Part I: Chapter III

Short Day, Intensive Work: 1930s –1960s

Workers' struggle for short workdays, formal holidays, and paid and casual leaves came to define the nature of time discipline within the collieries since mid 1930s. Employers believed that any approval of such demands as a whole would further cut into profits, without achieving any improvement in labour productivity. This chapter will explore the meaning of this struggle and the ways in which it re-constituted the time regime that regulated workers' lives.

We have seen in the previous chapter that mining classes began to organise for an eight-hour workday, weekly rest-day, sickness and other privilege leaves since the 1920s. Their struggle developed, I have suggested, in the context of employers' attempt at extending workdays and intensifying labour. At the same time, the miners wanted the legislation to put a check on the despotic, abusive power enjoyed by the operators and superordinates. Consequently, two kinds of work routine gradually developed. One, was for the 'better-off personnel (like supervisors, clerks, and mechanical workers), employed preeminently on time-rates. They got the benefit of the three-shift system, Sunday holidays, sickness leaves, and the casual leaves for seven to fourteen days. These employees earned casual-leaves, popularly known as earned casual-leaves, by showing attendance for 260 and 265 days in a year in the case of underground and surface works, respectively. They constituted about fifteen to eighteen percent of the total workforces in the least mechanised to highly mechanised collieries. In contrast, the rest of the direct-producers worked long work-hours with intermissions. They saw operators trying to convert the weekly rest-days into paydays and denied any arrangement for formal leaves,
except certain sickness *khurakhi* for a week or so and festival leaves for four days on four occasions in a year offered in the big collieries and maternity benefits for two weeks available in half a dozen of those collieries. ¹

Contrary to the expectation of employers, the direct producers and others called for a series of protests and strike actions, in the years 1937 and 1938, to press for the demands of short workdays and leaves. Two features of these demands became prominent now. *One* was about *paid* leaves and holidays. *The second* was the miner's approach to the length of leaves. Initially, miners asked for benefits which were offered to the employees in government services and to the colliery managers. The latter enjoyed paid sickness-leaves, paid weekly rest-days, paid privilege leaves for fourteen days, earned casual-leaves for 30 days, and other festival holidays. The charter of demands submitted by the collier during the strike actions in collieries like Bhadroochak, Chaitabad-Katras, Muddidih, Jealgoda and Jamadoba did not, however, specify the length of leaves wanted in 1938 (Pol. Spl. 1938: 379; 1940: 70 (II)). One special clause in this charter was a demand for maternity leave, which was certainly not a need felt by the patriarchal managerial staff, hence conspicuously absent in their own benefits. Moreover, it also shows that we cannot assume that the charter of demands of colliers was an envious replication of the benefits offered to the superordinates. When operators refused to meet those demands, colliers came up with a new charter in the aftermath of WWII, when the coalfields around the area were paralyzed by strike actions. It specified the length of holidays and leaves that they wanted. The provision of paid leave for 30 days and other casual-leave for 30 days in a year, without any clause of attendance, was included in the new charters (Pol. Spl. 1948: XL (S) 25/47; 1949: XL (S/2) 8/48). The new charter of workdays and the leave days remained an axis of negotiation taken place between miners and operators in the subsequent two decades.

Why did the miners agitate on the issue of holidays and leaves? What was the meaning of this agitation? To employers the agitation of miners was illegitimate because it was an attempt at authenticate 'indiscipline' and 'irregularity' in work. Against this view, we have the standard explanation that workers raised the banner of the short days in opposition to the tortuous, unhealthy workload (Upadhyay, 2004; Marx, 1867/1977). ¹
have argued, in the previous chapter, that mining work passed through specific historical moments and trajectory to receive such grave appreciation between miners. The ways miners adjusted to work regime and articulated resolutions to the problem were subject to two levels of mediations of the ideas and politics of mining classes, and of the social relation of domination between the labourer and the management. The colliery person highlighted the oppositional feeling against the workload through the demands, besides other things, for appointment of assistants to mechanical staff (like fitters and pump-men), and of the other additional staff so that the collieries did not burden, for instance, the trammers with additional tasks of the haulage attendant, hook-man, and the onsetter. Similarly, they asked for the appointment of adequate staff who should relieve the supervisor (underground managers, overmen, and mining sirdars) and the technical staff (banks-men, onsetters, boiler-men, safety-light clerks, and others) upon the conclusion of a shift.

The demands of miners were strongly articulated in the years when mining capital renewed its efforts at increasing workload through the extension of the working day. The immediate context was the stipulation of temporary regulations by the Chief Inspector of Mines concerning mining safety. The regulation called for placement of an Assistant Incharge, along with overmen in underground work at night shifts. He was expected to regularly inspect work, pumps and other machineries, ensure that matchboxes were not taken in to light bidis, and supervisors and mechanical staff did not leave the workplace without due replacement. Accordingly the collieries reformulated the service rules, which prohibited the supervisor and mechanical staff from sleeping during working hours, leaving his assigned place and responsibility without prior permission and due replacement, overstaying after leave from work, and absenting without any prior permission or acceptable reasons. The regulation aimed at improving safety of the mines against the hazards that wreaked havoc in 1935—1936 (Chapter ‘Safety Politics’). Subsequently, the Amendment to the Indian Mines Act in 1938 and 1939 gave permanent status to the regulation.

The big collieries that were usually deep, gassy and difficult to work in, took measures to give effect to the new service rules. They appointed new people as
Assistants In-charge, and began dismissing and substituting supervisory and mechanical officials in an effort to discipline them. From 1936 the flexible practices common in collieries earlier gradually gave way to harsher modes of ensuring discipline. It became increasingly difficult for employees and workers to 'make their own time' – snatch a nap, take a break, delay returning to work at the end of the period of leave.

Let me give some details. In 1938, the Bhadroochack and Chaitabad-Katras collieries (Burrakar Coal Co.: Messrs. Bird & Co.) dismissed fifteen underground personnel on the charge of sleeping at the night shift (Pol. Spl. 1938: 379). J.A. Williams (Underground Assistant Incharge), M.C. Banerjee (Underground Overman), Sankar Dayal Singh (Lamp Cabin Incharge) faced dismissal on June 9, 1938, because they were seen around 1 am sleeping while on duty. The former two were asleep underground and the third was outside the lamp cabin. Similarly, Rampada Banerjee (Underground Mining Sirdar), Alahi Mia (Onsetter), Sakur Mian and Hiru Turi (Pumpers or Pumpman) were found sleeping on August 4. Some days later, on August 18, Maha Rajwar (Trollyman Sirdar) and his gang men were discovered asleep. At mid night on September 9, Baijnath Kurmi (Line-mistry) was caught napping on top of the tub, while Bhagwati Dhobi (Pumper) was seen lying near the underground pump he was to operate.

Leaving work without proper notice, and failure to rejoin work on time now were acts that invited immediate and strong disciplinary action. Consider the case of Sobrati Mian and Tulsi Lal. Both operated pumps at the mines. On July 3, 1938, both of them put in an application for leave and left work within an hour after the shift started. We do not know whether this was because they assumed that the submission of application itself meant conformity to new rules, or whether they deliberately flouted norms. The management dismissed them for leaving work without prior notice. Pumpers, argued Leach (Chief Engineer of the Company), cannot leave their post without proper notice or permission since the management has to have time to make alternative arrangement. In another case, Fakir Singh got leave for 5 weeks on May 9, but he apparently over stayed in his village home. So the management refused to reinstate him in the job, charging him for 'overstaying this leave for a period of about 2 months without any excuse'. A similar case was that of Mani Mia, who claimed to be sick on July 30. The management asked...
him to see the doctor at the hospital. But Mia, we are told, went away to cultivate his land. When he returned ten days later, the management asked him to go to the colliery doctor and get a medical certificate. Mia failed to do this because there were earlier instances when he had disappeared in similar ways. In yet another case Dasrath Singh, who was a Token-munshi or Attendance Clerk, invited dismissal, as 'he received leave for 5 days on July 11 to see a sick relative and returned after 32 days.'

Coercive discipline became an intimate part of the regime of modern service rules. These methods were particularly deployed against semi-skilled and unskilled works. The Prasad Committee found in 1938 that latthaiths of one contractor of Bhadroochack colliery regularly beat up miners when they did not turn up at work on Mondays, remaining in their dhowrahs to enjoy an extended weekly rest (Prasad Report, 1941, Vol. II, A: 342). This was a frequent experience of night-shift miners. The labour investigation committees criticized such disciplinary practices, but only with reference to service-tenants and not the mining community in general. Not all miners suffered this form of socialization into the 6-day work schedule. Nevertheless, it created a climate of psychic fear in the coalfield, sensitively captured by Illyas Ahmed Gaddi in his novel, Fire Area. Operators began to take frequent recourse of coercive ‘driving’ especially from the WWI. Faced with increased War demand, they found that piece-rate wages could not ensure enhanced labour effort from miners. (Chapter ‘Long Day…’).

We have seen before how observers like Wilson (CIM, 1909), Rees (1919) and Noyce (1925) had recommended that workers could be persuaded to work harder in case they were offered improved conditions of work and living, and were provided with necessary supply of machines. This argument of modernization was re-emphasized by subsequent observers like Whitely (1931), Seth (1940), Deshpande (1946) and Seal (1961) as well as many labour advocates. The big collieries increasingly listened to these cries of modernity. They started investing in infra-structure to create improved conditions of living, so that employees could have better accommodation, drinking water, sanitation, dispensaries, and elementary schools. Initially the benefits of these investments were enjoyed by managers and supervisors who began to settle in the colliery districts with their families. Gradually colliery operators came to see these
investments as necessary on a wider scale, if they had to create a workforce that was settled, contented, and experienced, a workforce that could sustain uninterrupted production at the mines. After 1946, the government took keen interest in the matter to ensure a stable and efficient workforce. It instituted the Colliery Labour Welfare Fund (CLWF) to overcome financial constraints of colliery capital, and the callousness of small operators. In the long-run, the benefits of improved conditions of living was extended to about two-third of the workforce employed in the big collieries and to about one-fourth of those employed in the small collieries (Chapter ‘Industrial Space’). The effort was to ensure stable output at the collieries across the seasons. For workers it meant a new regime of work. Settling in mining areas, allowed them to enjoy privileges they earlier did not have, but it also meant subjection to the discipline of regular work. Settling became a method of creating a disciplined workforce.

After WWII, coal industrialists renewed their efforts at investing in the installation of machines to enhance productivity and improve the working environment. The effort received a boost when the Government offered tax breaks for five years (1946—1950). The government was keen on improving the mechanical capacity of the mines to meet the increased demand for coal. Big collieries exploited the opportunity in a productive way. The government subsequently tried to help the industry, to secure the necessary finance first from the nationalized bank (SBI) and other private banks and, later, from the International Bank of Development and Reconstruction (World Bank) to improve the productive capacity. The collieries now saw extended tramlines and a dramatic increase in the use of machines — for haulage, coal-cutting, drilling, pumping, ventilation. There was also greater use of safety lamps, explosives, and electricity. Two areas of technological capital are representative indicators of changed contexts: the amount of electricity consumption and the number of ventilators. The former directly ensured improved labour productiveness; the latter was responsible for an improvement in the working environment, as it worked to remove heat, humidity, and gases from colliery galleries and working faces. The conditions of work observed by Deshpande in 1946 had underlined the urgent need for ventilation:
In the development of phases where gallery driving was going on working conditions were often
tiring because, until the gallery has been driven and connected with ventilation passages there is no
free circulation of air. Moreover, it was noticed in one case that the heat out of the seams was so
excessive that the working condition was almost unbearable. The workers were seen to be perspiring
profusely and the only means of keeping themselves dry they could think of was to rub their bodies
with dhotis. In many mines, the air was so saturated with moisture and here blasting operation had
taken place, the air was full of fumes (Deshpande, 1946: 41-44).

Mechanization thus led to improved productiveness of labour. Of course not all
workers were equally affected, and increased labour productivity did not mean reduced
labour effort per worker. A miner employed on the drilling machine, for instance, was
still involved in grueling labour. At one level, the muscular effort of the trammer was
greatly relieved when haulage machines were installed and tramlines were extended up to
the working face. Realising this relief offered to trammers, employers kept the number
of trammers relatively constant, refusing to employ extra hands to meet the demands of
enhanced output. Consequently, the workloads of trammers often increased since they
had to handle a greater number of tubs. That is why they began to ask for a time-rate
wage and the payment of overtime instead of the piece rates offered to them.

Mechanisation often led to an increase of the ordeal of underground miners.
First, most of the mechanical tools, except the ventilators and the safety lamps, added to
the amount of coal dust, sound, heat, and the injury that the miners had to bear. Secondly,
electricity enabled colliery operators to introduce the system of two or three-shift.
Miners now had to finish their work on time, within shortened shifts, and could not
stretch their time as they did earlier. The Railway Board provided wagons for fewer
hours: from 1951-52 for eight to nine hours, and then from 1956-57 for six hours, in an
effort to rationalize the use of wagons. The change inevitably meant a speeding up of the
work performed by the wagon loaders. The work time for wagon loaders actually
became erratic and oppressive. Contractors subjected them, often forcefully, to an
irregular work-routine, reported Parmeshwar Noniya (Dhanshar colliery). Many
collieries gradually overcame the problem of underground flooding during the rainy
season by using powerful electric water pumps. This however led to an extension of
work time for the settled miners during the rainy season.
While mechanization was a substitute for labour intensive mining, it did not lead to any dramatic reduction in the over all labour effort of the miners. One could say labour input per unit of product declined but overall labour input per worker did not. Operators did not give up the practice of ‘driving’ workers to work harder, nor did the piece rate wage system disappear. Through the late 1940s, and in the years after, colliers continued to voice their anger against abusive behavior, assaults and maltreatment by employers.

**Formalisation of leave, service rules and job security**

Mining authorities thus sought to put in place new rules to regulate interruptions at work. But miners continued with their effort to redefine industrial rhythms of work, taking breaks, and stretching holidays. For a while, the management could not rigorously enforce its will against that of the employees. In fact, the nature of tasks underwent certain transmutation when miners negotiated with industrial routine. The employers appropriated Sundays -- classified as the rest days in the IMA, 1923 -- as the day on which wages were to be paid, in an effort not to interrupt work during the week. Workers hailing from the neighbouring bastees often walked long distances only to stand in long queues to receive the payment late in the day. After collecting wages they visited the bazaar and could return to the bastees only by early night. Thus, the rest day became an extension of the workweek, without it being recognized as such. This mode of time appropriation by operators continued despite the opposition of colliers. Indian Colliery Labour Union (ICLU) repeatedly demanded that Sundays should be considered a day of rest: coming to the mines to collect wages did not provide miners ‘an adequate margin of leisure’ (Pol. Spl. 1933: 8(III)). Miners on their part tended to stay back home on Mondays and, in some cases, on Tuesdays, even though this meant loss of income. To persuade colliers into returning to work, operators decided to offer incentives. Deshpande noted in 1946:

In two of the collieries, surveyed in the Jharia coalfield, an allowance called Monday rate was being paid at one Anna per tub on raisings of the coal by miners on Mondays in order to encourage
attendance on this day. The payment of this additional bonus did not result in improved attendance on Mondays.\textsuperscript{11}

By the late 1940s, the colliers gradually stopped extending the rest-days to include Monday and Tuesdays.\textsuperscript{12}

When incentives failed industrialists began to close the mines on Monday, reworking the industrial rhythm to adapt to workers’ preferences. The industrialists argued that ‘the majority of miners indulge in hard drinking (on weekend or payday) and thus render themselves incapable of attending work on Mondays and for many even on Tuesdays’ (BLECR, 1941: 342). As the Prasad Committee noted:

In some collieries even those workers who are not addicted to drink or drink moderately and can attend work on Monday, are not given work as the employers prefer to keep the mines closed even on Monday, ... many workers, who do not touch liquor or take it with moderation, absent themselves from work either on Monday or Tuesday on the pretext that the work is exhausting and they simply cannot keep up the strain for 6 days. This belief of theirs is not without any foundation. ...But at the same time, I have also come across some persons who had worked only 4 or 5 days in a week and did not think it worthwhile to tire themselves on the fifth or sixth day. The workers who were indulging in hard drink deluded themselves in the belief that without liquor they could not keep up their energies for the remaining 4 or 5 days in a week. Some also believed that the consumption of liquor was essential to keep their bowels free from coal dust, which they inhaled in course of their daily work (Prasad (BLECR), 1941: 342).

Workers extended rest days for a variety of reasons. Some wanted to recover from tiring work and sickness, others had to visit family and friends, and yet others wanted to spend their leisure merry making and drinking, within an industrial milieu where drinking had become an intimate part of the leisure culture. Extended rest seemed particularly necessary to coalcutters, loaders and trammers, who worked in the working faces, breathed air saturated with the coal dust, and confronted the hazardous colliery environment (Chapter, ‘Drinking...’). The 1938 strike by the colliers with the Jharia Coalfield Workers Union (JCWU) demanded that ‘[w]eekly payment should be made on Saturday’ and that rules should be framed for holidays and rest days in order to smoothen the work routine (Pol. Spl. 1938: 379).
This struggle over work and leisure time affected the lives of workers beyond the colliery. Over the years we see a gradual reduction of workers' social time or non-colliery time. Longer work hours and days at the mines meant reduced time for agricultural work and shorter festival time. When workers began to settle around the mines they could not always go back to their villages during peak seasons of agricultural work. However, workers continued to consider the 'upcountry', and not the coalfields, as their homeland. The BLECR noted in 1938:

As regards other permanently settled workers, many of them have indeed taken to mining as their main occupation but do not regard colliery areas as their own home. They always cherish the hope of returning to their country now and then. In course of our enquires some 56 families were found, who were visiting their homes once in 3 to 5 years and 46 once in ten years. Those who look upon the coalfields as their homes are found to be only a small percentage of the total labour force. ...in these months – June to August, mines become depleted of their labour supply. Now, a few collieries were found to be working with only half of the labour force. These colliery owners were making desperate efforts to get sufficient workers by playing Lorries or by poaching one another's labourers. The exodus is much less in the busy months of February and March ... but it again increases in the month of November when paddy is cut (BLECR, 1941: 313, 318).14

Colliers at the mines did not stop celebrating their festivals, or their life cycle rituals. What did definitely occur was a reduction of time spent on these celebrations. For instance, the occasion of Saradhs (funeral ceremony) used to consume about a fortnight to a month when workers visited to their bastees; whereas in the colliery settlements they absented from work only for a couple of days when inc case of a death in the family. Similarly, absence at the time of Holi festival came down from a month spent in the bastees to a couple of days in the colliery settlement.15

Mining authorities began to recognize festivals like Holi, Dashahra, Kali-puja, and Cake-puja as holidays, since they could not stop most workers from going back to their villages during these occasions – a fact that kept the mines effectively closed. As the number of the upcountry workers rose dramatically, these festivals began to be celebrated in the colliery settlements.16 Similarly, the Bilashpuris colliers held Ganesh-pujahs at the settlement. While the local workers walked back to their bastees during festivals like Makarsakranti and Sohrai. From the late twenties, we find colliers at the
settlements, celebrating numerous festivals like Jhanda/ Ramnavami, Sankritan, Mahavir, Haribool, and Muharram. The Ramnavami and Mahavir processions, in fact, were never considered as local festivals before. The coal merchants and the raising contractors took active interest in organising, for instance, the Ramnavami or Jhanda, Mahavir and Sankritan festivals with a view to win over the labouring populations, or to express their grudges against the Muslim settlement, though many contractors saw the need to promote communal harmony. With time, the colliery settlements welcomed musical and religious programmes, such as the Launda-naches, Nautankis, plays of Bhikhari Thakur, Satyasangas, and Ramlilas. The frequency of these programmes went up especially after Indian independence. In the post colonial period the newly formed labour union, Indian National Trade Union Congress, wanted to seize the imagination of the colliers, and resist the influence of the Socialist and the Communist labour unions (AITUC and AITUF). To establish social connections with workers, the new union took keen interest, in collaboration with the colliery operators, in organizing these programmes. The industrialists and labour contractor used the funds collected from fines imposed on miners, to support these cultural and religious initiatives. We are told: ‘not a single week passed, excepting those of the rainy season, in which one or the other Nach, Gan or Satyasang was not ongoing in one or the other colliery. We used to walk down to the other colliery after finishing our shift.’ What we see, thus, are two parallel processes: increased numbers of festive events and leisure activities and, at the same time, fewer days of festival leave enjoyed by settled workers in the colliery settlement.

The family majdoors and the kamins strove to combine wage-work and reproduction task. This led them to stay uncomfortably in colliery settlements in the period of child bearing and rearing. The larger mines, in particular, gradually enforced regularity in work and displaced the kamins. Only half a dozen collieries introduced the maternity and child welfare schemes from the 1930s. These were collieries that were well placed in the coal market, and were keen to have settled and contented family kamgars in the colliery settlement. Maternity benefits included leave for four weeks and the khurakhi (individual subsistence payment), which proved inadequate. “We are glad to note that some large collieries have inaugurated their own maternity benefit schemes and the board of health has also made small beginning, but this is still very inadequate
and far from the requirements”, observed S.K. Bose, Secretary of the ICLU in 1933 (Pol. Spl. 1933: 8(III)). Those who came to the coalfield to escape the socio-cultural norms of their villages stayed in the colliery settlements during pregnancy and childbirth. The proportion of such kamins steadily increased and those of going to villages for childbirth slowly came down. They worked until late stages of pregnancy and rejoined work within one or two weeks after childbirth. There were many instances when kamins gave birth in the pit itself, since they were keen to delay taking leave before child birth, and reduce the possibility of cut in wages. Thus, the span of the child bearing and rearing was shortened as the kamins tended to become regular labourers in an effort to save their job. Seth suggested in 1940 that the need for increase in income in a context of falling wage, due to the slump in the industry, forced the kamins to choose regular jobs. Seth overlooked two factors. The kamins were eager to defend their jobs by ensuring greater regularity at work under the pressure of a coercive time regime in a competing world of labour. He also underestimated the political consciousness of the mining classes, who started demanding that the maternity benefits Whitely Commission (1931, vol. I: 263) recommended be given to the labourers. The government passed the Mines Maternity Benefit Act in 1941. However, only after the long militant battles of 1946 and 1948, did the mining community succeeded in getting a broader implementation of the Act, and other infrastructural facilities under the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund Act, 1947.

The active interaction between the colliery employers, on the one hand, and the mining community, on the other, guided the course of adaptation. The mining community adopted several methods to pursue their claims to free time. The usual practice was to negotiate their ‘social’ leaves with sirdars or contractors. The settled labourers in fact involved the sirdars in their festive ceremonies such as, the Dashahra, Holi, Kali-puja, etc, and the vise-versa. This was the reason why collieries practically remained closed on those occasions, although workers went without pay. Some colliery employers began to distribute baksheesh (gifts) to the employees on occasions such as, the Dashahra, Kali-puja, Holi, and/or Cake-puja, and births and weddings (BLECR, 1941, vol. I: 350). The Cake-puja was celebrated at collieries run by Europeans, such as Bhowra, Amlabad, Jealgora, Lodna, Kustore, and Bhadroochak Collieries. This development in the organisation of colliery work-time and social-time shows how
cultural practices of workers were incorporated within the new industrial regime and how new rituals were established. Work relations were fashioned not by capitalists alone, the colliers managed to rework these relations in many ways. This industrial politics was evident in festive activities, such as the Ganesh-\textit{puja}, Sohra\textit{-purva}, and Makarsakranti or Jal-\textit{puja}, which could not get the validating recognition of employers. There were two possible reasons for this. Labourers of some specific social groups celebrated each of these: the Sohrai was linked largely to the Santhals, the Ganesh-\textit{puja} with Bilaspuris and the Nagpuris and the Makarsakranti with the Mahatos, the Rajwars, the Bauris, and the Ghatwals of Manbhum district. They could not exert pressure on the employers because they were relatively small in number. Moreover, the festivals like the Sohrai and Jal-\textit{puja} needed the labourers to leave the workplaces and go away to the \textit{bastees}. The Bilaspuris and the Nagpuris settled labourers being small in number could not secure the favour of the supervisory staffs that happened to be of social groups culturally indifferent to their festivity. The \textit{kamins} experienced the functioning of the work regime in the same way. Employers found it easier to replace them by other female or male labourers instead of giving some crucial fringe benefits to them.

Children who worked did not conform to the new regime of time. Parmeshwar Nonya reported to me:

They did not work for a few days after an earning of some amount of money. They returned at work when they were financially exhausted or were forced by their working parents. This way of working dramatically changed after marriage (usually at the age of 16-20 of both the male and the female), and once the responsibility of the family and household fell on their shoulders.

Did this mean that children commanded their own labour time and were not as task oriented as their parents, though within the same capitalist labour regime? Thompson (1967) has suggested that the child labourer in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain was completely under the control of their parents and thus not task oriented at all. It is possible that even at the collieries of Jharia parents did not want their children to work in accordance with the intensive time regime adults had to conform to. Wage policy and the household economy also affected the length of work time of child workers. Their work time probably increased when the real earning of their families fell:
this was so, for instance, when wage rates fell and household incomes dipped between 1930 and 1937 and when female workers were being displaced from the late 1920s. In these times, even teenage female members of the labouring poor families, Seth reported, went into prostitution to sustain their household and to secure one or two bottles of liquor in the period of slump in coal trade (Seth, 1940: 248).

As in festival time, the mining community refused to work in cases of accident, death, funeral, and mourning.

The mining classes, thus, experienced a time regime that saw complicated processes at work. There was, on the one hand, an ostensible shortening and formalisation of work time through enactments of the state, on the other, operators imposed a work time that was longer than the statutory workday (nine or ten hours a day and six-day workweek), and further intensified labour input by ensuring regularity and steadiness. So the miners now had fewer breaks, shorter holidays, even though the number of festive occasions proliferated. Thus, though the length of the workday shortened for some workers, others had more working days in a week, a season, and a year. This trend seemed to have been applicable to all the collieries despite certain variation between the big and small.

The demand of the colliers for formalised rest-days, leave, and holidays came precisely in the context of a reduction in the time they had away from the collieries. The attempt of employers to enforce regularity and steadiness in work since mid-1930s became unbearable to miners who saw the new time discipline in the light of the battle with employers over the use of time. Workers began to agitate from 1938 against the usurpation of their work-free time. They were keen to have time for socio-cultural obligations, reproduction of their energy, and for recreational demands. They were also eager to curb the despotic, abusive power of the superordinates. Consider the following petition from colliers of Bhadroochak colliery opposing the appointment of a new manager along with a new set of sirdar and overman:

We the coalcutters are...in great distress by the tyranny of the Manager. He beats us for nothing cause and holds to contempt as a dog. Whenever we bring any case about any Sardar's or overman's shameful behaviour with us, he does not care, but calls bad names and utter “Go away”. By the
transfer of Mr. Morrison Saheb, the whole colliery affairs have been upset. None is happy in his coming and doing. ...so we are determines to leave our work if our case should not be decided well. We will be happy if Maciel Saheb, the Assistant Manager, comes here (A Letter to Ralph Fenwich, Chief Mining Engineer, Bird & Co. Pol. Spl. 1938: 379).

The old managers were seen as lenient, understanding and considerate. The persons associated with the new regime were considered to be harsh and ruthless. There were other cases of such protests with changes in management. In Jamadoba Colliery in 1933, the company dismissed M.N. Dutt and A. Mitter, Assistant Managers, for their inability to coerce the colliers to show deference and respect the reduced wage-rate in 1932-33 (Pol. Spl. 1933: 08(III)). The colliers were enraged with this change in command. They saw it as an end of negotiable production schedules.

The crucial element of the struggles, nonetheless, was over the precise language of the resolution. The resolution had two distinct elements. First, the idea of formal codified intermissions, i.e., the sixty-days leaves, weekly rest days, sickness breaks, twelve weeks-maternity break, and the festival holidays; and, second, the fiscal character of these breaks, i.e., the paid nature of leave. What accounted for these two elements? The colliers wanted to integrate the privilege of discretionary and flexible character of the production schedule; hence, the emphasis on casual leaves and the sickness breaks accompanied that of the paid leaves and other holidays. The former two provisions would allow them the possibility of sudden 'absence'. Observers like Seth, the Whitely Commission, the Prasad Committee, and other labour publicist often pointed out that Indian miners worked, on an average, six to eight months in a year in cases of seasonal migrants and settled miners, respectively. The demands of the labour association for the paid leaves for thirty days, casual leaves for thirty days, weekly rest days and other breaks, i.e., about 120 days or four months breaks in a year seemed to express a well-established understanding of the capability of miners to bear the colliery exertion. The emphasis on the payment for the rest days and certain leaves expressed the modern idea of profit sharing by working classes employed in the organised industrial establishment. In the Indian context, the idea of profit sharing was premised on two observations made by the miner. One, the latter believed that the working class was the source of all the wealth and industrial profits but workers received disproportionately low monetary
values for the hard labour performed. Furthermore, a good share of the industrial profit was being drained to the *metropolis*. Profit sharing was necessary, felt miners, especially owing to the reason that mining people sacrificed their lives, lungs, health and bore an impaired condition of existence to produce profits for the employer. As early as 1920, Bishwanand, a Swarajist advocate of workers, argued:

> the miners' lives were always in danger and that they should therefore ask the proprietors to issue...a minimum wage of Rs. 1 and annas 8 a day for every person, man or woman working in the mines (Pol. Spl. 1920: 353).

This demand for more than two hundred percent revision in colliery wages for the direct-producers appeared to be justified because of the kind of sacrifices the latter made to serve the industry. This line of reasoning soon began to inform the arguments in favour of betterment needs in the mining society. This was in sharp contrast to the argument of the industrialist who emphasised the necessity of improved labour productiveness to precede any claim for extra expenditure on improved condition of living.

Like the working classes in 19th century England, the time politics of workers appeared to have been efforts only to arrive at a compromised deal with the new economy. Thrift (1990: 117) has suggested that from now, though workers would win the battle over work time they would lose the war. Time was now money, not tasks, and workers now fought not over a new idea of time but over adjustments within it. This perceptive observation, yet, underestimated the fact that time and money in a capitalist society becomes a social relationship. So, the issues at stake for the working class were: the nature of controls over time, and the nature of its very exchange. Workers hoped to frame the agenda of social days and the leaves with a view to protect these from any encroachment and external control. The aim of time politics was job security, individual claim on particular post, and fair, just treatment.
Multiple times, unified process, 1950s-60s

The struggle of miners over the laws of work and work-free time could not sufficiently persuade colliery proprietors to meet their demands. The colliery proprietor argued that the 'migratory' labourer – such as the daily rural urban commuter and the seasonal labourer that the industry heavily relied on – could not conform to the system of strict work routine. Employers continuously tried to repress unionization and agitations of workers, but their strategies changed over time. In the 1920s and 1930s there were efforts to ban 'irresponsible' union activity, such as the annual conference of AITUC in 1921, and disallow 'political agitators' within a radius of 200 miles of the coalfield. The subsequent decades saw employers applying two other methods. First: they began sponsoring 'pocket' unions, that is, 'company unions'; and second: they sought to mollify militants by making reconciliatory moves, by acceding to some of their demands.

Government interventions at times forced employers to negotiate with workers. The Mines Maternity Benefits Act, 1941 and its Amendment in 1945 permitted leave with a subsistence wage for eight weeks to surface kamins and for sixteen weeks to underground kamins. Additionally, it declared that kamins who were pregnant could not be made to work for more than four hours in the underground for thirty-six weeks (half the period before child birth and the rest afterwards). To claim the benefits, kamins had to be regularly employed for sixty days before pregnancy. The Colliery Conciliation Board, instituted in the midst of widespread strike actions of the miner in 1946-48, gave an award (May 1947) that included recommendations for framing the service orders concerning leave and holidays. The associations of operators had to pay heed to the recommendation, especially when the Joshi Agreement (1948) reinforced the recommendation. The latter approved leave for seven days with payment for six days, and the casual leave for another fourteen days. One could earn the right to this leave by showing attendance for 190 in case of underground miners and 265 days surface miners. This benefit was available to all direct-producers. In contrast, the supervisory, clerical
and other employees employed on a monthly salary, received paid leave for fourteen days and casual leave for another one month based on attendance criteria similar to those of the direct-producer.

The Mines Act, 1952 confirmed the standing orders of the IMA and extended these to the entire coalfields. Conditions of leave were slightly modified. Colliers were now to receive payments for every day of the seven-day leave, sickness leave was to be based on medical certificates obtained from colliery dispensary, workdays were to be of eight hours, and women could no longer be employed for night work (10 p.m. to 5 a.m.). Workers demanded that leave benefits had to be extended to further. In 1956-1957, the Mazumder Colliery Disputes Award and Dasgupta Appellate Decision attempted to address some of the resentments of miners. The leave benefits available until then only to the monthly paid employees were now extended to all workers. In addition, they approved five paid festive holidays and two days of paid leave so that workers could celebrate Independence Day and Republic Day. The eligibility criteria of leave and the number of days of leave thus remained issues of continuous contestation and negotiation.

The standing orders were critical in establishing the new work regime. Big operators used them to settle workers. By linking the right to leave with eligibility criteria the operators sought to create a stable workforce. According to these orders, only colliers who had worked for a specified number of days could claim leave. The industry applied this attendance scheme to the entire spectrum of the labour-management relationship including the payment of minimum wages and other social security benefits. In this way the standing orders sought to streamline work time, induce workers to be more regular, integrate them into a new regime of work, and persuade them to submit to industrial peace. The government sought to create a stable, contented, efficient and experienced workforce. The Rees and Foley Coalfield Committees had recommended to the government, as early as in 1919 and 1920, to move in this direction (Rees, 1919: Para 43-58; Foley, 1920: 13-16). But, in the Mines Act, 1952 the provisions on work time seemed to resonate more with the ideas of big proprietors than with the demands of workers.
Militant workers faced the danger of losing the benefits that were being negotiated. Participation in an illegal strike could amount to the loss of entitlements for that particular quarter of a year. When operators sought to control workers, they frequently found a friendly response from the Chief Labour Commissioner, a representative of government, on this matter. So there was no more any need to declare a labour association unlawful. Strikes could be easily declared ‘illegal’. V.V Giri, Labour Minister, proposed in mid 1950s to restore the principle of collective bargaining. But in the face of violent opposition of industrialists, the proposal had to be withdrawn.

Even in the 1950s, the work routine in the different mines was generally characterized by variation. The Standing Orders sought to lay down norms that could create a unified process, a uniform time discipline. The latter hoped, in Zerubavel’s words (1990), to privatise the social times of workers by subordinating the latter to the dictums of work time. The ‘permitted leave’ would be within the bounds of colliery time and its structural logic of coordinated, standardized time management. An increasing number of big establishments adopted universal electrification and, concomitantly, worked in three shifts, each shift being of eight hours. About one-third of them and a few small ones provided paid casual leave, too, even though this was not a requirement under the statutes. They were the well-placed collieries in the coal market, i.e., enjoyed access to reserved coal markets; and, hence, keen to have a stable, contented, efficient workforce. Nonetheless they differentiated between the permanent employees called on to constitute the core segment and the contract labourers who were seen as the disposable segment. The contract labourers formed about one-fourth of the total workforce until the 1959-60, when their status was redefined. In that year the industrialists agreed to the demand of the labour association in the Industrial Committee to convert all contract workers who were employed in regular production work into permanent or Sarkari employees (IMA, 1961). The Conciliation Board Award (1947) and the Joshi Agreement (1948) laid down the principle that contract workers should receive the same benefits that were available to those directly employed. The issue remained a bone-of-contention in labour-management relationship. Operators continued to see contract labourers as temporary workers, badlis, who were not entitled to statutory benefits. B.N. Srivastva, the investigator of the Survey Labour Condition in the Coal
Mining Industry in 1962-63, found that after the 1959-Agreement in the Industrial Committee, the big operators began recruiting 'probationers', who again could not claim statutory benefits. In contrast, other collieries employed a large proportion of the temporary, *badli* and casual workers.

Unlike the big collieries, most of the small collieries (like Dubaree and Bera), associated with the Indian Mining Federation (IMF) and the Indian Colliery Owners Association (ICOA), resisted the making of modern industrial arrangements. These small collieries benefited from the guaranteed coal prices as well as regulated coal marketing under the new scheme of Coal Control Board, which came to effect from 1944. Yet, they faced disadvantages in competing for access to the coal market, because of the low quality of coal they produced and their financial constraints. They worked in two or one shift, each longer than 10 hours, i.e., longer than the statutory limit. They relied on colliers half of whom were not entitled to modern industrial arrangements and worked without paid leave and other benefits. They were contract workers – temporary workers, *badlis* and casual colliers. Not more than twenty-three percent of the total workforces and a lower proportion in case of coalcutters and the loaders could qualify for the earned paid leaves in 1958-59 despite the amendment brought to modern industrial arrangement in 1956-57 (Labour Bureau, 1965: 84). The following tables show how the work regime in the small and big mines varied. As we can see most large collieries (over 90 Per cent) had shifted to 8-hour shifts and worked three shifts a day, while about 40 percent of the small mines worked one or two shifts, and 55 percent of them had 10-hour shifts.
Table I.

Distribution of Coalmines according to No. of Shifts Worked, 1962-63

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>No. of mines / No. of workers</th>
<th>% of mines on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>465 / 2.1 Lac</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large mines</td>
<td>91 / 1.19</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small mines</td>
<td>374 / 0.91</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large mines</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small mines</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour Bureau (Srivastva Report), 1966: 43, 45.
### Table II.

#### Percentage of Coalmines Granting Various Types of Leave & Holidays with Pay, 1962-63

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>No. of mines</th>
<th>% of mines granting</th>
<th>National &amp; festival holidays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earned leave</td>
<td>Casual leave</td>
<td>Sick leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large mines</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small mines</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large mines</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small mines</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table III.

#### Percentage Distribution of Workers Employed, June 1962

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Production workers</th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Probationers</th>
<th>Temporarily</th>
<th>Badli</th>
<th>Casual</th>
<th>Apprentice</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>169081/ out of 2.1 lacs</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large mines</td>
<td>101979/ 1.19</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small mines</td>
<td>67102/ 0.91</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>343845</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large mine</td>
<td>243041</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small mine</td>
<td>100804</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the new system came into being the difference between the large and small mines became sharper. The large mines shortened the hours of work per shift, worked three shifts, and agreed to grant maternity, medical and other forms of leave. As we have seen the grant of these benefits was part of a modernizing system that sought to maximize efficiency of the workforce, rationalize work, and discipline workers into a structure of regularity. The paid leave granted was linked to an eligibility criterion that sought to ensure regular attendance and continuity of work. The smaller mines resisted these new norms, continued to operate long shifts, employ temporary workers (even in 1962 they constituted about 48 per cent of the work force in small mines), and deny leave provisions. Two different forms of time discipline, two different forms of labour regime, was part of the way mining capital established its sway.

**Attendance registers and social control**

One sign of the new system was the attendance register. Since attendance was critical to the definition of rights and claims, the record of attendance was important. So the register, I suggest, became a site of a negotiation, conflict, manipulation and protests.

Mining operators attempted to restrict the entry of colliers into the class of permanent employees – those who had leave and other entitlements. This they did through the control over attendance registers. The *badli* got a job when a permanent worker was absent, and there was shortage of labour. The colliery maintained a list of *badli* workers. The *badlis* had to visit the mines daily to get work. The casual worker got work when there was an acute shortage of labour, or to meet a sudden spurt in demand. The permanent worker could claim statutory benefits if they were able to prove that they had the required attendance. His/her claims had to be established at the labour court, instituted in 1948 at Dhanbad. This was often difficult. Operators devised ways to prevent a regular worker from fulfilling the condition necessary to become a 'permanent' miner. One common strategy was to repeatedly change the name of a regular worker on the payroll, or show her/him to be absent, or drop his name for a while from the attendance register. Small collieries rarely bothered to maintain either any list
of badli workers or a comprehensible attendance register. Sathrughan Rajwar, who worked as a pick miner and loader in the Tisra and Dubaree collieries since the late 1950s, described the system to me in these words:

In the Company Raj, the Malik (operator: owner, agent or contractor) used to deduct wages by turn, one worker after another worker, week by week. We used to load six garees (tubs) in a shfta (week), but the sirdar paid us for not more than five garees a week. ... We were 600 to 700 miners in the Dubaree colliery, but only 20—25 of them were permanent workers. One miner worked as a regular, but the Malik used to change his name in the attendance register. Hence, he could not classify as permanent or regular worker; he could not be entitled for quarterly bonus and PF and other benefits. My name was first entered as Pramood, but then I saw several changes in my name in the register; the name at the time of nationalisation was Sathrughan Rajwar. The contractor used to call out to us not by our original name but by a number - the one entered in the register. Notwithstanding this, a miner used to be gad-gad (happy) as we used to get cash earnings and the job at our will upon the return from the bastees.26

These sentiments were reaffirmed by other workers. Not just leave, but workers’ claims to bonus were linked to attendance and regularity. Manipulation of registers allowed the company deny bonus payment. Muhammad Yakub, a pick coal cutter in Bera colliery, explained to me how this was done:

In the time of the Company, quarterly bonus was paid to workers on the completion of 55 (since 1956) regular hazree (attendance). At that time, the company did not allow us to complete the full tenure; it used to forcefully discontinue us for a while. That was arbitrary work practice. The malcutta (coalcutter) had a difficult time. The agent (Gopi Baboo) asked him to fill up three garees a day, howsoever long the work spell went. Then the malcutta had to pay commission to the mining sirdar. The former was under the control of the latter. Those who did not do three garees, lost his hazree for the day. The Company (Agrawallas) used to ask workers to perform all kinds of odd task, including lifting of cable, cleaning, and grass cutting; and doing all these in the ‘off time’, we had to fill up the necessary garees in the underground shift. We fought with the Company. The fight was for our haq (Rights) and for our bhaiolog (fraternity); but the Company used to declare the strike illegal. The condition of life was akin to that of Gulams (Slaves/ Bonded-labour)

Kinker Kora, a loader in Joyrampore, Bhagatdih and Dubaree collieries, again recounted how bonus payments were denied: ‘At the time of Durga-puja, the company gave one
saree to the *aurat* (woman) and one dhoti to the *purush* (man), besides an occasional payment of 6 to 20 rupees in a year. This was the bonus for most of the workers, not any quarterly bonus.²⁷

The clerk often received extra rewards to carry out the guidelines set out by the proprietor. ‘The company wanted to minimise the size of the class of permanents; and wanted to confer this privilege only to the loyal and pliant *majdoors*’, reported Moteshwar Mondal (an attendance clerk).²⁸ Over time, the big firms employed a large contingent of permanent workers and the rest of the workers were classed as ‘probationers’. In the case of probationers, employers did not have to play tricks with the attendance register, since they had no legal right to the benefits that permanent workers had.

The *munshi* also had the power to impose fines and deduct wages for late attendance. The reporting time was again to be entered in the register. So the power of the register was reaffirmed through the power of fines. The imposition of fines – either the deduction in wages or denial of job for a day – became another instrument of imposing the new time discipline, particularly in the big colliery and with permanent miners. The shift schedules were 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., then from 3 to 11 p.m. and 11 to 7 a.m. in the morning. The single-shift schedule worked between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. with an interval of two-hour interval in between. The Company installed a siren to guide miners, among whom only a few had watches. The power to impose fines on the late comers and absentees meant tyranny of the *munshis*. The *kamins* and commuter found it difficult to reach on time, especially in the morning. Waking up early in the morning, they had to rush for the communal tap (anyway water was scarce), finish the domestic work, and run to the distant mines. Their struggle to adjust to the hardening time regime and the arbitrary authority of the *munshis* is captured a miners’ song:

> At four in the morning we rise, in the middle of winter  
> To cross the river, to reach the quarry  
> *Seven miles we have to walk each day*  
> Returning home exhausted before we eat  
> Sleeping without a proper bed, relieved to have reached home at last,
But we have to leave in the middle of the night,
Leaving our children sleeping,
We have to hurry,
For we are late, we will not get work.
If we are just a few minutes late, the Haziri Babu harasses us,
Go away, he orders, or see me later!
If we miss work one day, he orders
Go back today, or demands, bring me a chicken tomorrow.
The sahib, the sirdar, the Munshi and the haziri Babu all make us weep.

The power of the munshi, and the register, derived from the significance that
time-keeping had within the new system. Colliers, however, managed to devise their
own everyday forms of resistance to new norms, knowing the norms and subverting
them from within. They learnt to manipulate the register, and manipulate the munshis
who controlled the register. When a worker stayed away from work beyond the
permitted time, he paid a dasturi (commission) to the munshi, who registered the worker
as being present. By paying this dasturi, the worker could register a day of leave as a day
of work, ensure his/her attendance and retain the claim to all the benefits that regularity
of attendance ensured.

Labour publicists protested against such ties, against the payment of dasturis.
They believed that dasturis was traditionally paid to gang sirdars because they were
leaders of the workers’ gang, and looked after workers’ needs. But under the new system
this dasturi had become a serious malpractice. The control over the registered allowed
munshis the power to extract this bribe. Kesho Rawani reported about an Attendance
Munshi employed in Bhowra Colliery, who used to deprive colliers of their bonus by
tricking with registers:
The company used to deny the payment of Bonus upon absence of even one day more than the permitted days of leaves. Upon receiving an appeal from miners, the Hazree Munshi, named Sharma Baba, used to say, "You submit five rupees on the penis of the Baba, then you can get Bonus". A few of us did not agree to his demand. Hundreds of persons went his way, but five also came with us. We opposed his tricks. We showed our fortitude in confronting his hundred persons with our five.29

Workers like Keshav Rawani were not demanding only the right to bonus. They were protesting against abusive and arbitrary power exercised by those in authority, including munshis and sirdars. Anger against abusive power often led to physical retribution against the supervisory staff.30 The first incident of this kind had occurred in 1939, when a group of miners attacked one overman, as they protested against the manoeuvring with attendance register and unfair deductions imposed on them (Kirbi, 1940: 28). In the aftermath of WWII, colliers frequently resorted to physical attacks on supervisors to protest against maltreatment.

In the 1950s Keshav Rawani had no more than 'five persons' with him to oppose the abuses committed by the Sharma Baba, and to resist the way control over the attendance register gave him power over workers. This in a way captured the dramatic transformation that had taken place in the industrial landscape in the years after Independence. In the 1940s, Rawani had the backing up of the great majority of miners. He and other comrades formed a formidable force to fight for a variety of issues, including the improved wages and conditions of living and work, job security, recognition of union, just and fair treatment, industrial democracy and socialisation of the means of production (Pol. Spl. 1948: XL (S) 25/47; 1949: XL (S/2) 8/48).31 Keshav Rawani worked in Bhowra colliery, where he and his comrades organised a strike that was three month-thirteen-day long in early 1948 to press for workers' demands. The strike action was similar to those seen in the other collieries in 1946-48. His organisation, the AITUC, and the CPI, had already refused to accept the Conciliation Board Award declared in May 1947, as it did not meet several of the demands that they were fighting for, including the question of leave, fair treatment and job security. The government and the proprietors decided to suppress defiant agitators militarily. They first classified the coal industry as a public utility service, so that ongoing industrial
struggles could be prohibited. They outlawed Communist associations and activities in 1948. As a communist, Keshav Rawani had to go underground. The employers dismissed politically active militant colliers in favour of others who were pliant. Many miners now preferred to play within the rules of the games, and conform to regulations that the mines imposed. The changed situation destined that people like Keshav Rawani would be isolated.

The Industrial Committee on Coal Mining introduced the bonus card system but failed to do away with dasturi. Miners continued to overstay permitted leave, and continued to bribe the munshi. Payment of dasturi could persuade even the colliery doctor to issue a sickness certificate that allowed workers to claim sickness benefits.

**The decline of absenteeism and the new time regime**

The new regime of rules managed to impose greater attendance and regularity in work. The proportion of colliers working for six-days in the week went up to about two-third by the 1960s as against one-third in 1929-30 and one-half in 1945-46, respectively. The proportion of colliers absenting from the colliery work on Mondays came down to about one-fifth. G.S Jabbi (Chief Inspector of Mines) proudly announced that the industry had overcome the problem of seasonal fluctuations in output and the usual seasonal mobility of miners. Although workers took more leave in particular season and month, such as May and June, to attend to other social and cultural ceremonies (Jabbi, CIMAR, 1966: 13), the average annual absenteeism (including the authorised leave) amongst workers employed in the Jharia coalfields came down, pointed out K.C Seal (Investigator of the Survey on Absenteeism, 1961), to twelve to thirteen percent which was the standard for the industrial economy. It meant that the average absence of colliers did not exceed much more than the overall of earned paid leaves, casual and sickness leaves, national and festival holidays, and weekly rest days (i.e., 103 days in a year in 1959) offered to them.
Table IV.

How many Days Did Workers Work?  
(No. of Days Worked in a Week in October, 1959)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of days of attendance in a week</th>
<th>No. of workers</th>
<th>Percentage distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Absenteeism of Weekly Paid Workers on Different Days after Payday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day after the pay day</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All India</th>
<th>Jharna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>13.31</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>13.12</td>
<td>11.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>13.46</td>
<td>12.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>14.03</td>
<td>13.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>13.83</td>
<td>13.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>13.66</td>
<td>13.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>13.21</td>
<td>12.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour Bureau (Seal Report), 1961: 13.33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All India</th>
<th>Jharna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>13.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>13.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>12.85</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>13.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>12.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td><strong>11.18</strong></td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 August</td>
<td>11.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lal, 1968: 17. It included all kinds of absence from works.
Chart I

Table VII

Absenteeism (Seasonal) in the Jharia Coalfields in 1928
Loyabadi Colliery tons of coal

Absenteeism (Seasonal) in the Jharia Coalfields in 1928
Loyabadi Colliery Miners (coalcutters & loaders)

Absenteeism (Seasonal) in the Jharia Coalfields in 1928
Standard Colliery tons of coal

Absenteeism (Seasonal) in the Jharia Coalfields in 1928
Standard Colliery Miners (coalcutters and loaders)
The shift to new work-time practice was however not uniform. As we saw there were different work regimes, different forms of time management. Old practices were not all displaced. The *malcuttas* and loaders, for instance, continued to take breaks from colliery work, staying away from work after official leave. Many of the pick miners, unlike the CP miners, preferred to extend the Sunday rest day to Monday. Furthermore, the leave undertaken by the worker on piece rate in general and underground workers and *kamins* in particular, exceeded that of the time-rated employees and other surface colliers.

### Table VIII.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Underground</th>
<th></th>
<th>Surface</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>piece rated</td>
<td>time rated</td>
<td>total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no.</td>
<td></td>
<td>days of</td>
<td>average no.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of workers</td>
<td></td>
<td>absence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indebted</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-indebted</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>piece rated</td>
<td>time rated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indebted</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-indebted</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour Bureau (Seal Report), 1961: 56-57.38
Table IX.

Average No. of Days of Absence per Year among Weekly-Paid Employees, 1959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>Underground</th>
<th>Surface</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample No. of workers (A)</td>
<td>% days of absence (B)</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1587</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>882</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average no. of Days of Absence per Year among Piece-Rated and Time-rated Weekly-Paid Employees, 1959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>Piece rated (miner)</th>
<th>Time rated</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1364</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>42.5 surface</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1504</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>905</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average no. of Days of Absence Underground & Surface Workers in Different Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of worker</th>
<th>Miner &amp; loader</th>
<th>Trammers</th>
<th>other</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Trammers</th>
<th>Wagon loader</th>
<th>others</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>966</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>1587</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of absence</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour Bureau, 1961: 19, 20, 52.
Table X.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>No. of mines</th>
<th>% providing housing</th>
<th>No. provided by management</th>
<th>% house with one room</th>
<th>% house with 2 rooms</th>
<th>% house with 3 rooms or more</th>
<th>% mines charged</th>
<th>% mines rent for all</th>
<th>% mines no rent at all</th>
<th>% mines allotted some employee houses</th>
<th>% of workers allotted Houses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>58202</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large mines</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>39927</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small mines</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>18275</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour Bureau, 1966: 75. 37

**Inferences**

The movement for short day and formal leaves sought to enforce regularity, steadiness, standardisation, and coordination in production schedule. It aspired to come to grips with disruptions caused in the universe of social times of the working people, by reworking their notion of time, making them learn the new rules of the game. But different notions of time and work continued to co-exist, even though there was a general move towards the creation of a workforce that worked for short shifts, regular hours, specified days, and enjoyed regular leave. The new regulations were an effort to create a stable and permanent labour force; even though these rules were subverted and modified in actual practice. The distinctive technological and economic bases of the coal industry, unlike that of the factory which depended on mechanical power driven machines, allowed space for multiple times. The time of the worker did not have to synchronize with that of running machines, so the workers could modify the nature of work time in many ways. What workers asserted through absences and breaks was the difficulty of enduring the
demanding nature of some of the colliery work, and the opposition to the way new forms of authority and power were established over the labour process.

1 About twelve to fifteen percent of the total colliery (three hundred plus) qualified as the big colliery based on its annual output of about one lakh and more tons. Such collieries produced about two third of total output and employed a similar proportion of the total workforce. A big colliery firm usually owned and managed more than one colliery including the big and other middle size ones.

2 It was an effort at subjugation rather than disciplining, since the employer dispensed the punishment on 'mistakes' but worked through a control over the life process. He inflicted coercion through the latthaiths/pehalwans.

3 The increase in workload and intensification of labour continued in the period of slackened demand or slump between the two commercial booms of 1914-19 and 1939-46. The big collieries increased outputs in order to reduce the cost of per unit of output and the market price of coal. As a result, the total output increased in 1923-29, though the coal price fell after 1923 and so did the total workforce. Moreover, the big collieries further raised the output during the great depression with a view to reduce the cost.

4 The Colliery did not get as many night-shift miners as day-timers. The regular commuters were available only in the daytime, and they still constituted around 25 percent of the total workforce besides some seasonal and temporary labourers. While the night work extended with the expansion of the electricity in the coalfield.

5 The proportion of the service tenants shrank in the 1920s. However, in the decades of the 1930s and the 1940s their number did not go down as such. Even the local zamindars and some labour contractors in collusion with the colliery owners began to maintain a captive labour force.

6 Fire Area by Illyas Ahmed Gaddi, NBT, 1994. It was one of the reasons that workers preferred Sarkari system and hated the contractors. They rose in protests against contractors, like H.C. Ray Choudhary in Amlabad colliery in 1930-31 and in Kustore colliery in 1939-40.

7 The post of driller-cum-shotfirer was a true sign of mechanical mining. It was subject to mandatory certification through training since 1938, under the Amendment to IMA, 1923. The driller-cum-shotfirer gradually ascended to occupy the place of gang headman, a position held previously by labour sirdars. Being recruiters and coalcutters, the sirdars led the gangs in the working faces.

8 Parmeshwar Nonya: Interviews on December 28, 2003 and January 24, 2004, at Dhanshar Bastee (Near Railway Wagon Loading Depot). He was a third-generation worker in the colliery. He joined the colliery in 1951 at the age of 14/15 as a coal dust carrier, and graduated to the job of fitter in the later phase of his life.

9 Hobsbawm (1964, especially chapter ‘Custom, Wages and Workload’) has pointed out that ‘driving’ was widely prevalent in the early industrialism. The movement of the industry towards mechanisation, relative surplus value extraction, result based wage system and industrial paternalism saw the substitution of ‘driving’ with incentive driven labour efforts.

10 The experiences of factory workers in Britain in the nineteenth century and of textile workers in Bombay and Kanpur in the early twentieth century closely minor the Jharia scene.

11 Deshpande, 1946, Condition, p.54. This description, nevertheless, confounded the discourse of employers that Indian miners work only four-and-a-half days on an average in a week. The practice was neither uniform nor did it evolve in a linear way.

12 The number of persons resting on Mondays was about one-fourth to one-third of the total workforce by 1959, and the great majority of them were coal-cutters and loaders (Labour Bureau, 1961 and 1966). We will analyse later the conditions responsible for this shift.

13 The number of stable majdoors rose from one-fourth to one-third in 1930, to about one-half in 1938-39, and two-third of the total workforce in 1946. One-fourth of the total workforce was regular urban commuters. In addition, the majdoors living in dhowrabs including stable miners used to visit their villages. This did not necessarily converge with the temporality of agricultural. Some of them, for instance, visited bastees at the interval of 15 days, or one month or two or 5/6/12/ months or 2/3 years. As the distances of the places of origin of the majdoors increased, the frequency of the visit diminished. Similarly, the frequency of the visit greatly differed between the categories of single men workers and those of family workers. The latter visited rather less frequently.
As late as 1970, Rothermund (1980) confirmed the same trend.

Ramjash Rawani reported this to me (Interview: January 29, 2004). He was a second generation worker at the Twelve-number Incline bastee in Bhowra Colliery. He joined the colliery as fitter during the WWII. His parents emigrated from Bhojpur district (contemporary Arrah district) in the first decade of the 20thc.

Whitely, 1931: vol. I: 115-16; Seth, 1940: 56; Deshpande, 1946: 46.

Prasad Jee reported to me (Interviews: January 20, 2004) at the Bhulanbararee bastee (near Phusbangla). He joined the colliery in 1941-42 during the WWII. He emigrated from Banaras district in the United Province.

The proportion of kamins went down from 39 percent in 1916 to 31.7 percent in 1928, 13.7 percent in 1937, 10 percent in 1942, and about 25 percent in 1945, 11 percent of the total workforce in 1962.

Seth, 1940: 158-59, 162. Seth pointed out how the tough conditions found in the colliery expedite the exhaustion of the mother resulting ultimately in premature birth, stillbirth, and the birth of infants too weak to survive even for a month after the delivery.

The proportion of the child labourer was around 7-8 percent in 1916, 4-5 percent in 1929-30 and, a few hundred in 1938. This official data considered workers of the age below 13 as child workers. This certainly underestimated their numbers, as it did not enumerate the children working alongside their parents as wagon loaders, shale pickers, coal-dust carriers, and the likes.

The age of marriage in the peasant families was around 8-10 for females and 16-20 for males. But in the landless labouring classes the age of marriage of men and women did not vary so sharply. The average age of marriage was usually high as well. This was also the case among the tribal (Adivasi) families (Banerjee, 1981).

Most of the collieries in Bihar province were located in the Jharia coalfields. The category of large colliery referred to the colliery employing more than 450 persons, and producing more than 5000 tons of coal per month.

The constellation of contesting social forces of the working class, the employer and the Reformist Petty-bourgeois State-power agreed upon to move towards formalisation of industrial relations and ensure the well-being of workers. But, what we see was that the intrigue by capital to subvert any further development in the direction advantages accrued by labourers was an integral element of the Reformist system. When the working class threatened possibility of the appropriation of surplus value by capital in the latter 1940s, a collusion of State-power and employers came forward to negotiate economic liberalisation for the labouring people.

To be enlisted as permanent, the badli worker had work for 190 days in a year in the case of underground work and 265 days in the case of surface work. The casual worker was to graduate first to the status of badli.

Sathrughan Rajwar: Interviews on December 12 and 29, 2003, at the Dubaree Colliery Dhowrahs. He is a second generation in his family to work in the colliery. His father was a mining sirdar in the Tisra colliery and died in a mining accident. Rajwar joined the colliery in late 1950s at the age of fourteen or fifteen. He came from the Chandankiary block in Manbhum district. At the time of interview, he was one of the active members of the Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union (BCKU) in the area.

Interviews with Md. Yakub: December 23, 2003, Bera Colliery (Muslim Dhowras). He migrated from Pratapgarh district in United Province, as a Gorakhpuri recruit under the special scheme started in 1944. Interviews with Kinker Kora: January 1, 2004, Dubaree Colliery, Purulia Dhowras. He worked as dust-carrier alongside his mother since the 1940s, when he was nine or ten year young. After the WWII, he worked for a while as a domestic servant for one of the colliery officials, and later entered into the colliery as a loader. His parents were second-generation workers in the coalfields. They migrated from Purulia district in the current West Bengal, first, to Raniganj and then to the Jharia fields. At the time interviews, both were active members of the Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union (BCKU) in the area.

Sukumal Sen has discussed the case of immiserisation, new demand for need-based minimum wage and democratic service condition, and the resistance movement of the working-class against the denial of their demands in independent India (Sen, 1997: 377-400). The problem is with his idea of general immiserisation, since it overlooks internal economic differentiation and the consequent involution that
took place within the class of direct-producers. Sen is convincing when he makes an argument for a 
relative immiserisation that continued in the Plan development period (see page 392).

28 Moteshwar Mondal: Interview on January 29, 2004, at the Dubaree Colliery Office. He was an 
attendance Munshi in Dubaree colliery employed in 1961-62. Since the late 1950s, he was on probation for 
a few years in the same colliery.

He was a second generation workers in the colliery. His parents migrated from the Arrah district. He 
joined the Bhowra colliery in 1918-19, at the age of nine or ten, and retired from the BCCL, nationalized 
colliery, in 1978-79.

30 For a detail discussion on the question of representation of the working people on the decision making 
bofies, see Chapter 'Safety Politics'.

31 See also Pol Spl (1948: XL (S) 184/47; XL (S) 252/47; XL (S) 197.47), (1949: XL (S/2) 191/48).

32 Similarly, the absenteeism was comparatively high immediately before and after festivals like Dussera 
and Diwali. Thus, the general average attendance in this week was 5.2 days as against 4.7 days in October 
1945. Attendance on Monday rose from 1/4th in 1929, 1/3rd to a little above 2/5th in 1945 to about 2/3rd by 
the 1960s. The increase owed, suggested Seal, to the incentive given to workers after the introduction of 
the Bonus Scheme in 1948, the improvement in working conditions and the economic exigency or rising 
social status, etc., in the last one and half decades.

33 It included absences because of authorized leaves, but excluded absences due to strikes, lockout, or 
maternity benefits. In a year, there were 306 working days in the colliery.

34 In this table, absence because of strike, lock out and maternity benefit, were also included, unlike Seal's 
Report of 1961. The casual and badli workers were excluded. Source: Labour Bureau (B.N. Srivastava), 

35 Source: RCL, 1931, vol. IV, Part I: 16-17. The chart presents, unlike the first chart of the absenteeism 
rate, the pattern of monthly output and the workforce employed to indicate seasonal fluctuations.

36 Seal recommended that 'if the weekly paid workers are paid weekly attendance bonus and monthly paid 
workers quarterly bonus, this changeover might improve attendances among the coalmine workers.'

37 The figure would be on the lower side in case of the Jharia coalfields, as the collieries managed by the 
Railways and the government in the Giridih and Hazaribagh fields had better records.