

APPROACHES TO LABOUR RELATIONSHIP IN INDUSTRIES

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Today, after experience of almost three score and more years with the working class, through reputed Social Service Agencies and organised Welfare Departments of Industries in private and public sectors and in the ameliorative services in the villages from where the urban workers are drawn, if I were to be asked to state two factors that can change the life and outlook of the working class for the better, I would unhesitatingly say that adequate housing facilities round about the industries, and proper machinery for dealing with the grievances of workers from within the industries, will surely lay the foundation for a happy, healthy and harmonious industrial relationship. These fit in well in the socialistic pattern of planning nationalised industries of the people, for the people and by the people, in the free Welfare State of India.

Importance of Housing : For health and happy family life housing is the most important thing in the crowded cities wherein industries have sprung up indiscriminately. Decent tenements provide adequate space, air, light, water, privacy, sanitation, healthy neighbourhood and community life, while on the other hand, most of the workers are condemned to life in slums and single-room tenements which breed plague, pestilence vice and crime.

Scope of Industrial Welfare: Industrial Welfare is not merely providing a few amenities but a serious attempt to deal with the internal working conditions, workers' grievances, promotion of industrial harmony,

stability of labour, security of tenure and adequate wages; and such other benefits which the worker is unable to secure for himself, such as, decent housing, adequate sanitation, efficient medical aid, education and recreation.

The Human Factor: No machine of steel or brass however well constructed will work satisfactorily unless it is kept clean and lubricated and is run under suitable conditions. The human machine which is made of flesh, blood and bones has a far more complicated mechanism, is very sensitive to its environments and needs more care and attention. The days of treating workers as labour to be hired and fired at will are fast disappearing. The workman should not be considered as a labourer hired for 9 hours a day, told to sit in a certain place and move his hands and arms according to carefully planned instructions. We cannot consider the workmen as automatic machines into which we put in one rupee and pull out a rupee-worth of labour. It is being realised that the workman is after all a human being, not an isolated individual but closely linked up to his family, neighbourhood, community and class; with all his faults and failings, feelings and fancies, hopes and dreams, ambitions and aspirations, hoping, planning and what is more important from the point of view of the employers, grousing and conspiring. When we want good work done with a will, the human element will remain the key to the situation. Contented workers should make for efficiency and greater turn over. If the human element is

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not recognised, any scheme of Welfare Work will run on the rocks, for the most dangerous of rocks is frustrated human nature. '*Welfare-minded*' Management will always feel it worthwhile to spend money for real and abiding enrichment of the lives of the workers and building harmonious relationship between themselves and labour. It should be realised that in addition to the fine buildings, splendid canteens, magnificent playgrounds and representative teams, generous benevolence for sickness, holidays and pensions, the spirit of human understanding and recognition of human values and sympathetic service should pervade the entire administrative machinery of industries. The whole edifice of the industrial organisation rests on confidence between the work people and the supervisory staff. Instead of emphasising authority, the workers should be made to feel their responsibilities. There must be a feeling that everyone is working happily together for the concern as well as for himself. The workmen should be made to realise that the management is keenly interested in everyone's problems and willing to assist wherever possible; that favouritism and corruption of every sort will be rigorously discouraged and suppressed; that everyone can always rely on a fair hearing for any grievance and is allowed and encouraged to live his life to the best of his ability and according to his own talents.

Channels of Communications: The three avenues of communication between the management and the work people are (1) through the administrative channel of Labour Welfare (2) through the democratic forum of the Works Committee and like institutions; and (3) through the methods of collective bargaining by the Labour Unions. The three channels should be made to function without any hindrance or obstruction and there should be free flow of traffic, both ways. There need not be any rivalry or competition, as the subjects could be clearly

demarcated between the three. The Department of Labour Welfare as an important adjunct of the administrative machinery, should be recognised as the common link of co-operation to deal with all labour matters and to make all approaches complementary to each other in the common interest of serving the working class. These are clearly envisaged in the Welfare Officers' Rules which directs that a Welfare Officer shall be treated on a par with other Heads of Departments, shall be provided with adequate assistance in relation to the staff strength, to carry out duties of establishing contacts and holding consultations with a view to maintaining harmonious relationship between the management and the workers, to maintain liaison regarding grievances and complaints, to advise managements on obligations statutory or otherwise, to promote productivity, to advise on amenities and welfare measures, to organise Work Committees and see that they function along right lines and in short, to be a consultant in all matters pertaining to labour. To the extent, the management gives effect to the above statutory obligations, in letter and spirit, to that extent the given tasks will be fulfilled. But by by-passing and short-circuiting the stipulated procedure and of the Golden Rules of Administration "Through the Proper Channel" and by denying facilities for the administrative and executive functioning of the Welfare Officers, it will lead only to chaos and confusion and to unfair labour practices and consequences thereof.

The Administrative Approach: The most important "Safety Value" would be the functioning without fear or favour, of a machinery to deal with individual grievances. The Welfare Branch should be recognised as the channel for routing all individual grievances. Repeated representations from different individuals will focus the attention of the Administration on a common trouble-

spot. It will bring to light any administrative shortcomings which could be rectified. It may even expose any public scandal brewing that may affect the workers. If for any reason this procedure is fought shy of or torpedoed and the grievances are referred to the very sections that have given birth to them, it can be clear that the underground is having the upper-hand and have cleverly prepared the ground for malpractices. A good number of petty mistakes or incombatability could be adjusted at the lower levels. If individual grievances are redressed at the proper levels without much ado, they will not develop into group grievances which later may give a handle for professional agitators. In this connection, it may be mentioned that a machinery for the redressal of individual grievances was suggested in a proposal by the Commissioners of Labour but had not been followed up to the stage of implementation. This in fact, provides the key to face and tackle the labour problems. The statutory obligations should be scrupulously followed by State enterprises as a model for private employers.

The Democratic Approaches : The Works Committee is a co-operative attempt by the management and work people to come together to share their problems and to endeavour to solve them. It provides a unique channel of communication between the management and the workers and to promote interest, understanding and co-operation for mutual benefit. The object should be to organise unity of interest and then to diminish the area of conflict and bring out the advantages of harmonious human relationship. The sincerity of purpose and the tone of sympathetic understanding can create an atmosphere of mutual confidence and co-operation. The Works Committee should not attempt to traverse on the administrative functions of the management or to encroach on the functions of the Trade Unions for collective

bargaining. It should be made clear that there is plenty of room for many groups and institutions to work for the welfare of the workers and each is complementary to the other. Trade Unions should not try to use the Works Committees just as another platform for their Union activities. In fact, they will do well to train their second line of leadership through Works Committees so that they learn the art of expression, co-operation and team work. As a means of expressing the views of the work people, the scheme works admirably. Representatives realising that they are acting with full recognition of the management, perform their duties in the knowledge that their relationship with the concern will not be affected while acting in good faith. Consequently, there is no hesitation in bringing forward grievances which have reasonable foundations. It is certain that the existence of Works Committee influences the improvement in working conditions and amenities. Participation in Welfare Schemes will afford ample scope and a wide field for improving relationship.

Other avenues of democratic training offers itself through the Organisation of Recreation Clubs, co-operative ventures, Safety Committees, Production Committees, etc., set up with definite purposes and governed by written constitutions. To the extent they are guided along proper lines, they will succeed. Proved cases of delinquency should be dealt with in a deterrent manner and it will be misplaced sympathy if such individuals are let off lightly. Democracy should be made safe from the invasion of such individuals who invariably organise themselves into strong groups to launch their rackets in pastures anew. It is the primary duty and responsibility of the management to blacklist the proved delinquents. The institutions should be controlled to see that rules are

followed, the democratic procedure for sanction and utilisation are not short-circuited and that records are maintained and preserved.

The Agitational Approach : The Labour Unions invariably adopt an aggressive agitational approach to magnify grievances and to put up unreasonable demands to win the workers. They work up the emotions of the workers and lead them to strife and strike. Whatever justifications may be for such attitude in private industries, it is out of place in nationalised public utility concerns. If the administrative and democratic approaches are properly tuned up to tackle the labour problems, there will not be much fuel for the fury of the agitators. By by-passing the administrative approach

and trampling upon the democratic voice, the agitators are given a long handle.

As an eminent Statesman who had served the nation in various capacities as a labour leader, Ambassador, Minister, Governor and as administrator, the president of the Indian Union has said, it is the most difficult task to be an administrator, for, one has to give full scope for the proper functioning of the men working under him in their respective spheres but take the full responsibility for all actions; it is a delightful role to play the role of a smiling Ambassador; but it is the cheapest and easiest role to play the agitator, to create trouble for other people, to solve and to play a negative role in the game of finding fault with anything and everything; and be on the top of the waves all the time.