

CHAPTER XI : Industrial Disputes in Tea Industry

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While discussing the trade union movement in tea industry in Chapter IX, we discussed in detail the growth of labour management conflicts in different decades. We observed that during the pre-independence period due to non existence of trade unions the employers were highly organized and powerful. They dictated both the wages and conditions of services of workers. After independence, with the intervention of trade unions the employers started losing the grip over the workers. The labour management conflicts got momentum during the fifties on some major issues like bonus, wages and work load etc. However, the bonus issue was settled in 1956 with the intervention of the Central Government, but the other issues were yet to be settled and industrial disputes gradually increased. It reached to its peak when the first United Front Government came into power in 1967. This time the trade unions got some support from the U.F. Government. Both the strikes and lockouts increased in tea industry. The pace and pitch of industrial disputes in tea industry showed declining trend only after 1969 with the development of process of negotiation. Both bipartite

and tripartite negotiations were gradually developed. These negotiations succeeded to control the number of strikes and lockouts in tea industry significantly.

Data on number of strikes and lockouts in tea industry during the fifties and sixties are not available. Moreover, the 'Labour in West Bengal', the official publication of the Ministry of Labour of West Bengal Govt. are not maintained at the head office of Directorate of Labour, Calcutta and National Library, Calcutta. Thus, we could only consult the 'Labour in West Bengal' since 1970. As a result, statistically we could not measure the trends of industrial disputes (strikes and lockouts) during the fifties and sixties. We have estimated the trends of industrial disputes with the figures of strikes and lockouts during the period 1972 to 1990. Again the 'Labour in West Bengal' does not present the data on industrial disputes separately for Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling hills. It presents statistics on total industrial disputes in tea industry of West Bengal. We approached to the Statistical Deptt. of Directorate of Labour for segregated data, but they could not supply it. We also approached to the TIPA (Terai Indian Planters' Association) and TBITA (Terai Branch of Indian Tea Association) and office of the Assistant Labour Commissioner, Siliguri to get the data on industrial disputes in Terai. But they have also not maintained it. Consequently, we could not present the industrial disputes in Terai tea gardens separately. We have presented the figures on industrial

disputes in Tea industry of West Bengal.

11.1 Intensity of Industrial Conflicts and Trends

The nature of industrial relations prevailing in the tea industry of West Bengal is reflected in the intensity of conflicts. The data on work-stoppages in tea industry are given in Table 11.1 for the period between 1972 to 1990, which enable us to trace trends in the industrial conflicts.

Figures in Table 11.1 show erratic nature of all indicators of intensity of industrial conflicts, no uniform and regular upward or downward trend is discernible. However, number of work-stoppages, number of workers involved and mandays lost showed a downward tendency for the years 1985 to 1990. During this period the share of strikes in work stoppages had reduced considerably. Another significant feature of industrial conflicts in tea industry as revealed by the data in Table 11.1 is that there is no correlation existing between the figures relating to the number of work-stoppages, number of workers involved and the mandays lost. During the last 19 years (1972-90), on an average, about 11 work-stoppages involving around 11852 workers and resulting in loss of more than 1,23,268 mandays lost due to these work-stoppages were registered in the tea industry of West Bengal.

Table 11.1
Trends in intensity of work-stoppages (1972-1990)

Year	Number of work -stoppages	Number of workers involved	Number of mandays lost	Index of mandays lost (Base 1972=100)
1	2	3	4	5
1972	20	18,229	2,00,857	100.00
1973	20	10,707	49,625	24.71
1974	12	27,835	42,824	21.32
1975	8	6,184	24,656	12.28
1976	4	18,602	24,602	12.25
1977	10	9,102	72,603	36.15
1978	20	16,884	64,290	32.00
1979	7	6,996	36,346	18.10
1980	17	47,113	1,24,613	62.04
1981	6	8,270	2,87,909	143.34
1982	11	6,995	3,31,245	164.92
1983	10	6,402	2,15,501	107.29
1984	6	4,772	96,778	48.18
1985	20	15,890	1,98,723	98.94
1986	15	10,618	3,13,441	156.05
1987	8	5,469	1,62,599	80.95
1988	3	1,975	41,318	20.57
1989	2	1,163	25,477	12.68
1990	2	1,965	28,690	14.28
Period Average 1972-1990	10.58	11,852.05	1,23,268.26	61.37

Note : (i) Work-stoppages include both strikes and lock-outs.
(ii) Figures for 1990 are provisional.

Source : Data compiled from Labour in West Bengal, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1990, Published by Ministry of Labour, Govt. of West Bengal.

11.2 workers' Participation in Conflicts

In order to draw an idea about the extent of workers' participation and their involvement in the work-stoppages of tea industry of West Bengal during the year 1972-1990, we have applied the measures which was originally developed by Ross, A.M and Hartman, P.T.¹ In table 11.2 three criteria have been adopted from Ross and Hartman for assessing the extent of workers' participation in industrial conflicts, viz., (A) Dispute Duration Ratio, (B) Dispute Coverage Ratio and (C) Time Loss Ratio.

Due to paucity of data we could not find out the membership involvement ratio. The official statistics of the ministry of labour, Govt. of West Bengal, maintains the total membership of unions of all industries in the state. But it does not maintain industrywise union membership.

(A) Dispute Duration Ratio : Dispute Duration Ratio is a measure of mandays lost per worker. It is evident from Table 11.2 that a worker involved in dispute, on an average, 16.18 days per year, during the period of 1972-1990. The average duration of dispute varied from a low of 1.32 days to a high of 34.81 days. The yearwise performance of dispute duration ratio show an unsystematic behaviour. However, the disputes were relatively for shorter period during the first nine years of the study period, 1972-1980. Annual average duration of disputes were around only 5 days during the same period. During

Table 11.2
Measures of workers' participation in work-stoppages during
1972-1990

Year	Dispute Duration Ratio	Dispute Coverage Ratio	Time Loss Ratio
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1972	11.02	911.45	10,042.85
1973	4.64	535.35	2,481.25
1974	1.54	2,319.58	3,568.67
1975	3.99	773.00	3,082.00
1976	1.32	4,650.60	6,150.50
1977	7.98	910.20	7,260.30
1978	3.81	844.20	3,214.50
1979	5.20	999.43	5,192.29
1980	2.64	2,771.35	7,330.18
1981	34.81	1,378.33	47,984.83
1982	47.35	635.90	30,113.18
1983	33.66	640.20	21,550.10
1984	20.28	795.33	16,129.67
1985	12.51	794.50	9,936.15
1986	29.52	707.87	20,896.07
1987	29.73	683.63	20,324.88
1988	20.92	658.33	13,772.67
1989	21.91	581.50	12,738.50
1990	14.60	982.50	14,345.00
Period			
Average	16.18	1,178.17	13,479.66
1972-1990			

Source : Data compiled from Labour in West Bengal, 1976, 1981, 1986 & 1990, Published by Ministry of Labour, Govt. of West Bengal.

this period the number of strikes were more than the number of lock-outs and larger number of workers involved in relatively shorter duration period of strike. In 1981, the annual average duration of disputes shoot up to 34.81 days from 2.64 days in 1980, and were relatively for longer period during the remaining ten years of the study period, 1981-1990. Excepting the years 1985 and 1990, a worker was involved in disputes for more than 20 days during the same period. The general upswing tendency of dispute duration ratio during the last ten year of study period was due to the involvement of relatively a small number of workers in lock-outs with long duration period.

(B) Dispute Coverage Ratio : It is a measure of workers' participation in per work-stoppage. Taking the period as a whole from 1972 to 1990, about 1178 workers were involved per work-stoppage per year. The yearwise dispute coverage ratios show that there is no continuous increase or decrease in the trend values of workers involvement in per work-stoppage over the period between 1972 and 1990. It is interesting to note here that excepting the years 1974, 1976, 1980 and 1981, when the dispute coverage ratio was as high as 2319.58, 4650.50, 2771.35 and 1378.33 respectively, during the rest of the years it was less than the average number of workers' involved per work-stoppage between the years 1972-1990. The general upswing in the ratio during these years was due to the involvement of larger number of workers in strike activity.

(C) Time Loss Ratio : It is a measure of average time loss in per work-stoppage. It is seen from column-4 of Table 11.2 that on an average, about 13480 mandays were lost in per work-stoppage. The ratio had ranged from as low as 2481.25 in 1973 to as high as 47984.83 in 1981. Though the ratio does not show a uniform and regular upward or downward trend, but a general upswing tendency was noticed since 1981. In 1981 the ratio had shown an alarming upswing to 47984.83 from 7330.18 in 1980. During the first nine years of the study period, 1972-1980, on an average, about 5369 mandays lost in per work-stoppage were registered against 20779 during the rest of the period, 1981-1990. The general upswing tendency in the ratio during the period from 1981 onwards was due to the occurrence of some long duration of the lock-outs.

11.3 Relative Position of Strikes and Lock-outs in Work-stoppages

The above three measures of workers' participation in the work-stoppages of tea industry clearly indicate a changing pattern from 1981 onwards. This is due to the change in the relative position of strikes and lock-outs in the work-stoppages.

The relative position of strikes and lock-outs in the tea industry of West Bengal is presented in Table 11.3.

Table 11.3

Relative position of strikes and lock-outs in work-stoppages during
1972-1990

Year	Number of work stoppage		Number of workers involved		Number of workers lost		Mandays per strike (Col. 6/2)	Mandays lost per lock-out (Col. 7/3)	Average duration of strike	Average duration of lock-out
	Strikes	Lock-outs	Strikes	Lock-outs	Strikes	Lock-outs				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1972	15	5	15,922 (87.34)	2,307 (12.66)	152,100 (75.73)	48,757 (24.27)	10,140	9751	9.5	21.5
1973	17	3	8,931 (83.41)	1,776 (16.59)	20,321 (40.59)	29,304 (59.05)	1,195	9768	2.3	16.5
1974	11	1	27,615 (99.21)	220 (0.79)	38,864 (90.75)	3,960 (9.25)	3,515	3960	1.4	18.0
1975	7	1	5,419 (87.63)	765 (12.37)	10,120 (41.04)	14,536 (58.96)	1,446	14536	1.9	19.0
1976	4	-	18,602 (100.0)	-	24,602 (100.0)	-	6,150	-	1.3	-
1977	10	-	9,102 (100.0)	-	72,603 (100.0)	-	7,206	-	8.0	-
1978	17	3	15,630 (92.57)	1,254 (7.43)	31,690 (49.29)	32,600 (50.71)	1,864	10867	2.0	26.0
1979	5	2	5,864 (83.82)	1,150 (16.18)	7,346 (20.21)	29,000 (79.79)	1,469	14500	1.3	25.2
1980	10	7	42,010 (89.17)	5,103 (10.83)	52,720 (42.31)	71,893 (57.69)	5,272	10270	1.3	14.1

contd ...

Table 11.3 contd ...

1981	-	6	-	8,270 (100.0)	-	2,87,909 (100.0)	-	47,985	-	34.8
1982	-	11	-	6,995 (100.0)	-	3,31,245 (100.0)	-	30,113	-	47.6
1983	1	9	300 (4.69)	6,102 (95.31)	2,100 (0.97)	2,13,401 (99.03)	2,100	23,711	7.0	35.0
1984	5	1	3,872 (81.14)	900 (18.86)	7,678 (7.93)	89,100 (92.07)	1,536	89,100	2.0	99.0
1985	8	12	6,275 (39.49)	9,615 (60.51)	9,489 (4.77)	1,89,234 (95.23)	1,186	15,769	1.5	19.7
1986	-	15	-	10,618 (100.0)	-	3,13,441 (100.0)	-	20,896	-	29.5
1987	3	5	2,550 (46.63)	2,919 (53.37)	40,100 (24.66)	1,22,499 (75.34)	13,367	24,500	15.7	42.0
1988	-	3	-	1,975 (100.0)	-	41,318 (100.0)	-	13,773	-	20.9
1989	-	2	-	1,163 (100.0)	-	25,477 (100.0)	-	12,738	-	21.9
1990	-	2	-	1,965 (100.0)	-	28,690 (100.0)	-	14,345	-	14.6

Annual average 5.95 4.63 8531.16 3320.63 2472.79 98545.47 2970.84 19293.79 2.91 26.59
1972-1990

Notes (i) Figures for 1990 are provisional. (ii) Figures in parentheses indicate percentages to total.
(iii) Lock-out is inclusive of cases of strike followed by lock-out.

Source : Data compiled from Labour in West Bengal, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1990, Published by Ministry of Labour, Govt. of West Bengal.

A close perusal of column 2 and 3 of Table 11.3 shows that there is no significant trend as such in the occurrence of strikes and lock-outs between the years 1972-1990. The yearwise incidence of strikes and lock-outs had been uneven. No uniform and regular upward or downward trend was discernible. However, the incidence of strikes was far greater than the incidence of lock-outs between the years 1972-1980, and thereafter the number of lock-outs was more than the number of strikes during the rest of the period (1981-90). On an average, the number of strikes and lock-outs in tea industry were 5.95 and 4.63 per year respectively for the period between 1972 and 1990.

Column 6 and 7 of the table reveal that excepting the years 1972, 74, 76 and 1977 when 75.73 p.c., 90.75 p.c., 100 p.c. and 100 p.c. mandays were lost due to strike action of the workers, lock-outs accounted for much larger number of mandays lost in the remaining 15 years of the study period. On an average, strikes and lock-outs accounted for 4,69,733 and 18,72,364 mandays lost respectively between the years 1972 and 1990. Thus, mandays lost in lock-outs registered four times more than the mandays lost in strikes during the period 1972 to 1990.

Again column 8 and 9 of table 11.3 further points out the fact of high share of lock-outs in mandays lost. The average mandays lost per strike and lock-out show a range of 1186 and

13,367 days in the case of strikes, and a range of 3960 and 89,100 in the case of lock-outs. On an average, 56,446 mandays lost accounted in per strike against 3,66,582 in per lock-out between the years 1972-1990.

Thus, there is a marked increase in the number of mandays lost due to lock-outs in tea industry. In fact this trend had started since 1981. Since lock-out is a form of offensive that the employers can inflict on the workers, it would be interest to study the average number of days a worker was involved in a strike or a lock-out.

From the figures given in table 11.3 column 10 and 11 clearly indicate that average duration of strike was gradually becoming shorter, this proved decline in sustaining power and consequent fall in the bargaining power of the workers of tea industry. Excepting the years 1972, 1977, 1983 and 1987, when the average duration of strike in tea industry was as high 9.5, 8, 7 and 15.7 days respectively, during the rest of the years from 1972 to 1990, it was around 3 days. Whereas the average duration of lock-out was more than 20 days during the same period, excepting the years 1973, 1974, 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1990 when the average duration of lock-out was as low as 16.5, 18, 19, 14.1, 19.7 and 14.6 respectively. On an average a worker was involved in lock-outs for 27 days (approx.) against only 3 days (approx.) in strikes, between the period 1972 and 1990. This might show the unequal strength of the labour and management in the tea gardens.

11.4 Distribution of Work Stoppages

After studying the trends of disputes, workers' participation in disputes and relative position of strikes and lock-outs in the work-stoppages, we may now proceed to analysis the distribution of work-stoppages (both strikes and lock-outs) industry wise in the state, which enable us to trace the relative position of tea industry to total work-stoppages in the state.

In table 11.4 we have shown the percentage distribution of work-stoppages by major industries in West Bengal during the period 1981 to 1990.

It is clear from the table 11.4 that the incidence of disputes was the highest in the "Miscellaneous Industry Group" during the last ten years period, 1981-1990. This is indicated by the highest annual average incidence of work-stoppages, viz. 51.89 per cent. It is because of the largest coverage of this group in the state, viz. Iron & Steel, chemicals, printing press paper etc. As this group comprises of several kind of industries this average percentage can not be compared with the corresponding percentage figure of other industries mentioned in table 11.4 of the other four groups. The position of tea industry is the third in the state, in the incidence of work-stoppages. The Engineering industry is the worst affected group of industries in the state by work-stoppages with an annual average percentage of 28.55 per year. Next to

Table 11.4

Percentage distribution of work-stoppages by major industries in West Bengal - 1981-1990

Industry	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	Averages - 1981-1990
Engineering	30.63	26.71	30.29	25.54	25.49	22.23	33.90	39.02	24.67	26.98	28.55
Jute	14.38	16.44	12.58	7.07	10.29	10.14	11.02	8.94	10.57	11.11	11.25
Tea	3.75	7.53	5.71	3.26	9.80	7.24	3.39	1.22	0.88	1.06	4.38
Cotton	5.00	6.16	1.14	3.26	3.43	2.90	3.81	4.88	3.96	4.76	3.93
Miscellaneous	46.24	43.16	50.28	60.87	50.99	57.49	47.88	45.94	59.92	56.09	51.89

Source : Data compiled from Labour in West Bengal, 1986 and 1990, Published by Ministry of Labour, Govt. of West Bengal.

Engineering industries, the Jute industries in the state, comes next with an annual average incidence of work-stoppages of 11.25 per cent per year. The cotton industry is the lowest disputed industry in the state. This is indicated by the lowest annual average incidence of work-stoppages, viz. 3.93 per cent.

Thus, the industry wise distribution of work-stoppages in West Bengal for the period 1981-1990, reveals that the incidence of work-stoppage in tea industry is lower than many industries. This situation is attributed to the following factors :

- i) Tea gardens are located in backward regions and its workers live within their own community with their traditions. Literacy rate is very low among the tea garden workers and hence they are less concerned with the labour movement in the urban areas.
- ii) The trade unions in tea industry have taken the policy of avoiding strikes as far as possible. There have been a growing demand from the trade unions to settle the differences at the bipartite level.
- iii) Tea industry is an agro based industry and if tea leaves are not plucked out in due time, entire leaves are damaged. It harms the employers more than anybody. So there have also been a growing demand on the part of the employers to resolve the disputes, whether minor or major, through the bilateral discussions with the trade unions. It is to be noted

here that the employers show this attitude more in plucking seasons than in the non-plucking season. Thus, tea industry had witnessed more lock-outs generally during the non-plucking period than in the plucking season.

11.5 Absenteeism

Strikes and lock outs can be classified as articulate form of industrial disputes on the ground that they are open and collective expression of 'workers' dissatisfaction with their employer over the terms and conditions of employment, while industrial absenteeism is taken to be evidence of inarticulate form of industrial dispute for, it is mute, unorganized and individual form of workers' protests against their employers.

Absenteeism as a form of industrial disputes is a major labour problem confronting the management because production is often affected, labour costs are increased and efficiency of operations is reduced as a result of frequent and continuous absence of workers.

The term 'Industrial absenteeism' generally means "the failure of a worker to report for work when he is scheduled to work". It is generally defined as the ratio of man-days lost due to the absence of workers to mandays scheduled to work expressed in percentage term. The measurement of absenteeism, i.e., the "Absenteeism rate" is the measure of its severity,

i.e., the quantitative expression of human energy lost.

Table 11.5 has been computed to show the extent of atsen-teeism in some of the major industries of West Bengal for which data is available.

Table 11.5

Average annual rate of absenteeism by industries
(1974-1989)

Year	Tea	Cotton	Engineering	Chemical
1974	20.97	11.01	17.21	13.56
1975	19.74	13.15	15.82	15.23
1976	20.96	12.21	15.24	14.18
1977	19.44	12.01	15.80	14.39
1978	18.13	10.62	16.67	14.60
1979	19.85	11.80	16.15	14.39
1980	16.84	11.45	15.64	15.17
1981	19.14	13.07	16.28	14.91
1982	16.97	13.80	17.03	16.13
1983	11.85	12.55	15.99	13.19
1984	12.11	13.56	17.20	16.15
1985	15.40	14.67	16.19	16.00
1986	12.89	14.98	15.45	15.62
1987	14.71	13.34	13.60	15.31
1988	10.36	13.90	12.43	15.28
1989	13.40	14.89	14.44	12.31
Mean	16.42	12.94	15.70	14.78
Standard deviation	3.41	1.31	1.25	1.05

Source : Data compiled from Labour in West Bengal, 1974 to 1990, Published by Ministry of Labour, Govt. of West Bengal.

Analysing table 11.5, we find that the annual rate of absenteeism in the four major industries, viz. tea, cotton, engineering and chemical industries of West Bengal is quite considerable. Considering the annual average rate of absenteeism in these four production channels for the period of 16 years from 1974 to 1989, we find that in each of these industries, the rate of absenteeism is very high. The tea industry in the state accounts for the highest rate of absenteeism with 16.42 per cent p.a. over the period mentioned. Next in order of the degree of absenteeism come Engineering, Chemical and Cotton industry with 15.7, 14.78 and 12.94 per cent respectively.

Data in table 11.5 clearly indicates that there have been year to year fluctuations in the rate of absenteeism during the period under review. But, by and large, we can say that the severity of the problem of absenteeism has remained the same throughout. A comparison of standard deviations for the four different industries over the period 1974-1989 indicates that the variation between absenteeism rates is maximum in the case of Tea industry followed by Cotton, Engineering and Chemical industry.

A comparison of annual rate of absenteeism in four major industries of West Bengal clearly indicates that the average annual rate of absenteeism and year to year fluctuations in the rate of absenteeism in tea industry is the highest.

11.6 Causes of Absenteeism

The prevalence of high rate of absenteeism in tea industry naturally leads us to the analysis of the cause for industrial absenteeism in tea industry. Generally speaking, industrial absenteeism in any place is a social phenomenon. As it is the case with all social phenomena, industrial absenteeism is the result of a multiplicity of causes - social, political, economic and others. Hence it is not possible to attribute any single cause for industrial absenteeism, nor is it possible to discuss all the causes leading to the problem in industry. The official statistics of absenteeism collected by the Department of labour, Government of West Bengal, give the following classification of the causes of absenteeism. Sickness and accidents, social or religious and other causes. Adopting the following classification given by the Department of Labour of the Government of West Bengal, we have attempted here to analyse trends of the causes of industrial absenteeism in tea industry during the period covering about 16 years beginning from 1974 to 1989.

The cause wise analysis of annual rate of absenteeism in tea industry is shown in table 11.6.

It can be seen from the table 11.6 that the annual rate of absenteeism due to causes like sickness and accidents, social and religious and other causes have not shown a consistent trend towards increase or decrease during the period from

Table 11.6

Annual rate of absenteeism in tea industry by causes
1974-1989

Years	<u>Absenteeism due to</u>		
	Sickness or accidents	Social and religious	Other causes
1974	6.06	4.26	10.65
1975	5.22	1.73	12.79
1976	7.55	3.38	10.03
1977	5.75	3.97	9.72
1978	5.58	4.48	8.07
1979	6.03	3.56	10.25
1980	5.13	4.26	7.45
1981	6.34	4.97	7.83
1982	4.88	4.88	7.21
1983	5.30	2.11	4.44
1984	4.87	1.65	5.59
1985	4.22	3.19	7.99
1986	3.66	1.72	7.51
1987	3.99	3.23	7.49
1988	4.26	1.20	4.90
1989	4.72	1.90	6.78
Mean	5.22	3.16	8.04
Standard Deviation	0.96	1.23	2.14

Source : Data compiled from Labour in West Bengal, 1974 to 1990, Published by the Ministry of Labour, Govt. of West Bengal.

1974 to 1989. A comparison of standard deviations for the three causes of industrial absenteeism over the period 1974-89 indicates that the variation between absenteeism rates is insignificant for sickness or accidents and social and religious causes. However, other causes leading to labour absenteeism are quite significant in the sense they contribute to an average rate of absenteeism of 8.04 per cent per year during the period under study as shown in table 11.6. The year to year fluctuations in the rates of absenteeism by other causes is also comparatively higher than the other two causes of absenteeism like sickness and accidents and social and religious causes as it is revealed by comparatively higher value of standard deviation. It means that the average rates of labour absenteeism in tea industry arising out of different causes have remained more or less at the same level. But the 'other' causes have contributed relatively higher rates of absenteeism in tea industry than the religious, social, accident or sickness causes.

Some of the important causes included in 'other' causes of absenteeism have been discussed below :

i) Absenteeism among the male workers is generally due to their liquor addiction. Absenteeism among the women workers are due to different reasons. Household work and child rearing activities are the main reasons for absenteeism among the women workers. After receiving weekly wages at least half of the male workers absent themselves from the work for a day or

more as they go for a prolonged drinking session. Among the tea workers the Ghasis and Baraiks remain more absent than all other adivasi and non-adivasi workers. Without any apparent reasons they remain absent from the work. Traditionally the Ghasis were drummers and musicians and Baraiks were the weavers. It seems that they are ill suited for the plantation work which is basically agrarian in character.

ii) It is found that most of the tea workers suffered from low vitality. This is because their take home pay is small and their families are large and they have to spend a lot of money on social occasions, etc. The result is that they just can not afford nourishing food. Lack of nutrition and insanitary living conditions are the causes of a low state of health among tea workers. This is one of the major causes of absenteeism.

iii) The tea workers are found to be in the clutches of money lenders. In fact, being always short of cash, they tap all resources for whatever they can get; and when they find it difficult to pay back, as it often the case, they absent themselves from work, in order not to be traceable. Such a worker's mind always remains worried about financial matters. This naturally causes a strain on his health and life, and consequently results in absenteeism.

iv) The tea workers are usually educated to a very low standard which makes their thinking very narrow; consequently,

they can not manage to come out of their old beliefs and practice, as for example, spending excessively on marriage/deaths/feasts; unplanned family life, animals living, etc. As a result, we get an attitude of mind, of which absenteeism from work is one of the facts.

11.7 Remedial Measures to Combat Labour Absenteeism

The above diagnosis of the problem of labour absenteeism in tea industry during the last 16 years (1974 to '89) or so reveals the broad dimension and the severity of the problem. Labour absenteeism in tea industry as we have analysed has not been a simple problem admitting of an easy solution. It is unfortunate that the tea garden management has not given adequate attention to such a serious problem. No ^{proper} garden level or industry level statistics are being collected except by the Department of Labour and no proper remedies are being thought by the managements to solve the problem. Besides better attention is given to other problems like strikes and lock outs to the neglect of the problem absenteeism. The Department of labour, no doubt is collecting and publishing statistics relating to absenteeism in the tea industry. But, effective steps have not been adopted even by this Department to combat the problem. The management of each tea garden should be compelled through a legislation to collect adequate statistics relating to the problem and analyse them with a view to adopting proper remedial measures to combat the evil. In this, the trade unions,

the employers' organization and the Department of Labour should co-operate with the managements of individual garden.

Alcholism is the prime cause of absenteeism among the male workers. It is, therefore, inevitable on the part of the both management and trade unions to launch an anti-alcholism programme among the tea workers. The workers should be made to realise the harmful effects of alcholism.

There is a pecularity in tea industry that the permanent workers are not paid for the weekly holidays. It causes a frustration to them and they absent themselves from the work frequently. Thus, the system of weekly paid holidays to be introduced in tea industry.

Finally, apart from providing suitable housing facilities and recreational amenities, the workers should be made to realise the harmful effects of absenteeism through effective propaganda and publicity.

11.8 Summary

There is no trend is discernible as regards the number of conflicts, workers involved and the man-days lost in the data relating to work stoppages in tea industry between 1972-1990, they indicate the enormity of the problem, viz. on an average, 11 conflicts per year involving 11,852 workers and resulting in about 1,23,268 man-days lost per year during the period already mentioned.

The comparison between strikes and lock-outs reveal that the incidence of strikes was far greater than the incidence of lock-outs between the years, 1972-1980, and thereafter the number of lock-outs was more than the number of strikes during the rest of the period (1981-90). On an average, 55,446 man-days lost accounted in per strike against 3,66,582 in per lock-out between the year 1972-1990. On an average, a worker was involved in lock-outs for 27 days against 3 days in strikes during the period already mentioned. This relatively shorter duration of strike proved the decline in the sustaining power and consequent fall in the bargaining power of the workers of tea industry.

The industry wise distribution of work-stoppages in West Bengal for the period 1981 to 1990, reveals that the annual average incidence of work-stoppages is 4.38 per cent during the period 1981-90, against 28.55 per cent in Engineering industry and 11.25 per cent in Jute industry during the same period of time.

The industry wise analysis of the problem of labour absenteeism in West Bengal between 1974 to 1989 reveals that the tea industry has the highest degree of absenteeism with the annual average of 16.42 per cent followed by Engineering industry with 15.70 per cent. Chemical industry with 14.78 per cent and Cotton industry with 12.94 per cent. The important inference arising from the cause wise analysis of

absenteeism in the tea industry is that though there are short term fluctuations in the absenteeism figures from time to time, over the period as a whole, they remained significantly at the same level. Thus, though the man-days lost in tea industry of West Bengal due to strikes and lock-outs is insignificant as compared to the same in the Engineering and Jute industry, but as regards the man-days lost due to absenteeism the tea industry of West Bengal has command over other major industries of the state, viz. Engineering, Jute etc.

The cause-wise analysis of the rates of absenteeism over the period 1974 to 1989, reveals that the 'other causes' accounted for the highest rate of absenteeism with 8.04 per cent, on an average over the period already mentioned as compared to 5.22 per cent on account of sickness or accidents and 3.16 per cent due to social and religious causes. Among the important causes included in 'other causes' of absenteeism in tea industry; 'alcholism' is the prime one.

Notes & References

1. Ross, A.M and Hartman, P.T. 1960 "Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict". John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, quoted by A.Gani, "Industrial Relations in Jammu and Kashmir" in Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.26, Number July 1, 1990. p.57.