

## **CHAPTER VII**

# **INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The welfare of the labouring classes must be one of the first concerns of every employer. If the labourers are contented, well housed, well-fed and generally well looked after, it is not only an asset and advantage to the employer, but serves to raise the standard of both the industry and labour.

The concept of labour welfare in tea industry did not exist during the pre independence period. The working conditions in the tea gardens at the time are unhygienic and medical facilities are poor. With the coming of independence the Government of India enacted the Plantation Labour Act (P.L.A.), in 1951. The Act includes several statutory welfare provisions for the workers such as housing, medical facilities, *creches*, drinking water, education for the children of workers etc. But even after 48 years the provisions of the PLA have not been fully implemented by the employers. There is huge laxity on the part of the employers on the implementation of the provisions of the PLA.

### **7.1. Main causes of conflict between Employers and Employee.**

It is 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 condition of services of workers. After independence, with the intervention of trade unions the employers started losing their grip over the workers. The labour management conflicts got momentum during the fifties on some major issues like bonus, wage and work load etc. However, the bonus issue was settled in 1956 with the intervention of the central government, but the other issues are 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 union got some support from the U.F. Government. Both strikes and lockouts increased in the 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 the 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 1972. As a result statistically it could not measure the trends of industrial disputes (strikes and lockouts) during the fifties and sixties. It has estimated the trends of industrial disputes with the figures of strikes and lockouts during the period 1972 to 1992. Again the 'Labour in West Bengal' does not present the data on industrial dispute separately for Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling hills. It presents statistics on total industrial disputes in tea industry of West Bengal. Consequently it could not present the industrial disputes in Dooars tea gardens separately due to lack of information It presents the figures at industrial disputes in Tea Industry of West Bengal.

## **7.2. 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. Table 7.1 reveals the erratic nature of all indicators of intensity of industrial conflicts, no uniform and regular upward or downward trend is discernible. However, number of works stoppages, number of workers involved and mandays lost showed a downward tendency during the year 1985 to 1990. During this period the share of strikes in work stoppage had reduced considerably. Another significant feature of industrial conflicts in tea industry as revealed by table 7.1 is that there is no correlation existing between the figures relating to the number of work stoppages, number of worker involved and the mandays lost. During the last 19 years (1972-90) on an average there were about 11 work stoppages involving around 11,852 workers which resulted in loss of more than 1,23,268 mandays.

**Table 7.1:**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
<b>Period average 1972-1990</b>	<b>10.58</b>	<b>11,852.05</b>	<b>1,23,268.26</b>	<b>61.37</b>

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.

### 7.3. Workers' Participation in Conflicts

In order to draw an idea about the extent of workers' participation and their involvement in the work-stoppages on 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.<sup>1</sup> In Table 7.2 three criteria has been adopted from Ross and Hartman for assessing the extent of workers' participation in industrial conflicts, viz., (A) Dispute Duration Ratio and (B) Dispute Coverage Ratio.

Due to paucity of data the membership involvement ratio could not be determined. 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 industry wise union membership.

**(A) Dispute Duration Ratio :** Dispute Duration Ratio is a measure of mandays lost per worker. It is evident from Table 7.2 that a worker involved in dispute, on an average is 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 year wise performance of dispute duration ratio show an unsympathetic 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.

**Table 7.2 :** Measures of workers' participation in work-stoppages during 1972-1990

Year	Dispute Duration Ratio	Dispute Coverate 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	29.73	707.87	20,324.88
1987	29.73	683.63	20,324.88
1988	20.92	658.33	13,773.67
1989	21.91	581.50	12,738.50
1990	14.60	982.50	14,345.00
<b>Period average 1972-1990</b>	<b>16.18</b>	<b>1,178.17</b>	<b>13,479.66</b>

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

During this period the number of strikes were more than the number of lock-outs and a larger number of workers were involved in a relatively shorter duration of 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 up swing 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 ratio 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 and 1990. The general upswing in the ratio during these years was due to the involvement of larger number of workers in strike activity.

## **7.4. TRADE UNIONS IN THE TEA GARDENS**

All most all the labourers in the tea garden of Dooars are immigrants and their dependent. Majority of them came from the Chhotonagpur, Santal parganas region and a section of them came from Nepal. Those who came from Chhotonapur were mainly tribal (adibasi) and immigrants from Nepal were both caste and tribal people. They were pushed away from their homeland and at the same time they were also pulled by the vague promises of better life in the tea garden. Exploitation by land lords, administrator, money lander with the recurrent natural calamities famines set the stage for conflict. The worker had to work from dawn to dusk. The wages were fixed arbitrarily by the management. The condition of their social life was very poor. This was the condition of the worker in pre-independence period. It was in 1946 Dooars witnessed the first trade union movement.

The labour unions are very active in most of the tea gardens in the study area. Four labour unions are noticed in this area.

- (i) C.I.T.U. — Affiliated by Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union (W.B) an associate of CPI(M). Most of the labour (70%) are under its lobby. In Banarhat P.S. this union is very strong. In Nagrakata P.S., Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union is separated by Pachim Banga Bagicha Sramik Union, an associate of R.S.P.
- (ii) INTUC — Affiliated by National Plantation Workers Union an associate of Congress (I), only 5% of total labourers are under its lobby.
- (iii) H.M.S. — Affiliated by West Bengal Cha Shramik Union, an associated of Janata Dal. 10% of labourers are under its lobby.
- (iv) NEPU — An associate of C.P.I. 15% of total labourers belong to this lobby.

The CITU affiliated Unions have members in all the 39 tea gardens. The membership of the CITU is also highest among the total workers. It is found that there are two types of union members in the tea garden unit viz. General members and Office bearers. The office bearers are the president, vice president, secretary, assistant secretary and treasurer etc. Most of the workers join union with the expectation to get higher wages and better facilities. These two reasons have influenced about 60% of the total membership. Very few (only 10%) number of workers have become the members of a union influencing the trade union leaders. Remaining 30% have joined union due to other reasons such as, relatives are the members of the same trade unions, influenced by the fellow workers etc.

One third of the workers have felt that the social support extended by the members is the prime cause of the success of trade union, and two thirds feel that commitment, efficiency and sincerity of leaders are responsible for the trade union success. Majority of the members and leaders have identified that the opposition from the management is the greatest obstacle in activating the target of leaders. Most of the workers of these tea gardens have expressed their dissatisfaction about work schedule, wage, welfares, ration and management. However, the responses show variation in the opinions of workers from garden to garden. But as regards to wages the workers of all the tea garden studied have expressed their dissatisfaction.

## **CONCLUSION**

Tea gardens are located in backward region and its workers live within their own community with their tradition. Literacy rate is very low among the tea garden workers and hence they are less concerned with the labour movement in respect to the urban areas. 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.

Tea industry is an agro based industry and if tea leaves are not plucked in due time, entire leaves are damaged. It harms the employers more than anybody. So there also been a growing demand on the part of the employers to resolve the disputes, whether minor or major, through bilateral discussion with the trade union. It is to be noted here that the employers show this attitude more in plucking seasons than in the non plucking seasons. Thus, tea industry has witnessed more lockout / strikes generally during the non plucking period than in the plucking season.

It is also revealed that the trade union leaders take no interest in developing leadership from the grass root level. It also does not encourage the women workers to come to the union leadership. Thus the trade union movement, in the tea gardens have failed to take the shape of the working class movement properly. Not only the trade union movement; the system of Employer and Employees in tea garden have a permanent interaction between the workers and the managements. These types of interaction create several form of problems towards the tea garden as a whole and tea industry in particular.

Hence, it is essential to identify the major problems in tea industry as well as tea gardens in the next chapter.