moreover, the welfare of labour is dependent upon the entire policy of the legislature and the executive, and in shaping it wisely, organised labour can play an important part, with great benefit to itself as well as the community. Adequate representation to labour will also prove educative and will increase its sense of responsibility and of unity with the community. On the other hand, if its just claims for participation in shaping the policy of the community are

* Report, pp. 461-2,

into the future. "We rejoice at the evident signs of the awakening of the general conscience which greater knowledge and the ferment of thought in India are combining to produce, and the progress already visible should hearten all those who believe in the possibility of advance. It is on the growth of the will to progress in the community generally, in those responsible for Government and for the control of industry and in the workers themselves that the hope of the future lies."

CHAPTER XVI.

Labour in Small Industries.

The foregoing study of industrial labour in India would be incomplete without the inclusion of the workers in cottage industries who outnumber the workers in organised industries, the hand-loom weavers alone numbering 6 million. The cottage workers are a large percentage of the population of every town, and they still exist in almost every village. Moreover, it has been seen in the opening chapter that the cottage industries will occupy, and ought to occupy, a prominent place in the future economic development of India. A detailed examination of the conditions of the workers in the different cottage industries would, however, be beyond the limits of these pages. All that can be attempted here is, therefore, a rapid survey of their present conditions and the suggestion in outlines of the more important means of improving them.

(The cottage industries may be divided into three groups. The first consists of a few industries, like handspinning, that have disappeared altogether owing to the very keen competition of factory goods and other unfavourable conditions which proved too hard for the artisans, and it is useless to try to resuscitate these industries. The second consists of those industries like dyeing, pottery and oil pressing, which also have had to face the competition of goods produced on a large scale, such as aniline dyes, metal utensils and kerosene, but which have continued, although in a decadent condition, owing to the conservatism and ignorance of the artisans, which make them most reluctant to abandon their hereditary occupations, their fear of the hard conditions of factory work, and their heavy indebtedness to the merchants who play upon their ignorance and exploit them by compelling them to continue in their

ignored or recognised half-heartedly, it is sure to turn to other methods, such as communism, to assert itself, with great harm to itself and the community.

The industrial workers, so far, have been given much less representation in the legislatures than their employers. Moreover, all the labour representatives, numbering ten altogether, have been nominated by Government. This has deprived the representation of most of its educative value and has diminished the influence and authority of the representatives over the workers and made it impossible for them to enjoy their full confidence. As long as special electorates are continued in the Indian constitution, the industrial workers have the best claim to them and to a representation at least equal to that given to their employers.* This representation should be by means of election by registered trade unions, and this method of election will promote the healthy growth of the union movement. The Commission has recommended the creation in each province of a tribunal of three members, having no connection either with industry or labour, with a judge as president, to allocate votes among the registered unions before each election.

Industrial workers should be given special representation on municipal councils also. Hitherto, although they and their dependents have formed a large part of the population of many municipalities, they have not secured representation on any of the municipal councils except the Bombay Municipal Corporation. But without such representation it will be difficult to induce the councils to give that attention to the improvement of the health and housing of their citizens which has been seen to be necessary in the previous pages.

The Government of India, in the Department of Industries and Labour, has issued a report which shows that the various recommendations of the Labour Commission have been receiving the careful attention of the

* The communal award of the British Government has given effect to his recommendation so far as the Provincial Legislatures are concerned.

Government of India and Provincial Governments, and that legislative and administrative action to give effect to them is under the careful consideration of these Governments. Mr. Whiteley, the Chairman of the Commission in a letter published in the *London Times* of 18th April 1933 expressed his appreciation of the progress made in implementing the recommendations in spite of the fact that political questions occupied the centre of the stage in India, and of the determination of Government not to allow these questions to sidetrack industrial and social reform.

There is no doubt that public opinion will generously and actively support the carrying out of most of the reforms considered in the above pages to enable the workers to lead a richer and fuller life, to which they are entitled as human beings, because among the intelligenstia of the country there is already a widespread appreciation of the facts that India's industries cannot prosper at the expense of her labour, that a generous policy with regard to her labour is also a wise policy with regard to her industries, and that her industrial advance can be justified only by the prosperity of all those who take part in it.

The most striking fact that stands out from a perusal of the 18 volumes of the evidence placed before the Labour Commission is that numerous witnesses from all parts of India, known to hold the most divergent political views, came forward in a period of acute political controversies to offer their fullest co-operation to the Commission in its task of suggesting ways and means for promoting the welfare of labour, and the Labour Commission has freely admitted that if its task was made somewhat difficult in certain respects by the absence of information, the absence was due, not to anyone's unwillingness to supply the information to it, but to the information not being available at all to anyone.*

This is a very hopeful augury for the future, and the Commission found cause for much optimism as it looked

* Report, p. 3.

into the future. "We rejoice at the evident signs of the awakening of the general conscience which greater knowledge and the ferment of thought in India are combining to produce, and the progress already visible should hearten all those who believe in the possibility of advance. It is on the growth of the will to progress in the community generally, in those responsible for Government and for the control of industry and in the workers themselves that the hope of the future lies."

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hereditary vocations. It is clear that it is useless to try to strengthen such industries that are inherently weak. What is needed on the contrary is to dispel the ignorance and conservatism of the artisans by means of education, to improve the conditions of factory work and gradually to absorb them in organised industries.

The third group of industries, however, such as cotton and silk weaving, metal working and embroidery and lace making have shown considerable vitality and cannot by any means be said to be in a decadent condition.* They have felt the competition of large-scale production to a limited extent only, because the imports and the output of Indian factories have been mostly taken up by the much increased demands of the people. The brass and copper workers, for instance, have felt the competition of imported enamelled iron ware and glass and crockery, but the growth in population as well as in its purchasing power has enabled the absorption of these wares and brought about a substitution of brass and copper vessels for village pottery. Further, the nature and amount of labour needed for the various designs of artistic goods have prevented the competition of factories.

Moreover, such cottage industries have possessed several advantages over factories. Firstly, the tools represent only a small capital so that the initial outlay is small, and the tools can be kept in use for many years. Secondly, many of the cottage workers are not

*"The silks, brocades, embroidery, tarkashi (gold and silver thread making) and brassware of Benares, the carpets of Benares and Mirzapur, the muslins, silks and fine cloths of Mau and Mubarakpur, the jamdani fabrics of Tanda, the prints of Azamgarh, Lucknow, Farrukhabad, Agra, Muttra and Jahangirabad, the carved ebony work of Nagina, the wood-carving of Saharanpur, the marble and alabaster work, dyeing and printing, and durrries and carpets of Agra, the furniture of Bareilly and the artistic brassware of Moradabad—all these are still living and in certain cases prosperous cottage industries employing thousands of men, women and children. . . . The position of the cottage industries is still strong except in the case of plain hand-weaving of cotton. That of several artistic cottage industries has been, if viewed broadly, almost steadily improving."

The U. P. Government Memorandum, *Labour Commission, Evidence*, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 133-4.

"With the possible exception of China, no country can show such activity in respect of cottage industries as India and there is no sufficient evidence to justify the conclusion that there has been any general decline". Clow, *The State and Industry*, p. 57.

solely dependent on the earnings of their industrial work, as they combine it with other work, such as agricultural and allied work. Thirdly, they work much longer hours than factory workers, as they work at home in the midst of their families and in pleasanter surroundings, and there is some evidence to show that the present generation of workers are working harder than their predecessors.* Fourthly, the womenfolk of the families give much help in the different preliminary processes in the intervals of their domestic work. If the cottage industries were to disappear, only a small proportion of such women would be available for industrial employment.

Fifthly, the workers have a considerable advantage through inherited skill over the factory operatives who are new to their tasks. Sixthly, most artisans have been very faithful to their hereditary occupations. Seventhly, industries like the brass industry are still helped by the difficulties of transport on account of the large size of the articles usually in demand. Finally, having a low standard of living the workers are satisfied with a small margin of profit, and although this is not a desirable feature, its existence has certainly increased their power of competition. These factors interfere with the operation of the economic law of wages, and so the cost of production in these industries often does not compare unfavourably with that in competing factory industries.

The cotton weaving industry, by far the most important cottage industry, and more important than any large-scale industry from the point of view of the number of workers, possesses certain additional advantages. Firstly, handloom cloth is considered stronger and more durable than mill-made cloth and is therefore still much in demand by the masses, especially the villagers. Secondly, the complicated designs of specialised types of cloth and the comparatively small demand for each design and type prevent mills from undertaking their manufacture. Thirdly, custom has decreed that certain

* See the *Census of India 1911*, Vol. XII, pp. 207-9 and *Pillay's Economic Conditions in India*, pp. 139-40.

kinds of cloth used for ceremonial purposes must be hand-woven. Fourthly, fine and artistic fabrics demanding special manual skill cannot be manufactured by mills.

Fifthly, the mills cannot compete with hand-loom in the manufacture of very coarse cloths from very inferior cotton, as the yarn made from it does not possess sufficient strength to be put on the power loom. Sixthly, an appreciable proportion of hand-loom in India manufacture a number of different types of cloth for export only, such as lungis, safas and handkerchiefs, for which there is a steady demand from Burma, Arabia, Singapore etc. Finally, the substitution of mill yarn for hand-spun yarn has exercised a steadying influence on the industry, as it is stronger and smoother. Consequently, although the annual production in the industry fluctuates substantially, on the whole there is a tendency towards an increase rather than a decrease. While the weaving from coarse yarn is declining, the medium and fine weaving is responsible for the increase.*

The economic conditions of the cottage workers who are spread all over the country are very unsatisfactory, although many of them supplement their earnings by performing agricultural work. Those producing the finer qualities are better off than those producing the ordinary qualities of goods which are exposed more to the competition of factory goods. (A proportion of the latter have been compelled to abandon their hereditary occupations and to become agricultural labourers. As the production per head in factories is larger than in cottage industries, an increase in the number of factory workers results in the displacement of a much larger number of cottage workers. Most of those who have stuck to these occupations find it difficult to eke out a bare living even at the best of times, in spite of hard work and long hours. In periods of scarcity

* *Vide* Appendix I to the Industrial Commission Report.

"In the period under review (1920-27) more cloth was produced by handloom weaving in India than in any corresponding period for which we have statistical information". Clow, *op. cit.* p. 57.

they have to suffer severe hardships as they have no reserve to offer resistance to such a calamity. When the crops fail the income of the people is much reduced and consequently the customary demand for the products of cottage industries also gets very much reduced; and at the very time that the earnings of the cottage workers fall very low, they have to pay much higher prices for their food. They have, therefore, been a cause of much anxiety to Government in times of famine, and the Famine Commissions had to pay special attention to the problem presented by them, especially the weavers.*

Apart from the competition of factory goods there are several reasons for this unsatisfactory situation. Firstly, although some of the workers have taken to better materials and tools, the methods of work of most of them continue to be the same as those of their forefathers. (Many of the preliminary processes are unduly prolonged and excessively laborious; there is little use of labour-saving devices, and there is no proper division of labour.

Secondly, owing to their extreme poverty, the workers are completely in the clutches of merchant-financiers, who advance them materials at high prices, advance them cash for their bare subsistence and in return receive their finished goods at low prices, thus making them suffer both ways. This system is an old one, but it has now become so widespread as to be a very serious menace to the welfare of the workers, most of whom can never hope to pay off their debt and are therefore rendered liable for life-long service to the merchant-financiers. The system, therefore, removes all incentive from the workers to improve their methods, efficiency or skill, because any improvement would merely serve to pay off an additional portion of the debt and thus benefit their capitalists only.)

Moreover, some of the merchants, taking a narrow view of their own gain, cut down the wages of the

* Cf. *Famine Commission Reports* 1880, p. 60, 1898, pp. 297-8, and 1901, p. 78.

workers and the quality of the materials advanced to them. The workers, having to produce more in order to get bare subsistence, work hurriedly and badly, and this, combined with the poor raw materials, brings down the quality of the products. But they can be sold more cheaply and, therefore, sell well for a time, and the merchants obtain larger profits. But soon the demand lessens owing to the lowering of the quality, and both the merchants and the workers lose, but both find it difficult to raise the quality and to restore the demand once the quality and the demand have gone down. This is bound to happen wherever the maintenance of a standard of quality is necessary for the maintenance of reputation and demand.*

Thirdly, being unused to fair treatment, many of the workers are either suspicious of improvements and reluctant to adopt them, or abuse them by wanting to make too much, thus spoiling their own market. Fourthly, they have absolutely no organisation for marketing their products and, apart from their indebtedness to the merchants, they are fully dependent upon them for putting their output on the market. The latter have made some efforts to build up a commercial organisation for this purpose and to open up the Indian market for these goods, and some of the special products of important towns like Benares, Agra, Aligarh, Moradabad, Coimbatore and Madura are available in many parts of India. Three or four Provincial Governments have also established sales depots. But neither the merchants nor the depots have pursued a sufficiently bold and energetic policy for pushing on the sale of the products. The tastes of the consumers are not studied, the workers receive no helpful criticism of their work, no instruction, no new ideas or designs. They remain isolated in their separate homes, and no attempt is made to bring them together to compare each other's work by holding periodical exhibitions. Moreover, there is no attempt at publicity, no advertising, and all the dependence is upon

* Cf. Maxwell-Lefroy's Report on an Enquiry into the *Silk Industry in India*, Vol. I, pp. 5-6.

the casual visitors and customers. Further, no attempt is made to cater for foreign markets or to create them. The nature of their demand, actual or potential, remains unknown and none has paid any attention to their possibilities. The merchants have ignored the potentialities of cottage industries and have done nothing to encourage the workers to produce goods of qualities that would find a ready market in foreign countries.

Fifthly, the artisans are seriously handicapped by their ignorance, conservatism, lack of ambition and of appreciation of an improved standard of living. Their ignorance makes them waste an appreciable part of their valuable time, and still more valuable resources, on social and religious ceremonies. This, combined with their poverty, leaves them little time to look around them; to derive inspiration from those who are better off, and to take up new ideas and suggestions from them. Moreover, if by any chance their earnings improve suddenly, but temporarily, they succumb to the temptations of drink, gambling and excessive expenditure on marriages and funerals, which prevent them from making any saving for future contingencies. Finally, some cottage industries, such as the silk industry, are hampered by the absence of patriotism among the dealers and buyers. The former are quite ready to sell foreign goods brought to them by some energetic importing firm and neglect goods of the same quality and price made in India. The buyers take the goods that the dealers stock and do not care whether they are Indian or foreign. The position remains substantially the same, although the conditions in this respect have improved a little in recent years, owing to the spread of the Swadeshi movement.

Conditions in the silk industry are similar to those in the cotton weaving industry. Its importance may be realised from the fact that nearly a million workers are dependent upon it in Bengal, Assam, Chota Nagpur, the Central Provinces, Mysore and Kashmir. Although it has been hit harder by the competition of imported goods, the economic condition of its workers does not appear to be worse than that of their fellows in the

cotton weaving industry. Not only has the export of raw silk from Bengal greatly fallen off in recent years, but it has also changed its form, and most of it is now exported in the form of waste or cocoons, because its reeling is done so inefficiently in India that it is full of knots and loose ends and is of unequal strength. For this reason the Indian weavers also have taken to the use of silk imported from China and Japan. The export of silk manufactures also has diminished much owing to changes in the nature of the European demand, the progress of the industry in Europe with superior methods, and the growth of the competition of the Chinese, Japanese and American industry in the European markets. Internally, also, the industry has lost ground to imports owing to defects similar to those found in the cotton weaving and other cottage industries, such as wasteful and inefficient preparatory processes, antiquated methods of production, lack of organisation, and utter dependence upon exacting and short-sighted merchant-financiers.

The industry, however, possesses certain special advantages, and it will pay the Indian community to take steps to improve and strengthen it. Firstly, large-scale production with modern machinery is much more difficult in the case of silk than in the case of cotton manufactures and has not yet been started in India. Secondly, silk manufactures, being luxury goods, must have artistic excellence and a variety of types and patterns, which can be produced on the handlooms only. Thirdly, the Indian industry has received a measure of protection from foreign competition owing to the existence of a revenue import duty higher on silk manufactures than on raw silk. Finally, educated Indians have now begun to show a preference for Indian silk goods out of national motives, and this tendency may be expected to increase in the near future.

The woollen industry in one form or another exists in most parts of India, but the qualities of the goods vary much. The disappearance of the carpet industry, mainly from the Punjab, has been prevented by the substitution of the demand from European markets for that from the

Indian royal courts and nobility, but the quality of the production has gone down and the workers are suffering from the same drawbacks as those mentioned above. The shawl industry of the Punjab has declined much owing to the disappearance of the European demand. But the manufacture of rough and coarse woollen blankets, as a subsidiary employment, by agriculturists and shepherds is going on in most parts of the country. The raw material is cheap and abundant, the demand on the part of the villagers, who use them for a number of purposes, is large and steady, and there is no competition from factory goods, which cannot stand the same rough use. Consequently, there is much scope for the improvement and expansion of this industry.

It thus becomes clear that, although several cottage industries possess much inherent vitality, the lot of the workers is almost everywhere wretched, and that the only way to improve it is to organise them along modern and more efficient lines. The Provincial Departments of Industries have attempted this recently.* Most of them maintain peripatetic demonstration parties which exhibit from village to village the working and advantages of new and improved methods and appliances, such as fly-shuttle sleys, warping machines, new patterns and designs, because experience has shown that demonstration in the weavers' villages is more effective than the education of the weavers' children at fixed centres.

The Departments have also endeavoured to enable the weavers to improve the quality of their output by the introduction of dobbies, with which cloth can be produced with patterned borders: of a simple form of double box sley for weaving check patterns with two shuttles, and of jacquard looms for the production of cloth with elaborate designs. Further, they have assisted in the supply of the improved appliances. In many cases local carpenters have been taught to copy the demonstrators' models. In other cases carpenters have been employed and taught at departmental institutes.

* See *India in 1926-7* pp. 330-38, *India in 1929-30* pp. 424-28 and Clow, *The State and Industry*, pp. 58-63.

Finally, a considerable use has been made of exhibitions to show the weavers the advantages of improved appliances and methods. The related cottage industries of dyeing and printing of cloth have received a similar treatment.

The Departments also maintain a number of weaving schools for providing instruction and training to the weavers' children, and also to the children of professional agriculturists, in order to provide them with a spare time industry that can give them an appreciable subsidiary income. (In addition, central weaving institutes are maintained which conduct two separate courses. One for training artisans to become capable weavers, and the other for training the more intelligent and literate among them to be weaving instructors and demonstrators and to enable them to start or control small handloom factories. The institutes have further to control the weaving schools, to organise the demonstration parties in the provinces, and to attend to the improvement of appliances and designs and their supply to the weavers, to research, to the provision of advice and help to inquirers, and to the promotion of connected cottage industries.)

The Department of Industries in Bihar and Orissa maintains the Bhagalpur Silk Institute which tries to introduce new designs, new kinds of yarn and fly-shuttle looms, sends manufactured silk goods to exhibitions held in different parts of the world and sends samples to firms of several countries. A silk weaving and dyeing institute has been established at Behrampur in Bengal for similar purposes. In Madras, attempts have been made to extend silk production to new areas, seeds have been distributed, peripatetic rearing parties have been sent round to help rearers, and modern methods of preparing improved silk yarn have been introduced by means of demonstrations and the training of artisans. In Assam improved seeds for silk rearing have been supplied after conducting considerable investigations in sericulture. A sericulture farm is maintained at Khunti in Bihar for improving mulberry cultivation and silk rearing. The

cottage industries institute at Gulzarbagh in the same province deals with a number of cottage industries such as weaving, knitting, dyeing, lametta work, durry and carpet making, the weaving of tape and newar and the manufacture of toys. It trains boys, employs artisans on a commercial basis, and gives demonstrations outside to promote the general adoption of better methods of work that have been devised.

A wool weaving institute exists at Gaya for training the hereditary wool weavers in the use of improved appliances. The institute is conducting experiments to try to produce a suitable small fly-shuttle loom for the workers, since the present loom for weaving blankets is much larger than that used for cotton weaving and is too large to use in their huts.) The Department in Bengal has improved the machines used for sunn hemp, rope making, spinning jute yarn, bending umbrella handles and cutting conch shells, and has carried out useful research at the Serampore Institute in the weaving of coarse jute and coir fabrics and in the spinning of jute, coir, sunn hemp, waste silk and wool. The Departments in Bengal and the Punjab have achieved useful results in research, instruction and demonstration in connection with the leather industry of these two provinces. All the Departments maintain schools and institutes for providing technical and industrial education. In Bengal, Bihar and Madras, State Aid to Industries Acts have been passed for rendering financial assistance to cottage industries.* The jails and reformatory schools throughout the country are now imparting manual training and technical instruction to boys and men in weaving cloth, carpets and durries, metal work, leather work, carpentry and cane and bamboo work. Finally, several societies have come into existence in different parts of the country for helping and promoting small industries.

The success achieved so far by these measures has been small, and they have influenced the work and lives of only a very small proportion of the workers and this

* See Clow, *The State and Industry*, p. 104.

too, to a limited extent. The educated section of the community must, therefore, interest itself in this problem and insist upon a far more energetic and virile policy for ameliorating the condition of the workers.

To dispel their ignorance and conservatism there must first be a much wider provision for better general education which should include manual training and simple instruction in crafts. In most cottage industries the children can be put to work at an early age, and as their mothers have often to do a full share of the work, they get neglected and are made to start work too early in life so as to add to the family income. This must stop as early as possible. Moreover, the special industrial schools maintained by the Departments of Industries must be much larger in number and provide more efficient training to the artisans.* To enable selected artisans, possessing better educational attainments and good prospects of commanding some capital, to obtain practical experience in the control of workers and in the management of business on commercial lines, some of these schools should have a commercial section attached to them as recommended by the Industrial Commission,† so that after completing the technical and practical training, the artisans can start as master-artisans employing a few workers under them.

(Secondly, improvements in technique and methods, in raw materials and tools must be widely adopted by the workers, because these alone will increase and cheapen their production and enable them to better withstand foreign competition. It is specially necessary to reduce the labour involved in the preparatory processes. The adoption of new patterns and designs will also help them to increase their sales.) The Departments of Industries have made a useful beginning in this direction, but experiments and demonstrations under their auspices are needed on a much wider scale. Experience shows that the artisans are quite ready to take to new imple-

*For details, see the writer's *Wealth and Welfare of the Bengal Delta*, p. 266-7.

† See Report, Para 261.

ments, methods or designs if they become convinced that they are better than their own and that they can afford them.

Thirdly, it is necessary to rescue the workers from the clutches of rapacious and short-sighted merchant-financiers. The small size and scattered nature of the industries will always prevent big financiers, possessing enlightenment and vision, from interesting themselves in their development. But these very features make the industries admirably fitted for the application of co-operation.* Small industries in other countries are thriving with the help of co-operation, and a great future lies in the front of India's cottage industries if only co-operation succeeds in providing them loans at reasonable interest, and raw materials of good quality, and improved tools and appliances at reasonable prices, in removing the existing defects in their character by propaganda and education, and in helping them to dispose of their products, as it has succeeded in doing in other countries. It is true that the few co-operative societies that have been so far established among the artisans have not on the whole proved successful, but this has been due to under-capitalisation, ineffective bye-laws, business inexperience and bureaucratic irresponsibility of the officers of the Co-operative Departments and a want of sufficient contact between them and the artisans, in contrast to the experience, interest and contact of the merchants.

These defects, however, can be gradually removed if the following principles are borne in mind. Firstly, co-operation to start with should take the form of credit, which is the simplest, the most readily acceptable and the most educative. Secondly, after the ground is prepared in this way, other forms of co-operation such as purchase and sale should be started, separate societies should be created for the purpose, and the credit societies should not be saddled with these other functions. For the formation of co-operative societies there must be

*The Indian Central and Provincial Banking Enquiry Committees have expressed the opinion that the salvation of Indian small industries depends largely upon the development of co-operative institutions.

close co-operation between the Industries Department and the Co-operative Department.* Selected officers of these departments should be deputed by Provincial Governments to Germany to study the working of its co-operative organisation for small industries, as the organisation has achieved remarkable success. Thirdly, co-operation should be attempted at first in those industries whose products are readily saleable at more or less stable prices, and the co-operative treatment should be applied to the other industries only after success is achieved and experience is gathered in the easier cases.

Fourthly, if the urban artisans find it difficult to co-operate under unlimited liability, they may be brought together in the Schultze-Delitsch type of society which does not work on unlimited liability and lends to members on the security of two other names. Finally, the officers of the Industries Department should help the societies with advice on technical matters, provision of new markets and commercial aspects of new schemes.† These officers should make a special study of different markets in India and abroad, and this will enable them to give the artisans of their respective areas proper advice regarding the types of articles which may be in demand or for which markets may be created.

Further, all provinces should pass State Aid to Industries Acts similar to those that have been passed in Bengal, Bihar and Madras, and all of them should give financial assistance liberally and under a simple procedure to those cottage industries which cannot be reached by the co-operative credit organisation. It would also be useful to start a scheme of licensing merchant-financiers. The books of those who are licensed by Government should be periodically examined by the officers of the Co-operative and Industries Departments to ensure that the merchants do not charge exorbitant interest and prices for the loans and materials that they advance to the workers. In return the merchants would get the

* For details of this co-operation see the writer's *Wealth and Welfare of the Bengal Delta*, p. 273.

† Cf. *Industrial Commission Report*, paras 265-9.

benefit of the advice of the officers regarding markets, designs, methods of production etc., and of the confidence and co-operation of the workers. The unlicensed merchants would of course be free to continue their business, but they cannot obtain the above double benefit. A substantial proportion of the merchants, therefore, may be expected to come forward to get themselves licensed, with great benefit to the workers.

Finally, an important feature of any programme of strengthening cottage industries must be the building up of marketing organisations and the opening up of new markets for the goods turned out. A large part of the success of the cottage industries of Germany and Japan has been due to the building up of industrial organisations which take over the products of the various industries and dispose of them at home and all over the world, and India must do the same, especially as experience shows that when the demand for their products increases, the workers in most cases endeavour on their own initiative to improve their methods of production. The Swadeshi Stores in Bombay furnish a good instance of an energetic and successful agency for the internal distribution of the products of cottage industries by bringing to the notice of the inhabitants of large cities the products of other parts of the country. Similar stores should be established in the towns and cities of India, and the Industries Departments should work in co-operation with them. The Departments will find the stores very useful in their work of extending the home market for the products of cottage industries, while the stores can benefit much from the information that they can get from the Departments about such industries.

In addition, a few central trading organisations are urgently needed to connect isolated and unrelated cottage industries, to establish co-ordination and co-operation among them, and to introduce their wares to suitable markets at home and abroad. Useful work of this character is being done by the Arts and Crafts Emporia at Lucknow and Lahore, but these are not

enough.* Further, the Indian Central and Provincial Banking Enquiry Committees have recommended the establishment of licensed warehouses, co-operative wholesale depots and co-operative sale societies for the storing and sale of products of cottage industries in commercial centres under the competent guidance of provincial marketing boards.† The Central and Provincial Governments and the larger local bodies can also help by purchasing their stores from the cottage industries wherever possible.

* *Cf. India in 1926-27*, p. 331.

† Report, p. 251.

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