

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON CONSTRUCTION LABOUR

Report on the National Seminar on
Construction Labour; 1st to 3rd Nov.
1985 held at GANDHI PEACE FOUNDATION
NEW DELHI

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The three day National Seminar on Construction Labour organised by the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers began on 1st November, 1985 with the inaugural address by Justice V.R. KRISHNA IYER. The participants in the Seminar included representatives from Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Union and large number of construction workers of the Union itself, Swami Agnivesh, Construction Workers from U.P., Haryana and Delhi and A.I.T.U.C. affiliated construction workers Union from Punjab, and Delhi and their representatives Shri Manga Ram and Sri Mohan Lal and Sri Jai Singh of the Indian Federation of Construction and Wood Workers, and Sri Thankappan Trade Unionest from Bombay and Sri Swamy and Sri Firoze Ahmed from Construction Workers Federation of Karnataka. Following the inaugural address, the participants shared their experiences with reference to the lack of security of employment, and provisions for social welfare and social security for construction workers. Mr Guha Thakurta, representing M/s Gannon Dunkerley, a construction company, also spoke and expressed the need for a comprehensive legislation for construction labour. All the participants were unani- mously in favour of a comprehensive Central legislation for Construction Labour. The participants felt that the piece- meal extension or mere mechanical application of the various existing labour and welfare laws to the construction labour, is neither workable nor satisfactory. For instance, given the existing mobility and unstable nature of the employer- employee relationship in construction industry, the applica- tion of the ESI schemes or Maternity Benefit Act or Provident Fund Schemes are of no utility at all. The only way to ensure security of employment and securing social security and welfare measures would be by the creation of a construc- tion labour Board, vested with necessary powers to achieve the same.

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On 2nd November, in the forenoon, Mr P.S. POTI, retired Chief Justice of Gujarat High Court, addressed the participants. He said that a legislation of this kind is most urgently needed to take care of the most exploited and second largest unorganised labour force in the country. He stressed the need to eliminate the affect of the evils of dual system of employer-employee relationship, viz; Principal employer and immediate employer.

The participants then went into group discussions on the composition and functions of the Construction Labour Board, its structure from the national level to the local area level. The groups also discussed the following:-

- i) Working conditions and security of employment;
- ii) Accidents, safety and compensation;
- iii) Social security- ESI, PF & pension;
- iv) Housing, children's education, and creches;
- v) Wages and minimum wages;
- vi) Special problems of women workers.

The group discussions continued on 3rd November, 1985. After the conclusion of the group discussions and discussions on the reports of the respective groups, a consensus was reached in the form of proposals for a comprehensive legislation for Construction labour. It was also resolved unanimously to have a National Campaign Committee to follow up the task of drafting a legislation and for lobbying for its introduction in the Parliament. The National Campaign Committee will function under the Chairmanship of Justice V.R.KRISHNA IYER and will comprise of Mr P.S.POTI (Retired) Chief Justice of Gujarat High Court and Mr T.S. Sankaran (retired) Additional Labour Secretary, Government of India and Trade Union representatives among others.

At 4.30 PM, a Press Conference took place in which the object of the Seminar, the need for the Legislation and the salient features of the legislation were expostulated.

The seminar concluded with a note about the meeting on 6th November with the Hon'ble Minister for Labour Shri ANJALIAH and the presentation by the National Campaign Committee of the consensus reached at the Seminar.

R. VENKATARAMANI
CO-ORDINATOR
NATIONAL SEMINAR ON CONSTRUCTION
LABOUR