

RAILWAY SENTINEL

Minimum by National Convention of Railwaymen

The National Convention of Railwaymen is gratified to note the emerging unity of purpose and action among railwaymen as symbolised by this convention through the mass actions conducted by railwaymen in recent years in support of their long pending demands.

The Convention would like to emphasise that only through lasting unity and effective action would railwaymen be able to fulfil their role as the vanguard of the working class movement in India, even while securing the just and due improvement in their working and living conditions.

The Convention is concerned at the failure of the Railway Ministry to bring about a settlement of the various general and Sectional demands of railwaymen, more particularly, demands relating to wages, dearness allowance, bonus, decasualisation of casual labour and provision of adequate and subsidised foodgrains and other essential commodities to Railwaymen. While the Railwaymen quite justifiably expect the Railway Ministry to concede their demand for a need-based minimum wage, at least the Railway Ministry should have done was to concede the Workers' demand for parity in wages with the public sector undertakings of the Government of India.

The Convention rejects the argument advanced in certain quarters that the Railways cannot afford to meet the workers' demands as that would entail additional financial burden on the railways. While there is tremendous scope to avoid wastage and introduce economies on the railways and in the process find financial resources to meet the workers' legitimate demands, it is the height of absurdity to suggest that paying to the railwaymen wages equal to those available to workers in other public sector enterprises would mean an increase in the railway fares and freight rates.

The Convention would like to point out that the last time the railwaymen's salaries/wages were revised was following the recommendations of the II Pay Commission in 1959, and in the intervening fifteen years, railway fares

and freights have been revised upwards at least seventeen times without providing for any revision in the wage structure of railwaymen. If Dearness Allowance has been revised it was only to compensate for the rising prices due to the failure of the Govt. to hold the price line, and even there, the inadequate neutralisation has resulted in actual reduction of the real wages of railway employees. According to the III Pay Commission, between 1960 & 1972, the real earnings of an LDC on the Rlys. have come down by 10%. of a UDG by 18%; of an 'A' Grade Grade Rly. Driver by 22%. Between 1970 and 1972 there has been a further erosion in the real earnings of railwaymen due to the enormous increase in the prices of all essential goods. The fact is that railwaymen are today poorer than what they were 14 years ago.

The Convention hereby calls upon the Rly. Ministry to forthwith concede the following urgent and common demands of railwaymen.

(a) All railwaymen be treated as industrial workers with full trade union rights including the right to negotiate.

(b) The working hours of Railwaymen shall not exceed eight hours per day.

(c) There shall be job evaluation of all railwaymen through a scientific system to be followed by their reclassification and regradation with the need-based minimum wage as the wage for the lowest-paid worker.

(d) Pending the completion of job evaluation and reclassification, immediate parity in wages with those of workers in the Central Undertakings, viz. HMT, BHEL, HSL, HAL, etc.

2. Dearness allowance linked to the cost of living index with full neutralisation for every rise of 4 points in a six month period.

3. Bonus at the rate of one Month's wages for the year 1971-72 and 1972-73.

10th March 1974

4. Decasualisation of all casual railwaymen and their confirmation in service with all benefits given to them with retrospective effect.

5. Adequate and subsidised foodgrains and other essential commodities through departmentally-run shops.

6. All victimisation cases should be withdrawn.

The Convention calls upon the Rly. Ministry to open negotiations on these demands and arrive at a settlement thereon by April 10, 1974.

The Convention serves an ultimatum on the Rly. Ministry that if a settlement on these demands is not forthcoming by that date, the railwaymen will consider themselves free to resort to an indefinite general strike with effect from any date thereafter.

The Convention resolves that for the implementation of this resolution and for achieving the above-mentioned demands a Co-ordination Committee consisting of representatives of all railwaymen's Organisations, whether industrial or category-wise, be formed with the President of the AIRF as the Convener.

The Convention urges all participating organisations to form Co-ordinating Committee at every possible level and to observe a Demands Week from April 2 to 8, 1974 under the joint auspices of these Committees.

The Convention calls upon the railwaymen to unite as never before and to forge the necessary sanctions to compel the Rly. Ministry to settle the demands of the railwaymen. It warns the railwaymen to beware of forces that may try to sabotage this great effort at united action.

Railwaymen, more than any other section of people, are aware of the implications of a railway strike on the nation's economy. They are also fully conscious of the inconvenience that is caused to the people when the railways grind to a halt.

The Convention wants to emphasise that if railwaymen are today compelled to take the decision for a strike, it is only because the Railway Administration has created a situation in which no other alternative offers itself for the railwaymen to bring about a settlement of their legitimate demands.

The Convention hopes that the emerging unity of action among railwaymen will open the eyes of the Railway Administration to the realities of the situation and force them to concede the legitimate demands of the Workers. Should, however, a strike become inevitable, the Convention appeals to the working people, youth, students and the rural masses to support the workers' just struggle and at the same time exert pressure on the Government to meet the Workers' demands.

WHAT IS NATIONAL CONVENTION ?

The one day National Convention of Railwaymen which took place in New Delhi on February 27, 1974 was the most unique gathering of railwaymen ever held. At the invitation of the All Indian Railwaymen's Federation over two thousand delegates representing more than one hundred organisations of railwaymen participated in the Convention.

The participants included Zonal unions affiliated to the AITUC, CITU, HMP, HMS and BMS. They also came from the large body of categorywise unions including the All India Railway Employees Confederation, Organisations like the Loco-Running Staff Association and the Train Examiners Association which are not affiliated to any federating body also participated in the deliberations.

The Central organisations of labour in India were also fully represented at the convention.

S. A. Dange, General Secretary of the AITUC, Mohd. Ismail, M. P., Vice President of the CITU, Prithvi Chandra,

Secretary of the UTUC, S. Venkatram, Hind Mazdoor Panchayat led high power delegations from their respective organisations and also addressed the convention.

The convention adopted a resolution which while listing the urgent and common demands of railwaymen served a ultimatum on the railway Ministry to settle these demands by April 10, 1974. Failure to settle the demands inevitably lead to an indefinite General strike of railwaymen from any day after the expiry of the ultimatum.

The Convention has set up a Co-ordination Committee consisting of representatives of unions, associations and the organisations subscribing to the charter of demands and to the struggle perspective. Every organisation of railwaymen excepting the Congress led National Federation of Indian Railwaymen is associated with the Co-ordination Committee. Every Central Organisation of Indian workers excepting the INTUC has agreed to associate itself with the Railwaymen's movement to achieve their demands.