

KRISHAK SAMACHAR

Vol. 23

March 1978

No. 3

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Sugar is Sweet But to the Farmer!

Sugar is sweet and therefore it is given more per unit on ration cards in urban areas if not the same in rural areas. Of course it has also costed little more because of hike in levy sugar prices although the sugar factories are yet not very happy. The Government has given liberal credit facilities, excise rebates and allowed sugar export, still the sugar factories are not contented and as a result the poor cane growers are held at ransom. In the beginning the sugar factories started crushing very late and then started paying less for cane than the minimum prices fixed. Now the fire wood is costlier than cane so how can the sugar be sweet to the farmer ? On top of it this happens when the farmers have increased their production all time record about 165 million tonnes as against last year's 155 million tonnes. With the facilities given, the sugar factories are expected to continue paying to the cane growers the same price as was agreed to initially and maximise the cane drawal by late crushing beyond April. The khandsari units which were purchasing distress sale were never paying remunerative cane price far from statutory price of Rs. 9.30 per quintal of cane and now most of them have closed in protest of heavy increase of about 600 per cent in excise duties and falling khandsari and gur prices by about Rs. 50 to 60 per quintal which make their business uneconomical. Similarly sugar factories also plead that it is impossible for them to pay statutory cane prices of about Rs. 13.50 per quintal in the face of falling sugar prices and heavy expenditure on the large carry over stocks. The Government should purchase on large scale sugar and khandsari as a buffer stock and allow more exports, at the same time take serious action against the closing of sugar mills or crushers and against failure to lift the cane paying statutory price to cane growers. Sugar mills must clear all cane arrears and interest on the arrears to the cane growers.

The fate of the farmer is looming high in this triangular conflict and crisis even after fulfilling his benevolent duty of increasing the cane production which is expected of him. It is a pity that the farmer is crushed in this sweet sugar crisis. It is a well known fact that the statutory prices fixed for farmers produce are never satisfactory in the first place. Over and above he has all the compelling reasons to sell his produce immediately to

feed his family, repay previous debts and immediately invest for a new crop. This has been an inseperable part of his life and profession why he resorts to distress sale at any available price. But in the crisis when there is no buyer for his cane what can he do ? He is simply compelled to destroy the standing crop which he counts as already lost and plunge himself under the drugery of hard work in preparing the soil for next crop with some hope against no hope. Should this continue ? How far ? Can the farmer bear such heavy losses ? How long ? Every thing can be calculated but what goes on in the mind and spirit of the farmer is difficult to calculate and it would be disastrous to force him to live under such manageable crisis. It will be beyond control if the farmer also really learns the gimmick and trick of the trade like others.

Poor farmers and cane growers urge the Government to come to their rescue and intervene with firm hand without allowing the crisis to assume alarming proportions.

—Dr. D.A. Bholay

Form IV See Rule 8

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|--|---|
| 1. Place of Publication | New Delhi. |
| 2. Periodicity of publication | Monthly |
| 3. Printers' and editor's name | Dr. D.A. Bholay |
| Whether citizen of India ? | Yes |
| Address | A-I, Nizamuddin West,
New Delhi-110013. |
| 4. Publisher's Name | Dr. D.A. Bholay |
| Whether citizen of India ? | Yes |
| Address | A-I, Nizamuddin West,
New Delhi-110013. |
| 5. Name and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital. | Bharat Krishak Samaj,
A-I, Nizamuddin West,
New Delhi-110013. |

I, Dr. D.A. Bholay, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd/-

Dr. D.A. Bholay

Signature of Publisher

Dated 1st March, 1978

Special Conference on Rural Unorganised Labour

The first-ever Special Conference on Rural Unorganized Labour was called at New Delhi on 25th January, 1978 by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India. About 200 Delegates, mostly Trade Union Representatives attended the Conference. Representatives from Farmers Organizations were also invited. The Agenda of the Conference consisted of (1) Organisation of rural poor—suggestions for the proper growth of rural workers' organisations. (2) Need for a comprehensive legislation for security of employment and welfare of agricultural workers.

Trade Union representatives explained that the real obstacle to the formation of rural workers' organizations was not the low level of education or poverty, but lack of protection against the violent opposition of the landlords which always create a problem of law and order and the loss of employment of those who organise themselves into labour unions. They asked the Government to pass a Central Agricultural Labour Law on the pattern of Kerala Agricultural Workers Act, 1974 to provide security of employment and welfare of agricultural workers for uniform application in the States. They have appealed that the opposition of landlords to form agricultural labour unions should be treated as cognizable offence.

Bharat Krishak Samaj presented the following views :—(1) Instead of isolated attention to agriculture labour, the problems of entire rural labour both agricultural and non-agricultural should be simultaneously attended to as a whole. Unorganised non-agricultural labour is one-fifth of country labour force and account one-fourth of national income. (2) The problem of rural unorganised labour is serious because of the disparity in attention and allocation of national resources for the welfare of urban workers as against rural workers. It requires proportionate national allocations. (3) It is always good to start the rural workers organization work in the spirit of basic trust and

mutual understanding without unnecessary allegations on so called 'Landlords'. In fact with the passing of land ceiling act in the country all farmers are equally levelled and there are no landlords any more and we should forget 'Landlords' terminology and if we cannot forget this term then we should start learning few more lords like Urbanlords, Businesslords, Politicallords, Academiclords, Unionlords and the like. (4) Agriculture alone cannot absorb all rural unorganised labour beyond a limit and therefore fresh avenues of additional employment must be created for absorbing the rural workers gainfully. (5) Bharat Krishak Samaj has always supported minimum agricultural wages. At the same time while demanding for the rights, the consequent responsibilities must also be well understood. While fixing the minimum agricultural wages it must be correlated with the minimum labour output per man day of the worker for such wages. Cost of production is one of the factors while deciding the agricultural prices which consider the cost of labour into certain mandays per unit for specific agricultural operation therefore it is necessary to fix minimum norm of work output per labour day also. Wages should be linked with work output and productivity. (6) At present the farmer and agricultural labour live as a family in rural areas. Efforts should be to keep that family feeling without breaking it. (7) Pattern of 'Kerala Agricultural Workers Act' needs careful study and smoothening in the larger interest of increasing agricultural production in the country, for example, keeping of registers and consequent penalties, working hours, work output norms, provident fund, payment of labour during harvesting and its strict application etc. Agriculture has become very much untimely and insecure business. Many farm inputs are not available in time. Electricity is available to agriculture use during nights and that too no specific hours. Payments for agricultural produce sold by

farmers are not received in time and there are many other difficulties of farmers which should also be considered before passing any Central Agricultural Labour Law. Small farmers should be exempted from this law. Legitimate legal opinions must be allowed for settling any disputes. (8) When there are already state acts to provide minimum wages to agricultural workers in all the States, these laws should be improved instead of bringing out a separate Central Agricultural Labour Law since the agricultural conditions in various states differ greatly.

Although there was no consensus, it is very likely that a model legislative on the pattern of Kerala Agricultural Workers Act to provide security of employment and welfare of agricultural workers is under the consideration of the Union Labour Ministry. The proposed Bill will take up important aspects of the social security and welfare while allowing flexibility for adaptation in various states. This was disclosed by Union Labour Minister Shri Ravindra Verma while inaugurating the special conference. Referring to the "eternal twilight Zone" within which rural labourers existed, Mr. Verma noted that in urban areas, workers had the collective influence of publicity and public glare. Rural workers on the other hand, were exposed to totally different socio-economic environment where atrocities could be perpetuated without any redress. A sense of defencelessness has added to the problem of rural workers. Voluntary Organizations and trade unions should initiate steps for effectively organising workers in rural areas. Problems of rural workers include the seasonal employment, fixation of hours of work, quantum of wages, insecurity of employment, absence of a modicum of social security, provision of maternity benefits and the crucial problem of their housing. Government of India has ratified the International Labour Organizations (I.L.O.) Convention No. 141 and created healthy climate for organization of rural workers in India. Rural worker according to I.L.O. has been defined as any person engaged in agriculture, handicrafts or a related occupation in a rural area whether as a wage earner or a self-employed person such as tenant, share cropper or small owner-

occupier (Small farmer). During his concluding remarks, Mr. Verma announced that the Government would set up a standing committee and a special cell which could monitor achievements and developments in the field of rural labour. The National Labour Institute and the Board of Worker's Education would be asked to train field workers in the sphere of organising rural labour. The Minister said that the Government firmly believed in ensuring minimum wages, in setting up tripartite machinery for resolving disputes, in providing employment opportunities in rural areas and in extending social security to rural workers. Further legislation for agricultural labour would be decided on after more consultations.

Points for Consideration by the Members of the Samaj—Discuss widely in Local Meetings :

1. What can Bharat Krishak Samaj do to create conditions to promote the growth of rural workers' organization ?
2. What are the specific suggestions of the Samaj about the need for a comprehensive legislation for the security of employment and welfare of agricultural workers ?
3. What are the comments and specific reactions of the Samaj about the application and provisions of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, that is at present prevalent in your State ?
4. What are specific comments and reaction on various provisions of the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act ? Should this Kerala Agricultural Workers Act be the basis for the comprehensive Central legislation ? A copy of this Kerala Act has been sent to all Secretaries of Bharat Krishak Samaj.
5. What are specific suggestions that should be followed by the Samaj in the present situation and in the light of coming comprehensive Central Legislation on Agricultural workers as it might affect the farmers in their day-to-day affairs and affect in increasing agricultural production in the country ?

—Dr. D.A. Bholey

Tobacco Growers Crisis

The poor tobacco growers are left at the mercy of merchants who refused to purchase tobacco as a result tobacco prices have slumped. The present crisis is largely because of increased tobacco production, weaker export demand and merchants reservation to purchase tobacco in full swing. The tobacco growers feel they are being penalised for increasing the tobacco production. Tobacco is being purchased in America at Rs. 23 kg. while it is Rs. 8 in India. The Government should come forward in a big way to protect the interests of the growers. The introduction of tobacco leaves purchase voucher system by the Tobacco Board is also resented by the merchants since it includes all transactions for purchase of Virginia Tobacco from growers to be conducted through printed voucher forms and requires the purchaser to pay 50 per cent of the price on delivery. The tobacco market is controlled by monopolists and the growers are virtually held to ransom by merchants. The Government is passing a Bill seeking to create auction platforms at all important centres for the public auctioning of tobacco. Government should also purchase tobacco on large scale through State Trading Corporation. Government should ensure that the progressive measurers were not by passed by vested interests and protect the growers from the

mischief of low grading of tobacco by the merchants and monopolists in the tobacco market. Fair and remunerative prices is the only effective incentive to the growers for increasing agricultural production.

Potato Growers Face Crisis

Potato growers are also facing a serious crisis because of falling prices just as the sugarcane growers and tobacco growers. This year potato production in U.P. alone would be 35 lakh tonnes as against 30 lakh tonnes last year. The increased production was possible because farmers largely used high yielding seeds and fertilizers which has also increased their cost of production. As the farmers fate would have it in the face of increased production and high cost, the prices of potato have fallen sharply in the market to Rs. 60 per quintal as against Rs. 100 per quintal prevailing in December. With the shortage of cold storage facilities and its high rates, the farmers are faced with distress sale of their potato. Last year the NAFED had entered into the market and the export markets were also open. The Government is urged to protect the potato growers from the falling prices and NAFED to enter the Potato market in a big way and consider the export of potato.

Indian Wheat for Vietnam and Afghanistan : Wheat Situation

India has returned part of wheat loan from Russia in kind. Soon three lakh tonnes of wheat and 70,000 tonnes of maida will be sent to Vietnam. India would be sending 50,000 tonnes of wheat from Punjab to Afghanistan in next few days. In spite of this happy note wheat growers are anxiously waiting for the Government's announcement of wheat prices before the arrival of this year's wheat in market. The Agricultural Prices Commission is busy in their calculations. In the past, the A.P.C. has

reacted coldly when the total production increased. This year wheat production is expected to be 33 million tonnes as against 29 million tonnes of last year which is certainly credit to the farmer but it is to be seen how this is going to be appreciated by announcing remunerative wheat prices and at the same time the efficiency of handling wheat in the market by the F.C.I. and other agencies so that glut in the market could be avoided and what farmers may not face crisis and pay heavily for their sweat.

Farmers in Urban Land Ceiling Act

The Union Ministry of Works and Housing issued a notification on Dec. 19, 1977, relaxing several restrictions to help farmers carry out improvement work on their land, utilise excess vacant land and encourage building activity, generally scuttled by the implementation of the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act 1976. State Governments and Administrations were expected to give the new guidelines the widest possible publicity so that those affected by the relaxations were duly informed. They were also to instruct the district and tehsil officials on the new guidelines so that they could deal with the exemption requests from agriculturists according to the new rules. The need to amend the rules arose because restrictions in the Act regarding agricultural land in urban agglomerations harassed the agriculturists. They also destroyed the incentive for land improvement, prevented land-holders from hypo-

thecating their land to raise loans for cultivation and involved use of land by States without immediate return. The owners of excess vacant land were, moreover, forbidden to use it for construction of dwelling units for the weaker section of society. The Ministry, therefore, amended the rules to move the restrictions. The amended rules, titled the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Eight Amendments Rules, 1977, laid down that a competent authority may permit a person, under Section 21, to continue to hold the excess vacant land for construction of dwelling units for the poor.

The rules also direct the State Governments that under Section 20(1), they may exempt, in the interest, land entered in records before the enforcement of the Act as being used mainly for agriculture and as being actually so used even though it might be specified in the Master Plan for purposes other than agriculture.

Agricultural Outlook—1977-78

The prospects of agricultural output during 1977-78 are rated good. As a result the annual growth rate of the economy for the current year is expected at 5 per cent against last year's 1.6 per cent. Total food production will be 121 million tonnes as against 111 million tonnes of last year. The output of kharif food grains will be 73 million tonnes as against 66.6 million tonnes of last year. Rice production will be 44.7 million tonnes. Jowar will be higher. More production of other millets as wells as pulses than last year. Oilseed will be 7.8 million tonnes of which kharif groundnut 5.3 million tonnes as against 4.8 million tonnes of last year. Cotton will be 6.6 million bales as against last years' 5.8 million bales. Jute and mesta crop will be lower. There has been sharp rise (20 per cent) in fertilizer consumption 41.85 lakh tonnes during the year as against 34.01 lakh tonnes of last year. All these indicate an improved market for consumer goods. However, very large fluctuation in agricultural output cannot

be lost sight of. They bring in large variations in prices which in turn affect the incentive to undertake investment for increasing production and cause violent changes in supply which have undesirable consequences for consumers, including the rural labour force.

While high yielding varieties have been developed for wheat, rice, jowar and maize, little research effort has gone into pulses and oilseeds. Diversion of area under rabi pulses to irrigated and high yielding economic crops like wheat have to be prevented. In order to compete against profitable crops, gram, pulses, groundnut would need a high price. Crucial is issue to have a balanced cropping policy which require selective steps to be undertaken to correct the imbalance in the crop pattern. Rational price support and procurement apart, the marginal farmers will have to be brought into the main stream of agricultural development. Marginal farms as they exist cannot generate any surplus and the credit to them will lead to overdues.

State Smaj News

Tamilnadu : In a press cofrence held in the Farmers' Forum, Madras. Mr. M. Bhaktavatsalam, President, Farmers' Forum told the newsmen about the plight of the Thanjavaur farmers in disposing of their produce Paddy "at throw away priccs". Even though the country has been constituted into a single zone allowing free movement of paddy and rice, the position in Tanjore District is quite different since all restrictions and control on movement were still in force. The State Government had not only chosen to impose a Traders' levy of 20% on paddy, but also to seal the State Borders and restrict even inter-district movement. The Government should either pay a minimum price of Rs. 100/- per quintal for medium variety of paddy procured by levy or resort to open

market purchase. He suggested the setting up of a separete committee with representation for farmers to go into the problems of agriculturists in Tanjore District. The entire delta might be declared flood affected and farmers granted substantial relief by way of waiving collection of land revenue and other levies because mere postponment of recovery of loans would not help. He also wanted the Government to announce its procurement policy for Samba Crop immediately as the harvest was to commence shortly.

Shri R. Srinivasan, Treasurer Farmers' Forum, Madras and Shri G. Jagadeesan President, Shri T.M. Abdul Gani, Secretary and Mr. M. Kulandaivelu, Joint Secretary of the Thanjavur Chamber of Agriculture also explained the peculiar problems of Thanjavur farmers.

State-wise Minimum Wages in Agriculture

<i>Name of the States</i>	<i>Date from which Effective</i>	<i>Rate of Wages</i>
1	2	3
Central Government	18th September, 1976.	Rs. 4.45 to Rs. 6.50 according to areas.
Andhra Pradesh	2nd December, 1975.	Rs. 3.00 to Rs. 5.00 per day according to areas.
Assam	October, 1974.	Rs. 5 to Rs. 6.00 per day or Rs. 4.50 to Rs. 5.50 per day with one meal, according to occupation.
Bihar	July, 1975.	Rs. 4.50 to Rs. 5.00 per day plus Nashta (in all districts except East & West Champaran according to areas).
Gujarat	5th January, 1976.	5.50 per day or Rs. 2,000/- per annum.
Haryana	31st December, 1975.	Rs. 5.50 per day with meals or Rs. 7.00 per day without meals.
Himachal Pradesh	15th July, 1975.	Rs. 4.25 per day.
Jammu & Keshmir	No minimum wages have been fixed so far.	
Karnataka	2nd October, 1975	Rs. 3.65 to Rs. 5.60 per day according to class of operation and type of land.
Kerala	15th September, 1975.	Rs. 6.50 per day for light work and Rs. 8.00 per day for hard work.
Madhya Pradesh	2nd October, 1975.	Rs. 3.50 to Rs. 4.00 per day according to zones.

1	2	3
Maharashtra Manipur Meghalaya	March, 1974. 2nd September, 1975.	Rs. 3 to Rs. 4.50 per day. Rs. 6.50 per day. Rs. 4.50 per day with meals or Rs. 5.00 per day without meals.
Nagaland	Minimum wages not fixed under the Minimum Wages Act.	
Orissa Punjab	1st January, 1976. 11th July, 1975.	Rs. 4.00 per day. Rs. 4.65 to 5.65 per day with meals or Rs. 6.70 to Rs. 8.70 per day without meals.
Rajasthan	January, 1975.	Rs. 4.25 to Rs. 5.00 according to areas.
Sikkim Tamilnadu	Minimum Wages Act, 1948 not yet extended. 2nd March, 1976	Rs. 3.50 to Rs. 5.00 per day (adult) Rs. 2.10 to 3.00 per day (Non-adults) according to type of operations.
Tripura Uttar Pradesh	15th August, 1975. 23rd October, 1976.	Rs. 4.00 per day. Rs. 4.50 to Rs. 6.50 per day according to zones and type of work.
West Bengal	1st October, 1975. <i>Basic</i> Adult : 5.60 Child : 4.00	Daily Rate <i>D.A.</i> <i>Total</i> 2.54 8.10 per day. 1.82 5.82 per day.
	Adult : 80.60 Child : 39.00	Monthly Rate 65.10 145.70 47.25 86.25
The Calcutta High Court has issued injunction against the notification revising the minimum wages for agricultural workers. However, all Distt. Magistrates and Dy. Commissioners have been asked to ensure, through presuasive methods, payment of minimum wages not below Rs. 6.63 per day in case of adult workers and Rs. 4.74 per day in case of children.		
Andaman & Nicobar Islands Arunachal Pradesh Chandigarh	1st June, 1976. No. agricultural workers. 15th July, 1975	Rs. 5.50 per day. Rs. 5.00 to Rs. 7.50 per day with meals or Rs. 6.25 without meals.
Dadra & Nagar Haveli Delhi	15th April, 1976. 1st October, 1975.	Rs. 5.50 per day. Rs. 6.75 per day or Rs. 175.50 per month.
Goa, Daman and Diu.	24th November, 1975.	Rs. 4.00 to Rs. 5.00 per day according to class of work.
Lakshadweep Mizoram	No agricultural workers in the territory. Committee appointed to advise Government on the fixation of minimum wages in agriculture.	
Pondichery	1st May, 1976.	Rs. 3.50 to Rs. 9.00 per day according to areas and nature of work.