Chapter V: Conditions of Work and Employment.

Section I: Conditions of work.

Section II: Living Conditions.

Section III: Economic Conditions.
Section I: Conditions of Work

The conditions of work and employment form a very important phase of plantation labour. Questions such as hours of work, daily and weekly rest periods, holidays, overtime work etc have profound influence on the efficiency, welfare, income and standard of living of the workers in any industry.

Standing Orders

By various legislative measures taken from time to time the conditions of service in the plantations had been regularised. But it is only in the year 1951 that the Standing Orders for tea estates were certified. These orders came into force in all the gardens of Assam with effect from 12 September, 1951. The Standing Orders, applicable to all employees in service as well as those to be employed subsequently are the important milestone in the personnel administration in the tea gardens of the state. Certain earlier decisions of the Supreme Court had given the impression that the Standing Orders were binding only on employees recruited after the certification of the Orders and not those already in service. But the Supreme Court has said that the standing Orders apply to those already in service and those who will be recruited in future.

Freedom of Contract

We have, however, to note that the Industrial Law does not recognise an unqualified or unrestricted freedom of contract for the employer and the employee to enter into any agreement regarding conditions of

1. Basic Problems of Plantation Labour (ILO Publication) p.69
During the early period of the industry the so-called freedom of contract had absolute sway. The State did not concern itself with the conditions of service of the workers on the plea that it would be an interference with the freedom of contract of the workers. The theory that the Government need not try to interfere with the working conditions which the workers were taken to have freely accepted. But the fact was that the workers had no freedom of choice in the matter. There was no alternative except to accept what was offered by the management. Naturally, the working conditions were miserable and inhuman in many cases.

Ever since independence, the Government of India was vigilant about the conditions of service of the working class. As early as in 1949, it was recognised by the Federal Court that in settling industrial disputes, the function of the Tribunal was not confined to the administration of justice in accordance with law. A Tribunal can confer rights and privileges on either party which it considers reasonable and proper, though it may not merely interpret and give effect to the contractual rights and obligations of the parties. It can create new rights and obligations of the parties, which it considers essential for keeping industrial peace. In the result, the concept of freedom of contract has lost its significance in industrial adjudication. The conditions of service can no longer be justified on the mere ground that it is warranted by the contract of service. For example the Standing Orders and the agreements with the employers contain a provision for termination of service on notice or notice pay
but this right cannot be excercised according to the fancy of the employer, but only under exceptional circumstances?

Hours of Work: Unlike other agricultural industries, the question of hours of work is an important one on plantations. This is due to the fact that it is an organised and large scale industry and capitalistic enterprise. The very fact that labourers live on or near the plantations with their wives and children suggests that there is a possibility of overwork on the part of both adults and children, unless there is a specific provision against it.

Legal Hours: The hours of work in the tea gardens of Assam were, in fact, regulated from the very beginning. The Bengal Act III of 1863, as amended in 1865, limited the hours of work to nine per day and six days in a week. Although nine hours was fixed in many gardens labour was employed for shorter hours.

The Plantations Act of 1870, also fixed 9 hours a day. Subsequent amendments and re-enactments of this Act did not alter the hours of labour. The indenture system was abolished but the standard hours of work remained in force for a long time. The legal hours thus fixed for Assam tea gardens applied to men and women alike. Children or persons under the age of sixteen often worked the same number of hours as adults.

However, the work on plantations does not follow any rigid pattern and the time taken for the completion of the task varied

2. 1949-1-LLJ 245 ; 1956-2-LLJ 444
from one estate to another. In the circumstances only broad generalisations can be made regarding hours of work. The Reg
commitee also reported that on the tea gardens of Assam and
Bengal, works being on the hazira basis, there was no rigid rule
regarding the hours of work. Usually after one hazira, a worker
is free to take up extra work which is called "ticca" or "doulibi.
In the plucking season, the pluckers worked up to 11 hours per
day with a view to earning more wages.\footnote{Labour Investigation Committee (Main Report) p. 135.}

After the enactment of the Factories Act in 1948, the factories in the estates conformed to the provisions of the Act
and the factory workers work 48 hours a week. The pluckers usually work for 7 to 8 hours with a spread over of 8 to 9 hours. In
times of heavy flush, work for an extra hour or so is also not uncommon. But the daily tasks in respect of cultivation work
can be finished much sooner. Those engaged in hoeing usually take 3 to 5 hours to finish their hazira. Pruning takes 4 to
6 hours and forking and weeding also takes the same time. The
efficient and hard working labourers can finish their hazira in the minimum time given above and some finish much earli e. For
tipping or plucking on hazira basis, and for miscellaneous work for which time rates are paid, the workers are expected to put in generally 6 hours work. In the sampled gardens it is found that there are four sections of workers and the working hours are different from group to group.

\footnote{Plantation Labour in the Assam Valley p. 28.}
First Section: The workers employed on plucking leaf who constitute a large majority of labourers, work at least 7 hours a day. But there is no ceiling either on hours of work or on earnings on this job, despite the fact that minimum wage is guaranteed. In other words these workers are employed on 'piece rate', and can, by diligent work, earn much above the minimum wage. So the minimum hours of work does not apply.

Second Section consists of the daily rated 'task' workers who are employed on Minimum Wage jobs where 'task rates' apply. On completion of the task set, which incidentally has remained for all jobs almost the same for many years, the worker is allowed to leave. In general a minimum wage is given for much less than 8 hours of work on completion of the set task.

Third Section consists of the daily rated workers who are employed on fixed minimum wage jobs and usually are non-productive and work 8 hours a day. Such jobs are those of cow-herds, bungalow servants, gardeners, probationery chowkiders etc.

Fourth Section of workers are those employed in the factory for a full 8 hours for minimum wage, although overtime at 'double pay rates' is sometimes available.

We shall discuss the overtime system a little later.

Rest intervals: A rest interval of half an hour is given to the workers at mid-day. Usually those on cultivation work do not avail of the interval. They will either have finished their hazira by then or continue working without break till they finish. The pluckers avail of the interval. For them, however, this is not a period of rest, for during that time they have to attend to the
weighment of leaf and in those estates where leaf is weighed in the mid-day the rest interval is more or less over by the time they take their leaf to the factory and come back to the field. But the payment to the pluckers is generally made on the results of plucking and there is nothing to prevent them from taking a longer period of rest, if they so desire.

The manner of intimating to workers the periods and hours of work and holidays is specified in the Standing Orders. For those workers who are employed at regular and fixed hours, the periods and hours of work shall be posted on a notice board at the office and factory. For other workers the periods and hours of work shall be intimated by the authorised persons either verbally or by signal (siren, gong bell etc.) according to the usage of the estate.

All workers who have not been granted leave by an authorised person or certified sick by an authorised member of the medical staff, shall be at works at the prescribed time. If any worker arrives more than half an hour after the stipulated time without sufficient reason he may be liable to be refused work for that day, or in the case of workers paid on a daily or hourly basis, a deduction may be made from wages proportionate to the time absent according to the provisions of the Payment of Wages Act.

5. Standing Orders for Assam Tea Estates Clause 2(a).
6. Ibid Clauses 5 (a) & 5 (b).
Daily routine or Kashiari: For a tea garden worker the day begins generally at 7 A.M. At this hour a whistle or a gong is sounded from the factory to announce the start of the working day. At 7:30 A.M. and at 8 A.M. the whistle or the gong is repeated to summon the labourers to work. There is, however, no hard and fast rules regarding the commencement of the work. There is no morning muster of the workers as in most parts of South India but they are free to report any time they like and the only requirement is to finish their allotted task. The day is long and hot particularly during the flushy season and usually the workers are anxious to finish their task before it is hot. They, therefore, go out to work early. At mid-day, during the break period, the workers are supplied with liquid tea. Most of the men will have finished their work but the pluckers have by then finished only the first session of work which is called a 'bela'. During the break the morning’s leaf is weighed either in the field or at the factory. The second 'bela' lasts till about 4 to 5 P.M. and the workers have invariably to take the leaf to the factory for weighing.

Garden Time: In practically all the tea districts of Assam 'Garden Time' (G.T.) is not the Indian Standard Time (I.S.T.). The G.T. is one hour ahead of I.S.T. The origin of this 'timeless' old custom is in the desire to utilise the maximum number of daylight working hours. But G.T. no longer benefits the estate.

7. 6 A.M. I.S.T. as in most T.Es. garden time is one hour ahead of the I.S.T.
The field workers now-a-days arrive mostly not before 7 A.M. (I.S.T.) and leave at the so-called G.T. Thus there is a loss of man-hours. It is, therefore, necessary to standardise the working hours by using the I.S.T.

**Regulation of Working hours:** Although working hours on plantations are thus regulated by legislation, minimum wage laws and by collective agreement, they are actually fixed by custom. They are, moreover, governed by seasonal fluctuations in production. A very special feature of the industry is that the workers, at least those engaged in plucking leaves, have a tendency to overwork with a view to get more wages. Sometimes, the workers, being assured of the daily minimum wage, neglect their work and thus is wide variations in the quantity of leaves plucked by a worker from day to day. It appears that the worker works according to his pre-determined idea of the quantum of wage to be earned in a day. Employees' Unions have, of late sought reduction in the existing hours of work without loss in wages with a view to improve health of the workers and generate additional employment. Shorter hours, it is claimed, will not result in a fall in production and indeed will lead to higher productivity. Obviously the demand is based on the I.L.O. recommendations which states that where normal weekly hours of work are either forty eight or less, measure for a progressive reduction of hour of work to forty a week should be taken.

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In the case of tea industry the context is different but the idea incorporated in the recommendation is relevant in our case as well. Tea Plantations are covered both by the P.L. Act, 1951 and the M.W. Act, 1948. While the former prescribes a 54 hour week for adults, the latter envisages only a 48 hours week. The working hours in the Factory are regulated in accordance with the Factories Act, 1948 as amended from time to time. The National Commission on Labour recommended the amendment of the relevant provisions of the P.L. Act to bring it in line with that of M.W. Act and the Factories Act. We suggest that necessary steps should be taken to rationalise the legal provisions.

Overtime work: From the very early times in the tea industry the actual hours of work are quite different from those prescribed by law. The important factors which influenced the actual length of work are piece work or task, and in order to earn the full wages, the task was to be completed irrespective of the time. The fact that many labourers could not earn the regular wages indicates that the task was by no means an easy one. In fact, Section 5 of Act VI of 1865 specifically laid down that during the first six months labourers were to be paid the full pay on completion of half the daily task, unless the inspector testified that the labourer was physically fit to perform the whole task.

12. Standing Orders for the T.Es. of Assam, Clause 4.
But in modern days, by convention, overtime work does not generally exist on the plantations except in regard to works in the factory which is regulated by the Factories Act. It must be said that in some cases overtime work in the Factory is not paid for at double the ordinary rate. In the field even when workers complete more work than that required of them they are paid only at the ordinary rates in respect of the extra work. That means in the case of the pluckers the excess of the stipulated or the expected minimum is paid for at the fixed rates except in the case of Cachar, where, as we have seen earlier, varying rates per Kg. of leaves plucked are paid. No proportionate increase in D.A. is granted to them.

During the busy season, sometimes plucking is done on Sunday or other weekly day of rest. This work is not generally entered in the pay books but is paid for on the spot in cash. Cash payment on the spot at increased rates is an inducement to several workers. In a majority of the cases labourers working on a Sunday or a holiday absent themselves the next day.

With growing consciousness of the employees and the employers towards the need of improving the working conditions in the industry the overtime and ticca wages when paid are now duly recorded in the well-managed gardens where efficient administrative system is practised. The ticca wages sometimes are paid through contractors employed for a specific job. The Government is now alert to stop this practice.

**Legal Provisions**: There is no provision in the PL Act regarding Overtime work or overtime wages. In respect of overtime
work and overtime wages, plantation workers (excluding the factory workers) are governed by the M.W. Act. The PI Act, however, has fixed up the weekly hours of work. The Factory workers are governed by the Factories Act. Under the M.W. Act, overtime wages are payable only when worker works on any day in excess of the number of hours constituting a normal working day. The point is that the Act has only provided for daily overtime and not weekly overtime. The Act does not say that overtime wages are payable for work in excess of 48 hours a week. This omission is very material. The result is that if a worker works on all the seven days of the week, he may claim overtime only if he has worked on any day in excess of nine hours. At the same time, even if a worker has worked only for one day a week, the employer shall be liable to pay overtime, if he was required to work for more than nine hours that day.

As the maximum weekly hours of work that may be required of a worker under the P.L. Act is only 54 hours; a worker who is required to work 9 hours a day for 6 days cannot claim any overtime wages. However, in the Rules prescribed by the Central Government and some State Governments like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it is provided that overtime wages are payable not only when a workman works for more than 9 hours a day but also for work in excess of 48 hours a week. The Assam Government should frame such rules to safeguard the interest of the tea garden employees.

15. Section 14 (1) of the M.W. Act 1948.
The employers are against these provisions. They say that the workers waste their time during working hours by putting off important work till the end of the day so that they can work overtime to complete the same and thus earn extra money and therefore, overtime should be worked only under definite orders. Also it is necessary to stop the practice of over working by making the workers work for the third shift in violation of the provisions of the Factories Act. While such violations should be properly dealt with according to the provisions of law it is to be noted that overtime is not a normal feature and should be limited as far as practicable. Overtime works should be done only under unforeseen circumstances.

Overtime to Clerical and Executive employees:— Under the Factories Act, persons holding positions of supervision or management and those employed in the confidential section are not entitled to overtime wages or allowances. Those who are not entitled to overtime allowance have been specified by the various State Governments in the Rules made by them. For example, in Kerala Head Tea Makers, Assistant Head Tea Makers are deemed to hold positions of supervision or management and therefore not entitled to any overtime wages under the Act. But under an agreement entered into between the South India Estate Labour Relations organisation (ELRO) and the Estate Staff Union of South India the workers worked for 19 hours without any break.

17. Ibid. Speech of Sri P. Goswami of I.N.T.U.C. He referred to Kakojan T.E. where he said the workers worked for 19 hours without any break.
India (ESUSI) it has been agreed to pay these employees overtime allowances. This principle may be followed in Assam Gardens also.

The Clerical Staff in the factories are not factory workers. The only statute applicable to them is the Shops and Establishment Act which is applicable only in specified places. The monthly rated staff members working in factories are employed in shift duties to avoid payment of overtime allowances as far as practicable. The supervisory staff employed to supervise the holiday works are paid extra remuneration. Plantation Field Staff have no statutory claim for overtime wages. The M.W. Act does not apply to them because no minimum wages have been fixed in their case and there is no other statute under which they may claim overtime allowance.

We however note that the overtime work is mostly confined to the manufacture of tea. The industry should formulate proper rules and enter into satisfactory agreements with all sections of its employees regarding the extra work and overtime wages so that the misunderstanding in this respect may be removed. The S.L.C. should discuss the matter in its true perspectives and provide a satisfactory guideline. The National Commission on Labour does not recommend an amendment to Section 65(2) of the Factories Act which provides for exemption by the State Government from the limit of daily and weekly hours of work to enable factories to deal with an exceptional pressure of work.¹⁹

**Weekly Rest**: Like the hours of work, the days of work in the plantations in Assam were also regulated by the terms of contract as early as 1870. It was provided that there should be a day of rest once every week. The day of rest, however, varies from place to place according to local conditions, although most of the plantations observe Sunday as a holiday.

It is noteworthy that work on plantations is extensive and can be spread over a longer period of time during the day and the week, but being organised and capitalistic in nature, there is need for regular days of rest, especially in the rush season, when there is the possibility of overwork.

In the old days there was an important reason for weekly holidays. Most of the plantation workers depended partly on subsidiary industries, and regular holidays gave them a chance to attend to them without being absent from their duties in the gardens. Moreover, they had household duties to attend to. But the main purpose of weekly holidays is rest.

The need of community life was still more important in the earlier days of the industry where the labourers were mostly immigrants. It was perhaps the realisation of this fact that led Captain Mackie, President of the Darjeeling Planters Association, to suggest that, in addition to the weekly holiday, there should be half holidays on Saturday or the day previous to the day of weekly holiday. This suggestion was not accept. In fact the labourers were compelled to work even on Sundays as noted earlier. However, the utility of a
full day of rest once in a week has now been realised and one day in week is a holiday for the workers. Usually it is sunday for the field workers and monday for the factory workers.

It is needless to say that long hours do not necessarily lead to a larger income. The task or overtime work does not in reality help the workers to earn higher wages.

Further it is of interest to note that the weekly day of rest with pay apply only in the case of the monthly rated staff and the subordinate employees. The daily rated workers get no wages for the weekly day of rest. We, however, think that the weekly day of rest should be paid for in the case of the daily-rated workers also. A fully paid weekly day of rest will provide great encouragement to the general workers to work/greater interest.

Festival and National Holidays: The value of holidays in maintaining and increasing efficiency as well as in improving the employer-worker relations cannot be overemphasised. The Rege Committee observed that the higher rate of absenteeism and the large percentage of labour turn-over in the industry are, in a large measure, attributable to the absence of an adequate provision for holidays and leave. For a long time some gardens in Assam gave two or three paid holidays in a year to all workers on festive occasions. These are usually for Independence Day, Puja and Fagua (Holi).

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20. Labour Investigation Committee Report, p. 115
22. Plantation Labour in Assam Valley, p. 29.
As provided in the Standing Orders for the plantations in Assam the number of holidays are to be granted and the days shall be regulated in accordance with the Factories Act and Rules, agreements and Customs and usages of the estates. However, there has been strong demand for adequate number of paid holidays. The W.N.C. in its meeting in September 1970 provided for the following paid holidays in the tea gardens of the state.

- Assam Valley — 8 days.
- Cachar - 1970 — 5 days (3 National + 2 festival)
  1971 — 6 days (3 National + 3 festival)
- From — 1972 — 8 days (3 National + 5 festival)

The arrangement has more or less satisfied the employees in the tea gardens and no further demand for an increased number of holidays have been made. The National Commission on Labour has recommended uniformity in the number of paid and festival holidays with three national and five festival holidays in a calendar year. The Government has accepted the recommendation and commended the same to the state governments for necessary action. If more holidays are not granted the work done during holidays should be suitably paid.

Leave with wages: Under the P.L. Act, an adult worker, both permanent or temporary is entitled to annual leave with wages at the rate of one day for every twenty days of work; others to one day for every fifteen days of work. If a worker

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does not take the whole of the leave to which he is entitled, any leave not taken by him shall be accumulative, but a worker shall cease to earn any leave beyond thirty days. Wages are paid at the average daily rates to the daily rated workers.

Under the Factories Act, a worker must have worked for at least 240 days during the preceding calendar year to be entitled to leave with pay. Thus the Factories Act has stipulated a qualifying period of work to entitle a worker to leave with wages. Even the casual or temporary workers are entitled to leave with wages. A worker who is employed sometimes after first January in the year shall be entitled to leave with wages as laid down in the Act in the succeeding year provided he has during the year in which he was recruited, worked for two-thirds of the total number of days in the remainder of the year.

Travelling allowances: The staff members enjoying annual leave are paid T.A. for the journeys undertaken by them.

The annual leave rules have been fixed by tri-lateral discussions in the S.L.C. The Employers made the following offers which were unacceptable to the representatives of the employees:

First, those who have completed 240 days' work in a year will be entitled to 15 days' annual leave.

Second, those with 10 years or more service and who have not completed 20 years will be entitled to 21 days' leave in a year.

Third, those who have completed 20 years' service will be entitled to one month's leave in a year.

Further, employees who have completed 240 days' work in a year will be entitled to a special casual leave of 3 days to cover the time of the journey.

These terms were not acceptable to the representatives of the workers as the above proposal would cover the clerical and medical staff and not artisans. The union demanded 21 days' leave with 4 days' travelling time for all who have service up to 15 years and one month's leave for those serving for more than 15 years. The Management did not accept these conditions.

Sinha Award: The matter was left to the Chairman of the SLC. The Chairman gave the award.

First, those who have completed 240 days' work in a year up to the completion of 10 years' service, will be entitled to 15 days' leave in the year.

Second, those who have completed 10 years' service but not 20 years' service are entitled to 21 days.

Third, those who have completed 20 years' service are entitled to 30 days.

27. Ibid p. 24
29. By notification No 1726-IR/9L-67/62 of 29.4.1963, an agreement was recorded regarding the reference to arbitration of an industrial dispute arising between the Dooars tea gardens' Indian Employees' Association and estates in the membership of the Dooars branch ITA. In the recorded agreement it was stated that the dispute would be referred to the arbitration of the Chairman of the ITA, Calcutta Mr. S.P. Sinha who made a very judicious award on 8.8.1963. These principles were also accepted in case of Assam tea gardens. (Letter No SLC6/67/15382-405 dated 12.11.1967 from Special Officer Labour, Assam, Shillong.)
Fourth, 3 days' C.L. was recommended for those who got not more than 15 days' annual leave.

Fifth, those employees enjoying leave terms more favourable than that of the award, should continue to enjoy them.

But in no sampled garden leave conditions were more favourable than that given in the award.

The Executive personnel also is granted annual leave with pay and leave is generally taken during the lean period from November to March.

Casual Leave: There is no provision for C.L. in the P.L. Act and in the Factories Act. The plantation workers are, therefore, not entitled to any C.L. Members of the Estate staff are entitled to C.L. with full pay, as provided in the Standing Orders. However, staff members were given C.L. at the discretion of the management and the practice had its inherent disadvantages. There was agitation for the grant of C.L.  

The matter was discussed both bilaterally and in the W.N.C. meeting and following agreement was made:  

From 1971 - 4 days in a year for Monthly rated subordinate and other monthly rated staff.

From 1972 - 5 days in a year provided that not more than 2 days' leave is permissible at a time.

The provision has since been made for 10 days' C.L. per year.

There is a reasonable grievance among the daily rated workers...

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for not getting any C.L. They are demanding at least 10 days' paid C.L. They complain that in every industry there is a system of C.L., but the daily rated workers in ten gardens of Assam are not allowed even a day's' C.L. even when a death occurs in the house. The employers do not concede this demand on financial grounds. But some enlightened employers grant C.L. to their workers to meet urgent needs. It is, therefore, suggested that C.L. should be provided for all workers.

Medical Leave: Sick leave: The P.L. Act empowers the Government to make rules for the payment of sick allowance to workers. The Factories Act does not provide for Sick leave. Hence sick leave in the industry is determined by the Assam P.L. Rules. But these provisions are not adequate enough. Under Government Servants' service rules provision is made for leave with full pay, half pay and without pay for sickness but there is no corresponding provision in respect of tea garden workers.

Under the Assam P.L. Rules a worker is entitled to 14 days' sick leave in a year at two thirds of his daily minimum wage. This leave, however, is not accumulative. The I.N.T.U.C.'s suggestion that the sick leave should be permitted to accumulate for three months was discussed at the 11th session of the Industrial Committee on Plantations. The question was left to

33. Ibid. Speech of Mr. R. Gardinar.
34. The Assam P.L. Rules Section 74(1) (2) (3) (4); Government Publication 1956 p. 19.
be decided by a Sub-Committee which ultimately decided that

First, sick leave may be accumulated up to 30 days;
Second, option allowed to workers to combine sick leave with earned leave;
Finally, additional special 14 days' sick leave on certificate.\(^\text{36}\)

Justice Ram Labhya, who was called upon to arbitrate on this matter, decided that the workers are entitled to 15 days' sick leave per year with provision for accumulation up to two months.\(^\text{37}\)

Leave conditions of the executive are not definite. They should be standardised.

**Unauthorised absence**: There are Standing Orders regarding the grant of leave and the authorities to grant leave. Here absence without leave is not generally considered as a misconduct. Overstaying of authorised leave is absence without leave. Where such absence exceeds the limit prescribed in the Standing Orders, it would amount to misconduct, and the employer is entitled to take disciplinary action.\(^\text{38}\)

Section II: **Living Conditions**: Housing and Sanitary Conditions: The housing of labour population is a part of the organisation of plantation industry and this need has been

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37. Justice Ram Labhaya was entrusted to arbitrate on the issue. On the basis of memorandum submitted by the workers' Union (Labour department letter No 24/65/3759-77 dated 14.6.1966) the matter was thoroughly discussed in the 25th Session of the S.L.C. held on 30.5.1966.
38. Standing Orders for the T.Es. of Assam Clause 6(a)(b)(c)(d).
provided for in the Standing Orders applicable to the T.Es. in Assam.  

The importance of satisfactory housing was emphasized in the 1868 Commission. Many planters told the Commission that 'Coolies' tore down the machans of their houses for firewood but the Commission said that 'the managers who interest themselves in the welfare of their labourers have sufficient influence to overcome this difficulty'. The Commission also laid down specifications for the labour quarters.

In the next two or three decades, housing conditions on the gardens steadily improved although it was repugnant for aboriginals and semi-aboriginals to live in communal barracks. The Enquiry Committee of 1906 commented against the practice prevalent in some gardens to separate people of the same caste from each other in allotting the barracks constructed for their housing. It is thus known that the barracks line systems was too common in Assam Valley. In the Surma Valley, however, very different conditions prevailed. Garden quarters were often very large in relation to the area and economy of space was unnecessary. Labourers lived a free and easy life and in many cases were allowed to build their own houses according to their liking.

39. Standing Orders, Clause 13 (a) states that 'Permanent Workers and their immediate dependents shall be entitled to occupy rent free quarters provided by the estates during the period of and as an incident to their employment by the management'.
the gardens supplying the materials.\footnote{42}

In 1922, the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee found that in some gardens coolies lived in separate houses with a vegetable garden attached to each, and in more or less congested barracks.\footnote{43} At that time the cost of Pucca house for two families was about Rs. 300. In 1926, the Royal Commission referred to considerable improvement but repeated the criticism of bad specification.\footnote{44}

We note from the reports of the various committees that in the early days the labour population on plantations were housed in lines or colonies. These lines were over crowded. The houses were built very close to one another without proper outlet for conservancy and ventilation and the insanitary conditions resulted in a high rate of mortality on plantations prior to independence. Besides overcrowding, insufficiency of accommodation for all the members of the family was a great defect. In most cases several members of the family slept in a single room. Decency, convenience and comfort were thus lacking in many of the houses on plantations.

\footnote{42. Ibid. The Committee appears to have been impressed with the evidence of the Manager one Mr. Huon of Powai T.E. who stated 'I allow the coolies to live anywhere outside the lines they like. They build their own houses and I supply all the materials and pay them reasonable time while doing it. They consider this a great privilege. They can make a small vegetable garden round their huts and this has been a great success'.}

\footnote{43. Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1921-22 p. 71.}

\footnote{44. The Commission observed "Even in most recently constructed lines plinths are seldom provided, floor and cubic space are often inadequate while light and ventilation are too frequently entirely ignored. The house built by the worker himself is never provided with windows or ventilation openings but that is sufficient reason for their exclusion from houses built by employers." Report of the Royal Commission on Labour p. 408.}
Besides, only the settled labourers constituting about 80 percent of the total labour force were provided with housing accommodation. The National Commission on Labour in its report published in 1969 confirmed this percentage. The Commission found that 90 percent of the houses were kutcha without windows or verandah and with an average size of 180 square feet. Split bamboo walls which did not completely join the roofs provided ventilation, but afforded poor protection against rain and cold in winter. The condition in some well managed gardens were, however, much better.

All houses are rent free, but repairs are made the responsibility of the residents although the repairing materials are supplied by the employers once in two or three years. The usual source of water supply was an open surface well which the British Medical Association Assam, had described as most highly polluted and dangerous source of supply. Another objectionable source of water is from tanks and rivers. Tube wells had been installed in several gardens and though their progress was arrested by the non-availability of materials in war time, there has been much improvements in this respect after independence and in most of the gardens now there are arrangement for supplying good drinking water to the employees.

45. Ibid p. 57.
46. Report of the National Commission on Labour p. 147
47. Rege, D.V.: Report on an Enquiry into conditions of Labour in plantations in India (Delhi 1946) pp 316-318.
The Royal Commission recommended the establishment of Boards of Health and Welfare who should have the power to lay down standard minimum requirements of housing and to condemn houses unfit for habitation. But nothing was done to implement these suggestions. No lighting was provided. Very few bathing and washing places were provided in spite of the Royal Commission's suggestion for a serious attempt in this direction.

There are two views. Labour leaders regard a pucca house as progressive and a symbol of the dignity of labour, but the labourer received the kutcha house as more comfortable provided the house is properly built up as in the villages of Assam. According to the employers a pucca house is cheaper for them in the long run. In 1938 the whole question was re-examined by the I.T.A. After careful local enquiries specification of very sensible and practicable nature were laid down by the A.B.I.T.A. It was considered that uniform specifications for house all over the North Indian Tea Districts would be quite unsuitable. Sociological factors should be taken into account. Unfortunately these plans were not implemented. In 1947 the Government proposed the establishment of Housing Boards. It was opposed by the industry. The I.T.A. and other associations submitted to the Government of Assam their own plan for approval. These plans were

50. Labour Investigation Committee Report. p.317
51. Report of the ITA for the year 1947. The Association observed that some cement and other materials were necessary for semi-pucca houses and if such supplies were forthcoming it would be possible to construct houses conforming to the minimum standards at the rate of five percent per annum.
those which were prepared before the Second World War. In 1949
the Assam Government suggested certain modifications in the
plans. The employers gave an undertaking that they would provide
houses according to an agreed specification to the extent of
8 percent every year and complete the housing programme in a
period of about 12 years. Up to the end of March, 1951, tea
estates in the membership of the I.T.A. constructed 15,362
houses according to the new specifications. Most of them were,
however, kutch houses.

P. L. Act: In the meantime the P. L. Act of 1951 came into
force. The Act made it obligatory to provide and maintain housing
accommodation for all resident workers and their families. The
standard of accommodation is laid down in the rules. Under the
rules the employers are required to construct housing accommodation
of the prescribed standards for at least 8 percent of the resident
workers every year. This was simply the ratification of the
agreement already made by the I.T.A.

At the time of investigation conducted by the Central Labour
Bureau in 1950 there were 1,39,427 houses on plantation in the
Assam Valley in the membership of the I.T.A. Of these, 13,146
were stated to be pucca, 38,251 semi-pucca and 88,030 kutch.

52. Plantation Labour in the Assam Valley, p. 46.
The following table illustrates the position obtained in the sampled gardens.

Table 46: Labour Housing in Assam Valley (1950) in sampled gardens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>European owned gardens</th>
<th>Indian owned gardens</th>
<th>All gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sampled gardens</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area under tea (acres)</td>
<td>21,266</td>
<td>2,925</td>
<td>24,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>59,604</td>
<td>5,564</td>
<td>65,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workers -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>14,708</td>
<td>1,459</td>
<td>16,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>12,331</td>
<td>1,255</td>
<td>13,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>4,262</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>4,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31,301</td>
<td>3,162</td>
<td>34,463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of houses -</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pucca</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-pucca</td>
<td>3,125</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>3,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutcha</td>
<td>7,791</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>8,942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,596</td>
<td>1,273</td>
<td>12,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of persons per house</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of workers per house</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of adult workers per house</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quarters according to the approved specifications were not made in the A.T.P.A. gardens and in the estates in the membership of the I.T.A. 753 new houses built according to the new specifications were found in most cases to have been built with kutch materials and some houses were incomplete at that time.

54. Plantation Labour in Assam Valley, p. 46.
55. Ibid p. 49.
The I.T.A. found it increasingly difficult to give the guarantee to construct houses in accordance with the new specifications for 8 percent of the labour force every year. In 1954 the Association estimated the cost of providing pucca houses to all workers at Rs. 50 crores at the rate of Rs. 2,000 per house with an additional amount of Rs. 500 for water supply.  

**Subsidised Housing Scheme**: The P.L. Act 1951 laid down that 'it shall be the duty of every employer to provide and maintain for every worker and his family residing in the plantation necessary housing accommodation.' Rules framed by the State government prescribed the standard of houses to be provided. Since the progress in this direction was slow for want of resources, the Government of India declared their readiness to grant loans under the Second 5 year plan to the Tea Companies. The plantation Labour Housing Scheme was drawn up in 1956 for grant of loans to the extent of 80 percent of the approved ceiling cost of houses. The employers' response to the scheme had not been encouraging. The Working Group on Plantation Labour Housing set up in 1962 prepared a revised Housing Scheme for Plantation Workers. The main features of the revised scheme are, first, subsidy to the extent of 25 percent of the approved cost to be given to plantations whose financial conditions justify such assistance; second, suitable increase in the costs of houses; third, assistance for construction

56. Griffith, Percival; History of Indian Tea Industry. p. 366
of houses to housing co-operatives of plantation workers. Provision has been made for Central assistance upto 90 percent of the approved cost of a house for Co-operatives-65 percent as loan and 25 percent subsidy - the balance of 10 percent be arranged by the co-operatives; fourth, owners of small estates, located contiguously, to be allowed to take up joint housing colonies for reasons of economy.

The Subsidised Housing Scheme for plantation worker was brought into force with effect from 1 April, 1966 with 50 percent cost as loan repayable in 30 equal instalments at 5 percent interest and 25 percent as subsidy. The revised specification for labour housing in Assam was agreed to between the representatives of the employers and labour in bi-lateral discussions. Two types of houses were prescribed under revised specifications, one for family consisting of five members and the other for a family consisting of more than five members. The Government placed at the disposal of the industry funds to enable it to construct new houses at the rate of 8 percent per year which the industry had agreed voluntarily. The specification prescribed for the Assam gardens were considered to be higher than those of other states and the dispute regarding non-construction of houses was decided to be settled at the state level without making any reference to the Central Government.

It was appreciated that the rate of construction of new houses


59. Ibid. Speech of the Chairman, Sri K.P. Tripathy, Labour Minister, Assam.
was very slow. The amount of fund provided by the Government in the form of loan and subsidy was, however, inadequate for construction of houses for the workers. The rates of loan and subsidy have subsequently been increased to 50 percent and 37½ percent of the approved cost and the Company is required to finance the remaining 12½ percent of the expenditure.

On 31 December, 1966, there were about 11,65,668 resident labourers and 2,21,043 labour families in the tea estates in Assam. The total number of houses required to accommodate all families was estimated at 2,22,277. As against this the total number of houses of approved standard existing up to the end of 1966 was 94,577. With this position we go a few years back to study the progress of labour housing in the T.Es. of Assam.

We have already noted that as per agreement arrived at, managements are required to provide 8 percent of the total requirements of houses every year. This is equivalent to about 18,000 houses annually from 1957. Upto 1963 the total number

60. Ibid. Speech of the Chief Inspector of Plantations, Assam who submitted that except Deohal T.E., which had constructed two houses according to the revised specifications on an experimental basis costing about Rs.6,200 and Rs.6,500 respectively no other T.Es. had so far constructed any houses according to the revised specification.


of houses that should have been constructed were over 1,23,000.
But industry had constructed only 94,577 houses. Therefore, the
industry did not keep up the promise it made.

In 1963 the State Government increased the number of houses
to be constructed every year. But no construction was made. The
Government wanted the industry to take advantage of the Industrial
Housing Scheme and begin construction of houses.

The Employers' representatives, always expressed their desire
to construct houses. But they pointed out that Rs.29 crores was
required. The industry suggested that Government should provide
funds for the purpose. However, in a sample survey conducted in 25
company owned and 25 locally owned gardens it is seen that the
position of housing has not improved much during the period from
1950 to 1974.

Table 47: Housing provided in Sampled gardens 1974.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
<th>All gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sampled gardens</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area under tea (Hectares)</td>
<td>11,275</td>
<td>9,256</td>
<td>20,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Plantation</td>
<td>64,560</td>
<td>16,692</td>
<td>81,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>15,100</td>
<td>4,359</td>
<td>19,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>14,675</td>
<td>3,665</td>
<td>18,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>3,774</td>
<td>1,348</td>
<td>5,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33,549</td>
<td>9,372</td>
<td>42,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of houses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pucca</td>
<td>2,285</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-pucca</td>
<td>6,725</td>
<td>1,473</td>
<td>8,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutcha</td>
<td>2,927</td>
<td>2,305</td>
<td>5,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,937</td>
<td>3,993</td>
<td>15,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of persons per house</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Workers per house</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Adult Workers per house</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These statistics which also include the houses provided to the staff members in the gardens indicate that during the past quarter of the century the progress of construction has been slow and there is constant complaint regarding the substandard houses provided to the general workers as well as to the staff members. The Parliamentary Committee of the Assam Assembly made a thorough investigation into this matter. It came to the conclusion that housing condition was bad in all gardens except in a few. It was as follows:

Table 48: Housing Facilities in Assam gardens: 1961.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Number of gardens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above par</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At par</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below par</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At par</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below par</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The position of housing in the Dibrugarh district, where

64. A.C.K.S. Memorandum on Housing to 'C' grade Artisans submitted to the 25th session of the S.L.C. (Letter No. SLC 24/65/4596-600 dated 18.4.66).

there are the highest number of gardens in Assam, is as follows:

Table 49: Housing facilities in tea gardens of Dibrugarh District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of</th>
<th>Total houses provided</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houses required</td>
<td>Pucca</td>
<td>Semi-pucca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour - 1,40,379</td>
<td>35,678</td>
<td>8,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff &amp; Artisan - 4,377</td>
<td>3,110</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1,44,756</td>
<td>38,788</td>
<td>8,608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures indicate that the rate of construction of houses has been slow. The position in the gardens of Kamrup, Goalpara and Cachar is extremely bad.66

The tea industry is thus often criticised for its failure in building houses according to the approved standards and specifications. There are a number of reasons why the industry has not been able to attain the target. First, essential house-building materials like cement and C.I. Sheets are not readily available. Second, financial conditions of tea estates has deteriorated considerably since the time when the annual target for house-building was fixed at 8 percent. Third, the introduction in February, 1963 of new specifications resulted in the increase of cost of construction.67 Fourth, the financial commitment involved in providing housing accommodation is very high. Fifth, the fund

made available to the industry for the purpose is wholly inadequate. Sixth, the delay on the part of the State Government in the payment of loan contributed in no small measure for the slow progress. For example, the first instalment of loan sanctioned to Sonajuli T.E. in the Darrang district on 6.3.1973 was paid only on 1.4.1974. In some districts of Assam the payment of other obligatory arrear dues payable to the Government has been made a pre-condition for releasing the loan or the subsidy sanctioned to the gardens for the construction of labour houses.

In spite of all these difficulties the industry constructed by 31 December, 1972, 60 percent of the houses to be constructed. The position is given in the table overleaf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>1972</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assam Valley</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Total Resident population</td>
<td>5,16,773</td>
<td>14,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Number of resident families</td>
<td>92,304</td>
<td>2,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Total Number of houses required</td>
<td>91,874</td>
<td>2,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Total Number of houses of approved standard existing at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>64,750</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Total Number of houses of approved standard provided during the year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) New construction</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Adaptation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Total Number of houses of approved standard as at the end of the year</td>
<td>65,009</td>
<td>1,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Number of gardens included</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Area covered (Hectares)</td>
<td>71,858</td>
<td>2,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As percentage of ITA membership by area</td>
<td>77.57</td>
<td>47.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As percentage of Total Industry</td>
<td>48.26</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of existing houses to required Number</td>
<td>70.76</td>
<td>58.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

68. Compiled from Annual Housing Returns for the relevant years.
The target of housing in tea gardens of Assam during the 4th Plan period is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. C. P.</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. T. P. A.</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. T. A.</td>
<td>4789</td>
<td>4789</td>
<td>4789</td>
<td>4789</td>
<td>19,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. A. I. (Assam Valley)</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. A. I. (Cachar Valley)</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus the industry has to go a long way to provide adequate housing accommodation to the employees.

Assam Housing Board: The Directorate of Housing of the State Government has now been replaced by the Assam Housing Board with effect from April, 1974.

Food and clothing: In the case of recruited labour, it is obligatory that the employer should supply grain and clothing at concessional rates.

Rate of supply: The Commission of 1868 pointed out that in many gardens labourers were insufficiently nourished. The Commission strongly recommended that managers should, where necessary, establish and start their own markets. Act I of 1882 made it obligatory for managers to supply immigrant labourers with food grains at reasonable rates. The local Government was empowered

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69. The Government of India Review Committee on Plantation Labour Housing in the Eastern Region holding its session at Dispur (Temporary Capital of Assam) on 2.6.1973 observed that the housing requirement of the I.T.A. gardens for the period from July, 1973 to June, 1974 is in the region of 17,000 to 18,000.
to declare that rate, Rs. 3 per maund seems to have been notified in 1882 as the price at which rice must be supplied to labour if not available at the price locally. This obligation continued until 1915 and the price of rice at Rs. 3 per maund was maintained throughout the period.

The following was the scale of rice ration issued by the estates in the membership of the I.T.A. to the garden labour till February, 1950:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Adult, Man</td>
<td>5 seers per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Adult, Woman</td>
<td>4 seers per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Child</td>
<td>3 seers per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult dependent</td>
<td>3 seers per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rates have subsequently been changed and brought at par with those of the All India scale. They are:

- All Workers, Male and female - 3 1/2 seers per week.
- Non-working persons over 8 years - 2 seers 10 Chattaks
- Children between 2 and 8 years - 1 seers 5 Chattaks
- Children under 2 years of age - Nil.

For the purpose of issuing rations the term 'dependent' has also been defined clearly as:

1. Workers' children under the age of 16 years.
2. Genuine dependent previously on the working strength

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70. Plantation Labour in the Assam Valley pp. 36-38.
72. Amended from 12 to 16 years by agreement with the Union in 1959. According to the Report of an enquiry into the Working Classes budgets in Bombay in 1923, the average expenditure of 3076 families, including 603 single men's budgets, amounted to 56.8 percent for food, 9.6 percent for clothing, 7.4 percent for fuel and lighting 7.7 percent for house rent and 18.5 percent for miscellaneous items (Report pp. 14-41).
of the garden and now unable to work owing to old age.

(iii) Any person normally resident on the garden who, owing to physical disability, cannot earn his or her living and who is dependent on a working relation for support.

The rates of ration is also applicable to the staff members. The employees' wife, his sons below the age of 16 years, his unmarried daughters, his widowed mother, his aged father, so long as they are normally resident with and wholly dependent on the employee are also entitled to ration as dependents.

These rates are strictly followed and the ration at concessional rates are issued to the staff members at the following rates. Generally paddy and atta are supplied. If paddy is not available rice is supplied.

Concessional rate of paddy - Rs.10.62 per maund (37.5 Kg)
Concessional rate of atta - Rs.17.50 per maund (37.5 Kg)
Concessional rate of rice - Rs.17.50 per maund (37.5 Kg)

The quantity of issue is -

Adult worker - 3.26 Kg. per week per head.
Adult dependent - 2.10 Kg. per week per head.
Children - 1.05 Kg. per week per head.

There is proportional reduction for absence over two days. The proportion of deduction, however, varies from one estate to another. In all cases, the workers agree to buy the full quota of the ration for themselves and their dependents at the controlled price.

With effect from October, 1969, all non-resident permanent, temporary and casual (faltoo) workers as well as resident temporary and casual (faltoo) workers are entitled to concessional rations.
on the usual scales at single rate only for the days worked, provided that when food-grains are not available cash compensation is payable on the basis of the difference between the concessional and Government control price.\textsuperscript{73} 

Administrative difficulties: From the very early times the need for supplying the food stuff at nominal rates had been a great problem to the planters. In 1865 and 1866, when prices were abnormally high, the nominal rates charged from the 'coolie' was Re 1 per maund. The high price paid for rice and the fact that the planters were compelled to supply their coolies at one rupee a maund led to great losses.\textsuperscript{74}

The supply of food-stuffs to labour was perhaps the biggest cause of anxiety during the Second World War. The wartime conditions and the expanding economy increased the general demand for rice and led to abnormal movements of that commodity out of Assam. The policy previously followed by the gardens in Assam to import rice and paddy only from outside sources or from the surplus districts of Assam was abandoned in 1941 and it was recommended that gardens should purchase rice locally in order to prevent its exports out of the province. Managers were to co-operate and avoid competition between gardens to check further increases in price and steps were taken to encourage garden labourers to cultivate paddy in the lands available in the tea gardens.

\textsuperscript{73}Proceedings of the Emergent sitting of the S.L.C. held on 29.9.1969, 22.10.1969 and 23.10.1969; Item No 3(i); Labour department's letter No. SLC 10/69/1611-30 dated 6.2.1970

\textsuperscript{74}Jennings, C.B. Report on the Tea Industry of Assam, 1866.
In 1942 the complete cessation of Burma imports and tremendous pressure on the transport system in N.E. India resulting from military operations created an extremely difficult situation. In Assam the problem was largely one of moving grains from surplus to deficit districts. In September, the Government of Assam appointed Steel Brothers & Company as their agents for the purchase and distribution of imported dal, salt and other essential commodities. The I.T.A. appointed grain-purchasing officers in the various circles of Assam and Surmah Valley to purchase rice and paddy for distribution to all gardens. The necessary funds were provided from a common pool, to which the agency houses contributed. It was recognised that, in a collective scheme of this kind, member gardens must not be penalized merely because they happened to be more remote than other gardens from the source of supply and a uniform average price was, therefore, fixed, month by month for all gardens. In 1943 the Government of Assam agreed that a certain percentage of the purchases of grain made by Steel Brothers as Government agents should be made available to the industry in the Assam Valley.

In spite of such measures, towards the end of 1947, in Assam Valley many gardens found themselves left with very inadequate stocks of rice and had to reduce the ration. A good harvest brought some improvement at the beginning of 1948, but inefficiency of the official procurement arrangement together with the Assam Government's delay in permitting circles which had become surplus areas to purchase locally led to increasing difficulties. Ultimately the Assam Government gave up their attempt to
control the price of rice and the I.T.A. was allowed to appoint Steel Brothers as their sole procurement agent. In spite of extensive damage to the aus crops by floods, the position at the end of the year was better than at the beginning.

In 1950 the situation again deteriorated. In Assam communal disturbances, severe earthquake on 15 August, 1950 followed by floods in important rice producing areas and a shortfall of procurement led to rising prices and insufficient stocks and as usual middlemen reaped a rich profit. The position became worse in 1951 for failure of voluntarily procurement and disinclination of Government in using its power for requisitioning food grains.

The rice ration of the tea garden labourers was reduced and a further indirect reduction was effected by setting off against his ration entitlement any rice produced by him on garden land. Import of wheat and rice under the India-Pakistan agreement was arranged, but the formalities involved in moving these supplies were considerable and local purchases at exhorbitant rates of Rs. 75 per maund became unavoidable. The Tea Association had to airlift the cereals and keep the ration supply until the Central supply reached Assam by ordinary route.

Although the position improved in 1952, these difficulties had imposed a very heavy financial burden on the tea industry and an intolerable strain on garden managers. In many cases these

76. Plantation Labour in Assam Valley P.39.
difficulties were not appreciated and the industry was criticised for their failures. It is, however, reasonable to conclude that the industry managed to feed its labour force with the minimum of help from the Government at a very critical time.

Present difficulties:— In recent times, the tea industry have been finding it increasingly difficult to find adequate suppliers of food-stuff for their employees. The prices of rice and paddy have soared high. The I.T.A. has contended that the issue of food-stuffs at concession has placed an ever increasing burden on the employers and with the inability of the State Government to supply rice at the controlled prices, employers have had to purchase it at exhorbitant rates and when unable to obtain rice, they had to offer equivalent cash compensation which in many cases the workers had refused. The loss in issue of food-stuffs at concessional rates as estimated by the I.T.A. for the member gardens was as follows:

1962 — -- Rs.0.76 Crore
1964 — -- Rs.1.47 Crore
1967 — -- Rs.3.50 Crore

In 1973 a medium size garden in the Darrang district (Gingia T.E.) is stated to have spent Rs.57,456.83 and one bigger garden (Tinkharia T.E.) is reported to have spent Rs.1,42,156 on this account.

Owing to the general shortage of rice, procurement of supplies has been very difficult causing much anxiety to the employers as well as to the workers. Delay or shortage of supply has occasionally

77. Report of the Study Group for Plantation (Tea) ; National Commission on Labour p. 43.
resulted in a grave threat to industrial peace. As open market purchases are not always possible the hardship caused by food shortage is tremendous which has a direct impact on the administration of the personnel engaged in the industry.

Moreover, the poor quality of ration supplied has frequently led to outbursts of resentment.

There are a number of bazaar shops in plantations and it should be easy for Government to license a few of these as Fair Price Shops. These should be able to cater to the needs of the tea employees in general and the workers in particular.

**Clothing**: - Rule 71 of A. P. L. Rules, has provided that 'Every employer shall supply to every worker, free of cost, at specified interval or intervals, such materials for protection from rain or cold as may be notified by the State Government'. Accordingly the Government notified that the following articles should be supplied to the tea gardens workers:

1. Jhapis or Umbrellas
2. Waterproof aprons to the pluckers.

Clothing items are issued to sardars and chowkiders for 78.

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Speech of the Chief Secretary, Government of A.sam.
When the Director of Supply suggested allowing the I.T.A. to procure rice in Tezpur area Sri B.D.Sarma, M.L.A. objected. The Chief Secretary was not in favour of the Industry procuring rice in this area as he felt that this might upset the market and the flow of rice thereto.

free of charge once in a year. Umbrellas and aprons are issued at fixed intervals and the I.T.A. holds that the annual replacement being wasteful the aprons are to be made of higher specifications lasting for 3 years. As per agreement dated 20 March, 1972 male and female workers are to get umbrella from 1972-73 in every three years or Rs. 8 in lieu thereof.

No ration clothing is issued to garden workers except occasional gifts on festive occasions. During the course of investigation it is found that several estates stock cloth and issue it to the workers at cost price. In such cases most of the managements meet the freight and incidental expense. Some estates have the good practice of making presents of articles of clothing to old and infirm workers. Although initially the question of supplying blankets was tried to be resisted by the Employers a custom has now grown up by which the workers are provided with such articles without much hesitation. In some estates it is also found that each family is presented with a saree or dhoti according to their choice once a year.

Workers' gardens and animals: The provision of a plot of land for private cultivation is another kind of concession to which workers attach great importance. Plantation labourers are essentially farmers by occupation and tradition and the possession

of a piece of land to cultivate provided a source of pleasure and satisfaction to them; it also provides them with an indirect source of income by making it possible to grow a variety of food stuffs. In the earlier days of the industry the provision of a plot of land provided the necessary incentive to the workers to emigrate and settle in Assam permanently and by this inducement the planters tried to man the industry. The Government consistently favoured the settlement of labourers on garden rice lands and when in 1889 doubts were raised as to the legality of the practice of holding garden lands on thirty years' lease, the Government directed that the garden lands might be so employed without special permission to a limit of ten percent of a grant, or two hundred acres. The practice of settling the labourers on garden lands was more in Cachar than in the Assam Valley gardens.

By the time of the 1921 Committee of Enquiry, the practice of granting garden land for cultivation by coolies had grown still further. It was assessed by the Committee that 1,26,951 acres of Cultivable land were held by labourers and the area of Government land cultivated by ex-garden coolies had gone up from 1,12,000 acres in 1906 to 2,62,000 acres in 1921. In 1928-29 the labourers held 1,39,207 acres of land from the tea-gardens at the rent of

83. The 1921 Committee reported as under: 'As a rule, there is an understanding that when a coolie holds land some members of his family must work for the garden and the obligation is usually fulfilled. Coolies are rarely ejected from the land except as a disciplinary measure'. (Report p. 97)

84. Assam Labour Reports 1921-22 & 1928-29.
Rs.1,80,734 or Rs.1.28 an acre as compared with 11,295 acres held from other land holders at the rent of Rs.74,011 or Rs.6.55 an acre. If it is assumed that the former land was of the same productivity including both soil fertility and marketing value, the estimated amount of the savings would amount to Rs.7,33,362, which sum might be regarded as concession. Owing to reduction in land rent, a considerable number of labourers were able to cultivate land and to settle down in Assam. In 1950 the extent of land held by labourers for private cultivation in 25 European owned estates and 9 Indian estates was.

Table 51: Land for private cultivation: 1950.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>European owned estates</th>
<th>Indian owned estates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Estates</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area under t/a</td>
<td>21,266 acres</td>
<td>2,923 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of workers on books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>14,708</td>
<td>1,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>12,331</td>
<td>1,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>4,262</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31,301</td>
<td>3,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of families living on the Estates*</td>
<td>12,828</td>
<td>1,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of land given for private cultivation</td>
<td>8,344</td>
<td>1,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of families given land for cultivation</td>
<td>6,991</td>
<td>951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield of paddy per year</td>
<td>82,799</td>
<td>12,230 maunds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

85. Ibid.
86. Plantation Labour in The Assam Valley. p.39

*Report on an Enquiry into the Cost and standard of living of Plantation workers in Assam and Bengal recommencing the basis of calculation at 2.44 workers per family. (Report p.24)
In this investigation it was thus found that land to the extent of about 39 percent of area under tea in European owned and about 35 percent in Indian owned estates was available to workers for private cultivation. According to a sample survey conducted by the Director of Statistics, Assam, in 1949-50, 27.44 percent of the total grant of tea estates were under tea and 14.84 percent under private cultivation by the labourers. The extent of land under private cultivation by the labourers was, therefore, 54.1 percent of the total area under tea. In an investigation conducted in 50 different tea gardens the position was found as under.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>European owned Estates</th>
<th>Indian owned Estates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Estates</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area under tea (Hectares)</td>
<td>11,275</td>
<td>9,256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>15,100</td>
<td>4,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>14,675</td>
<td>3,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>3,774</td>
<td>1,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33,549</td>
<td>9,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of families living on the estates</td>
<td>12,775</td>
<td>3,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of land given for private Cultivation</td>
<td>4,541 (Hectares)</td>
<td>1,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of families to whom land is given for cultivation</td>
<td>7,662</td>
<td>2,452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield of paddy per year</td>
<td>93,856 maunds</td>
<td>36,695 maunds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus most planters use to provide workers with a small plot of land as long as it does not affect the area of cultivation. In some cases the land is given free of rent but usually nominal rent is charged. The usual rate of rent charged up to the year 1967-68.

was Rs. 5 per bigha which was reduced on demand to Rs. 2.50 per bigha. Some estates put up the necessary fencing for the Khet land at the expense of the management but, as a rule, the workers themselves put up fences through co-operative efforts. But in many cases, and especially where planters are desirous of cultivating every inch of the land with plantations crops, plots are extremely small and distribution is limited to a few workers or the concession is not granted at all. Moreover it is observed that in many gardens the extra land is neither utilised for cultivating tea crops nor distributed to the workers for cultivation. To prevent such non-utilisation the Government of Assam, in 1971, announced the land policy in respect of surplus tea garden land and published notifications in the year 1972 providing for acquisition of excess lands under the tea gardens grants and to distribute it equitably among the landless workers and to offer rights of holding in those cases where the labourers are already in occupation.

In view of such decisions taken by the Government the workers' representatives suggested that, First, Holding rights should be bestowed by issuing patta to the workers in respect of the land already held by them. Second, half of the surplus land acquired

89. In contrast it is observed that in the United States and its possessions the provisions of the Sugar Act make it mandatory for workers to have garden plots; in Malaya every planter must set aside and clear at his own expense an area to be used for gardens of at least one sixteenth of an acre per worker; similarly in Mauritius monthly workers are entitled by law to one sixteenth of an acre; in Uganda, permanent workers generally live on Government land outside the estate. Basic problems of plantations Labour pp 124-125.

by the Government should be given to the unemployed members of the community. Third, the tea workers should be allotted land for construction of their own dwelling houses to stay in after their leaving services in the gardens which automatically deprives them of their right to occupy the houses given to them during the tenure of their employment. Fourth, the Government should delete the confusing qualification put in by the prefix 'EX' while describing the Tea garden workers as 'EX' tea garden workers and take steps to provide land to all the landless workers who have been serving or have served the gardens in Assam.

In the light of the new Ceiling Act the Government of Assam have been taking steps to acquire and allocate the surplus tea garden lands on a more equitable basis. Although many critics try to opine that the actions of the Government are politically motivated, the economic benefits and sense of security to be rendered to the tea garden workers more than justifies such measures. While implementing the Land Ceiling Act, however, the Government should ensure that the gardens are enabled to go ahead with their expansion schemes and a lack of adequate land should not pose a problem.

Khet assessment: We now discuss another important point regarding the garden land held by the workers. This is about the

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practice of partial adjustment of the produce in such lands against
the usual rations payable to the workers. The practice of khet
assessment was in fact introduced in World War II when scarcity
of rice compelled Government to introduce rationing for tea
gardens. An agreement was reached at a tripartite conference on
27 and 28 November, 1950 standardising the rate of assessment at
2/3rds of four maunds of paddy per bigha. At that time the supply
department of the Government of Assam insisted that supplies
would not be made available to those who already possessed rice
in adequate quantities. Subsequently in November, 1962, with the improvement in the cereal situation, the restrictions imposed by the Supply department were relaxed.

In view of the very serious food situation subsequently faced by the country as a whole the question of khet assessment again merited re-examination. It was estimated that the pressure on Government's rice supplies could be reduced by about 18,000 tonnes through such assessment. In a survey conducted for this purpose it was estimated that the saving by khet assessment would amount to 12,448 tonnes of rice in the Assam Valley and 5,000 tonnes in the Surmah Valley. It was computed that 53.22 percent of all workers enjoyed khet land in the Assam Valley and the percentage was found as high as 81.9 percent in the Surmah Valley. The rate of holding was 1.42 Bigha in the Assam Valley, and 1.51 in Cachar. In terms of families holding khet the area was found to be 3.14 and 3.11 bighas in the Assam Valley and Cachar respectively. In addition to the contribution which could be made towards relieving the acute shortage in the country, the
utilisation of some 18,000 tonnes already on the tea estates was considered useful to economise very greatly in transport requirement. The assessment was also considered necessary to avoid duplication. In some cases, it was stated that the workers with khet harvested their paddy which they utilised and they also drew rice or paddy at concessional rates from the garden godown which they then sold to the open market. It was also realised that the taking over of the excess product also enabled the employers to distribute the same to the labourers who did not have khet land. In 1965 an agreement was made under the Chairmanship of the Secretary of Labour department under which 50 percent of the extra production of ahu crop through management's efforts would be taken away by the management. Thus the industry and the workers were found to have agreed to the assessment of the excess production. In the 26th session of the S.L.C., it was decided to constitute a Committee to consider the following:

95. Ibid. p. 16 Speech of D. Saikia.
96. Ibid p. 16 Speech of the Chairman, K. P. Tripathi.
97. Ibid. p. 16 The Committee was constituted with the following persons:

**Employers' representatives.**
3. Sri J.S. Hardman, Adviser, ITA
4. Sri C. Sinha, T.A.I.
5. Secretary, ATFA.

**Workers' representatives.**
6. Sri K.K. Nath
7. Sri P. Goswami
8. Sri D. Saikia.
First, how to increase production with the help of management. Second, whether any assessment should be made of yields over 4 maunds a bigha if the yield was naturally higher and not due to assistance from management. Third, whether the excess should be purchased outright by the management or by payment of the difference. Fourth, whether the issue price of rice from Government godowns should be raised.

The industry, it appears, has not been able to keep pace with the frequent changes in policies adopted by the Government. However, the Committee has been able to do some useful discussion and industrial peace has so far been maintained through tri-partite agreements on the issue. Although irregularities are not rare, the workers are properly compensated for the assessment and acquisition of the food crops produced by them. The workers have already agreed to hand over 50 percent of the extra production over and above their requirements and the management is expected to grant proper leave to the workers engaged in agricultural activities which is often denied.

Fuel and grazing: Free grazing of cattle is still another important concession. It helps the workers to own domestic animals, mostly buffaloes and cattle for the purposes of cultivation. The number of such domestic animals was not known in the past. In 1868 the Commissioners considered that the number of livestock owned by labourers provided an excellent test of their prosperity.

and in this, as in many other respects, they compared Cachar very favourably with the Assam Valley. In 1921-22, an attempt was made to collect information from a few gardens in different parts of Assam Valley. It was found that 83,338 labourers on 86 gardens owned 4,767 buffaloes and 48,610 cattle or a total of 53,377 or 64 heads of cattle and buffaloes per 100 labourers. In 1928-29, 98,258 labourers on 105 gardens owned 72,842 cattle and 6,075 buffaloes, i.e., 81 heads of animals per 100 labourers.99

In 1950, it was found that more than 50 percent of the workers kept cattle generally for the purpose of cultivation. The estates not only provide grazing land but also engage and pay herdsman. The following table shows the number of cattle, buffaloes, sheep etc. in selected gardens. Several of the workers and staff members are also found to have kept poultry.

Table 53: Number of livestock in tea gardens of Assam: 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>European owned Estates</th>
<th>Indian owned Estates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Estates</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area under tea (Acres)</td>
<td>12,766</td>
<td>2,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cattle</td>
<td>11,803</td>
<td>2,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffaloes*</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep and goats</td>
<td>1,466</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Pigs</td>
<td>1,370</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the course of investigation in 1974 almost all labourers and staff members are found to be keeping cattle at the average

99. Compiled from Assam Labour Reports for respective years.

100. Plantation Labour in the Assam Valley p. 41.

* Figures are mainly taken from the unpublished report of the cattle census conducted by the Government of Assam and in some cases buffaloes are also included under the head cattle.
rate of two cattle per family. There is no restriction but each family may keep 2 to 4 buffaloes, 2 to 4 cows and goats. The management, however desires that there should be no trespass of cattle into the tea gardens. But despite active efforts for minimisation, managements have failed to realise satisfactory results and in some tea estates cattle trespass is a menace.101

The Employers in the T.Es. of Assam are statutorily required to supply firewood to their employees both clerical and general and 192 cft of firewood per year is supplied to each family as per agreement. Whenever the garden fails to supply firewood they are obliged to pay compensation in cash through bilateral agreements and only in rare cases through tri-lateral agreement where the Government officials help in arriving at a reasonable settlement.102 The following table indicates a few cases in which cash compensations had been paid in recent years on account of the failure of the management to issue firewood to their workers.

Table 54 : Cash compensation in lieu of Firewood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Garden</th>
<th>Period of default</th>
<th>Amount of compensation paid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deepling</td>
<td>6 months in 1971</td>
<td>Rs.18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duliabam</td>
<td>6 months in 1971</td>
<td>Rs. 8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwood</td>
<td>3 years(1969-71)</td>
<td>Rs.16,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deopani</td>
<td>2 years(1970-71)</td>
<td>Rs.10,120(Rs.44 per family)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollamari&amp;Jaishing</td>
<td>1 year(1971)</td>
<td>Rs.26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmutty</td>
<td>2 years(1970-71)</td>
<td>Rs.19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badlipara</td>
<td>2 years(1972-73)</td>
<td>Rs.44,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ananda</td>
<td>1 year(1972)</td>
<td>Rs.22,500(Rs.45 per family)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

102.In the table all the agreements were made through bi-lateral discussion except in the case of Budlipara Tea Company where the agreement was effected through Govt.intervention.
Facilities for the Purchase of Commodities:—Owing to the long distance which separate most tea estates from villages and town markets, planters have been obliged either to set up stores or to assist private individuals to do so, in order to give workers the opportunity for purchasing sundry articles beyond food and clothing, to which references have been made. Thus on some large estates planters have built shops. Moreover, in remote areas where there are a number of neighbouring estates small townships have sprang up to meet the needs of labourers. Employers are found to have been encouraging such development within and without the estate. It is, however, noteworthy that in no case are the employers legally bound to set up stores on estates, and their action is only dictated by circumstances and is designed for the convenience of workers. In recent times however, the Employers are obliged by agreement to provide accommodation for co-operative stores opened in the estates and to purchase shares and render necessary assistance for realisation of share money due from the worker members.\footnote{Proceedings of the S.L.C.M. 25th Session held on 30.5.1966.} We shall revert to this a little later.

Most estates have a weekly ‘hat’ where the workers can buy some of their requirements such as clothes, cooking utensils, tobacco, vegetables etc. But the Marwari shop is still the important source for the supply of goods. Although some estates seek to regulate the prices charged by the Marwaris and have given instructions that the workers should not be granted credit, it is impossible to have an effective check by the managements in these matters.
Thus although the stores and shops are subject to licensing by the authorities, and one of the conditions is the display of a list of prices, the actual control has never been very much dependant on the Marwari shop keepers as they act as the estate banker cashing their hundis, procuring the necessary changes for wage disbursement etc. This may lead to exploitation of the illiterate workers either directly or indirectly.

In some gardens of Assam, food grains and clothes are sold on the basis of controlled prices, and the planters are allowed to add the cost of transport, handling, storage and issue. In most of the tea estates outside traders are free to enter the estates during the pay days, sometimes only with the permission of the management, for the purpose of selling goods to the workers. It is necessary that itinerant traders are not allowed to enter the estates so that the workers may be protected from being cheated and from spending their wages on useless things.

As noted by several enquiry committees the outside traders establishing grocery shops in tea gardens, traditionally known as 'Gola Munibs' often charged from the illiterate workers high prices on flimsy pretexts. The only help rendered by them is to provide the necessities at the door step of the workers. The general fall in the price level in the outside world did not have any reflection in the tea gardens. Further, it appears

105. Plantation Labour in the Assam Valley p. 61.
that the extent of the action taken by the employers in setting up stores and shops had been extremely limited. Existing stores and shops had often been poorly stocked with a dozen or so commodities, mainly foodstuffs which were inferior in quality. This situation reflected the nature and level of demand of plantation workers. On the other hand credit purchases was not an unusual practice, especially at private shops and often workers were and still are in continuous debt to shopkeepers. In many areas agents and recruiters either owned shops or had important interest in them. This brought into existence the indebtedness of the workers and a form of bondage of employment.106

Co-operative Stores: But in spite of such difficulties the need for maintenance of shops in tea estates has been very great in the interest of the workers. Even in the early days co-operative stores displaced the garden shop-keepers in some places. It was realised that if the tea gardens in Assam also encouraged the formation of co-operative stores and advanced the initial capital it would greatly serve the interests of tea garden labour. A recommendation in this regard was made as early as in 1921 by the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee.107

Till 1947 nothing substantial had been done in this respect. After independence, serious steps have been taken to protect the ordinary workers from falling into debt, and to assist them in making the best use of their income and such efforts have since

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106. The Labour Enquiry Commission in 1868 noted as under. "Even where the garden stores supply rice at equally cheap rates, Bengali coolies prefer to market for themselves and to buy rice in the husk in the neighbouring villages".

been directed through the promotion of co-operative societies and stores. In many countries of the world, during the last quarter century, co-operative stores have been opened in plantations for the benefit of the workers. Similarly in Assam gardens marked improvement has been observed and many co-operative stores have been opened during the last decade with the financial assistance given by the A.T.P.P.F. Scheme in the way of non-refundable loan to the P.F. members. The functions of these co-operatives are to be as under:

First, to arrange for the purchase and sale to its members and other consumers at reasonable rates all articles of consumption, other domestic requirements and necessaries of life bought by it or manufactured either by itself or in combination with other consumer stores.

Second, to provide finance to the members for agricultural or other activities.

Third, to ensure self-help, thrift and co-operation among the members and to enable its members to deposit their savings.

The Co-operative stores have been started at the first

108. In Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) for example, there are co-operative societies and stores on estates and the Government encourages their formation; membership confined to employees of a particular plantation or group of plantations. They are managed by a Committee of employees with the employer or his agent as President. They are subject to the control of the Registrar of co-operative societies. In Malaya, the Co-operative movement on Estates started in 1926 and by the middle of 1936 there were 228 societies with a membership of 36,081 and a paid up capital of 7,66,624 sterling. They were largely thrift societies. The war checked the growth of this movement but it is said to be growing again. (Basic Problems of Plantation Labour. I.L.O. Publication. 1950 p. 127)

instance in gardens with a minimum of 300 workers. The amount of contribution from the management had been limited to Rs. 1,250 to induce the employers to participate in the scheme which they did not do at the initial stages. Some employers' association also did not support the scheme. Further, the success of the scheme was also questioned on the grounds that senior officials of the Central Government, like the Labour Secretary, appreciated the suggestion of the industry to appoint shop-keepers in the estates to sell commodities other than cereals at the cost price to the workers. It was also pointed out that the plantations industry was on a different footing from other industries in as much as no other industry was required to supply cereals at concessional rates to the workers under the M.W. Act and therefore a Co-operative was superfluous.

However, in spite of such conflicting ideas, Co-operative stores have been successfully started at the initiative of the workers and where there was no collaboration of the workers, Co-operative stores have not been successful. The cooperation of the employers was still meagre. For instance, out of nine co-operatives in existence...

110. Ibid. Speech of Sri B.N. Upadyaya.
111. Ibid. Speech of Sri C. Sinha of Tea Association of India.
113. Ibid. Speech of Sri B.N. Upadyaya. In the course of discussion, Mr. G. T. Allen of I.T.A. pointed out that there was no complaint about high prices in the garden shops and a Co-operative store in a certain Cachar garden (Sirishpur T.E.) had failed although the Management contributed about Rs. 1,200. In reply, Upadyaya pointed out in this connection that the said Co-operative store was not set up in collaboration with the workers.
in 1966 in tea plantations the managements participated only in two of them. The Co-operative department was willing to make available the managements' subsidy of Rs.1800/- to each unit of co-operative stores if the scheme prepared by the Labour representatives in consultation with the co-operative department was accepted and the co-operative stores complied with all the other requirements. For successful development of the co-operative movement in the tea estates it was considered useful to set up a committee with representatives of employers, workers, co-operative department and the labour department to examine the working of the existing co-operative stores in plantations and the viability of such co-operatives in plantation industry in Assam. The Committee was to submit its reports within four months.

In the meantime, however, a co-operative store in a tea garden in Upper Assam was found to have been running very successfully.

On 11 June, 1968 an agreement was reached between the A.B.I.T.A. and the A.C.M.S. bilaterally and by the terms thereof to the effect that the management would render the following assistance.

114. Ibid. p. 17: Speech of Sri A. Ali, the Joint Registrar of Co-operatives, Assam.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid. Speech of the Chairman. Employers representatives, Workers representatives, Sri G.T. Allen, Adviser, I.T.A. Sri P. Goswami, INTUC, Jorhat. Sri C. Sinha, Secretary, I.A.I. Sri B.N. Upadhyaya, Government's representatives-Sri A. Ali-Joint Registrar of co-operatives, Assam & Special Officer for Labour (Committee & Conferences) who was also to be the convenor.
117. Ibid. p. 18
119. Ibid pp. 4-5.
First, provide suitable accommodation for co-operatives on the gardens.

Second, assist with garden transport whenever possible for the collection of goods for the store.

Third, assist in collection of debts by deduction from wages for payment of purchases.

This agreement at that time was not, however, extended to Cachar gardens. Subsequent description is a story of rapid development when several co-operative stores have been opened in the tea gardens through the willing co-operation of the management. There were 223 co-operative stores in the tea estates by 31.12.1974 and once started the stores have shown rapid progress from year to year.

A.T.E.I.C.O.L. := The Assam Tea Employees' Industrial Co-operative Organisation Limited constituted by a resolution in a well represented meeting of the workers' representatives held at Dhekiajuli on 1 July, 1971 and registered as a co-operative organisation under registration number CIL/1 of 1971-72 is an important milestone in the development of Co-operative movement in the tea gardens of the state. With an authorised capital of Rs.2 crores this organisation provides for promoting the economic interest of its members by inculcating in them the spirit and practice of common ownership and management. The rules provide for easy enrolment of members by obtaining necessary loans from their

120. Ibid, Speech of Sri J. Sinha.
121. Chah Mazdoor 2.11.1970. In establishing the Co-operative Store in Khongea T.E. for example the inaugural meeting on 19.10.1970 was presided over by the proprietor Sri Ananda Prokash and the working committee was formed with the Manager Srijit Shah as the Chairman. The Management agreed to purchase 10 percent of the share capital worth Rs.10,000 and render all facilities including free accommodation.
P.F. accounts. This has resulted in rapid growth of membership. The Board of Trustees of the A.T.P.P.F. Scheme, up to 31 March, 1975 advanced a sum of Rs. 31,65,082 to cover such payments in 31 gardens in Darrang district (Rs. 4,84,583), 49 gardens in Sibsagar district (Rs. 10,70,498) and 56 gardens in Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur districts (Rs. 16,10,001). The ATEICOL had enrolled 35,035 members up to 10 June, 1973. The membership has been growing and with its manifold activities, which are described in relevant places, this organisation of the workers will, it is hoped, be able to remove the long standing want of well organised consumer stores at the garden level. The A.T.E.I.C.O.L. has already started a co-operative store under its direct control.

J.T.E.I.C.O.L.: In addition the Jorhat Branch of the A.C.M.S. formed another co-operative unit covering 123 gardens and decided to open a consumer co-operative store with a total authorised capital of Rs. 10 lakhs. The organisation was named as 'Jorhat Tea Employees' Consumers Co-operative Organisation Limited (JTEICO)'. The organisation proposed to start a fishery and a dairy farm in Sonowal T.E. near Mariani and to open Credit and Thrift Societies in some of the gardens. The Employees of the gardens within the jurisdiction of the Sangha could become members by paying 21 rupees, being the cost of two shares and one rupee as entry fee. The Co-operative organisation was registered in September 1973 and arrangements were made to establish co-operative stores in 17 gardens. But unfortunately this has not materialised so far.

124. The writer is grateful to Sri G.N. Sarmah, Deputy P.F. Commissioner A.T.P.P.F. Scheme, Shillong for supplying the particulars on 30.5.1975.

125. The writer is grateful to Sri K.K. Nath of ATEICOL, Dibrugarh for supplying the figures quoted here.

Thus the application of co-operative methods, especially in the fields of purchasing and credit, will undoubtedly protect the workers from speculators and money-lenders as well as create a sense of solidarity and communal interest among them, thus laying the basis of a more stable employment and better living standards. To achieve better results the organisations should work in close co-operation and understanding with the central organisation at Dibrugarh.

**Recreational and religious facilities**: On a number of tea estates facilities of some sort are available; but they are extremely limited and depend to a large extent on the initiative of the management. Workers in general do not show much interest in games and sports, and it is only on rare occasions that such entertainment as adult and tribal dances are organized by the workers.

The provisions for making the life of the labourers on plantations more interesting have been traditionally limited. In the remoter districts there were opportunities for hunting and fishing which not only appealed to the aboriginal races employed in the industry but to the executive personnel serving here. On some gardens football has become popular, and an intinerant picture show is given once in a month. Some of the estates also contribute towards festivals such as Durga Puza, but the provisions for recreation are very limited in scope. The family budget of the workers show that there are few items for recreative purposes, and they could not, therefore, afford to spend money for recreation out of their meagre family incomes. Moreover, to devise such methods of recreation as would recuperate the body and elevate the mind at the same time was not easy under the circumstances in which the tea workers worked during the nascent days of the industry.
As we have noted earlier, estates in general were isolated areas and even in some estates workers' living quarters were separated by wide distances. There was a feeling of complete isolation from community life and there was a general feeling of depression in the non-working hours. Family life in the tea gardens were primitive to a degree and men folk found little pleasure in the midst of the womenfolk. Moreover, the monotony of work as well as its limited nature contributed to the workers' mental laziness and consequent boredom. Such a situation sometimes resulted in the workers quitting the estate in search of other employment. On the other hand most of the workers, being illiterate, do not realise the significance of time nor do they bother to spend it in useful way. Under such circumstances the value and importance of entertainments as a means to relieve the drudgery and monotony of life after work and to introduce an element of joy and relief as well as to impart instruction and education to the ignorant workers cannot be overestimated. Thus the question of organising workers' leisure time has been one of the most important aspect of life on the tea estates. As such, as soon as the country became independent the Government gave proper weight to this need. Through the P.L. Act, 1951, it is made statutorily binding on employers to provide recreational facilities to workers. But it is a common complaint that even after 24 years of operation of the Act, the workers are forced to fight for certain facilities like radio etc.

Sometimes they have to say that they will stop work if such things are not provided to them. This fact has already been brought to the notice of the Joint Committee of the Plantation Labour Act (Amendment) Bill, 1973. The National Commission on Labour in its report published in 1969 also noted that the Act was not implemented in most of the plantations. The Employers complain that the workers do not avail themselves of the amenities provided and the stipulations in the P.L. Rules are also not very clear. The workers maintain that the scale of facilities available is very inadequate. The workers' representatives maintain that the position relating to recreational facilities is no better now.

On visiting about fifty sampled gardens in Assam it is found that the recreational facilities have improved but the improvements have been mostly at the instance of the workers and their unions although at many places enterprising employers are found to have encouraged recreational activities like games and sports by providing necessary facilities even beyond the scope of the legal obligations. Staff clubs are well run in most of the gardens. Many voluntary welfare organisations are also found to have been helping the mazdoor clubs with financial assistance. Besides its commercial

128. Memorandum by A.C.K.S. & A.C.M.S. submitted before the Joint Select Committee of the Parliament during its visit to Assam from 30 October to 9 November, 1973. p. 4
130. Proceedings of the 25th Session of the S.L.C. held on 30 May, 1966. It was proposed to delete Rule 50(ii) which was creating unnecessary confusion in the mind of the Employers. However, the proposal was dropped after discussion.
benefits the films 'Ratanlal' and 'Kechasona' made under the 'Assam Chah Mazdoor Film Production Scheme' are sure to add to the achievement among the tea workers of the state. We welcome such ventures to boost up the morale of the workers at large.

During the investigation of the Rege Committee many planters complained that the clubs provided have not been used by the workers. But we find that the club facilities provided in the tea gardens are properly utilised and wherever entertainments have been provided, they have become immensely popular with a large number of the workers and their families. In spite of the discussion in the S.L.C. regarding the confusion in the legal provisions, we feel inclined to think that entertainments can be usefully regarded as a voluntary activity on the part of the employers with the co-operation of all concerned. It is for the employers to realise that ordinary entertainment such as sports, excursion etc. cost really little, while the psychological and moral gain both to themselves and to the workers is immense, and the effect of this on efficiency must be far greater than the small cost involved in providing entertainment. Apart from this, the contributions made to industrial peace by music, dramatic entertainments, and such other things must be incalculable.

The religious life of the workers has received some attention in most plantation areas. Planters usually assist the workers in performing their religious duties in one way or another.

Section III: Economic Conditions: The most important question in connection with industrial administration is the economic condition

133. Ibid. p. 353
of the personnel making up the enterprise. In tea industry the
consideration of economic condition of the workers cannot be computed
without a reference to the concessions and perquisites that are
offered to the workers in addition to wages. The main concessions
which are to be taken as fringe benefits are — First, land for
cultivation. Second, free housing. Third, free medical attention
including hospitalisation and maternity benefits. Fourth, free
primary education. Fifth, free supply of fuel; Sixth, concessional
supply of food stuff. In addition to the above they enjoy other
benefits in this way of First, allowance of free tea of a small
quantity. Second, benefits under statutory P.F., Insurance and
Pension Fund Schemes run by the State Government. Third, sickness
allowance as per P.L Rules. Fourth, Annual Leave with wages. Fifth,
paid festival holidays. Sixth, creches in many gardens for the women
workers with small children. Seventh, recreational facilities including
free film shows, games etc. and, Eight, servant allowances to the staff
members and executive personnel.

We have already discussed some of these benefits and the others
will be discussed in later chapters. In this chapter we discuss the
economic consequences of these benefits rendered to a tea garden
employee.

The actual benefit to workers of some of these so-called
concessions has, however, been questioned. The allotment of garden land

134 Free issue of dry tea at 1 lb per family per month and ½ lb for
single worker per month to be given monthly, bi-monthly or
quarterly according to the convenience of the management was
agreed upon in the Emergent sitting of the S.L.C held on 22 &

135 Sarmah, G.C., Speech of proceedings of the 28th session of the
SLC held on 27 February, 1968. (Letter No SLC 143673977-94.)
for cultivation for instance, or allotment of land by Government to those who are already in possession of the same can scarcely be termed concession. In a desire to encourage settlement in certain areas, the Government of Assam itself rented land at concessional rates, and in 1928-29 ex-garden workers held 3,09,231 acres of such land directly from the Government. In most cases, the gardeners secured land from Government at concessional rates and allotted it to the workers for retaining a constant source of labour supply near at hand. While working in their own land, the workers could avail of themselves of such concession. The present procedure of khet assessment has completely upset the concessional aspect and the extra production obtained by the workers is not enough to compensate the extra-labour put by them in cultivating his land.

Further, the most objectionable feature of some of the concessions is that it has traditionally been having a demoralising effect upon the attitude of the labourers. The accommodation of workers on the premises of the gardens, and various other concessions instead of payment in the form of money wages, especially the grant of rice at reduced prices, helped in making the labourers too much spoon-fed and consequently subservient to the gardens. The Assam Labour Enquiry Committee of 1921-22 was constrained to admit that, owing to what was practically a condition of servitude, in that, although he was fed by the estates, he was unable to pay for his food and received no cash wages at all at the end of the month, with sometimes an increasing load of debt accumulating round his neck. Although such

136. Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1921-22 p. 17
extreme cases were quite exceptional, the general effect of it upon the mind of the labour could not be minimised. The employers' view points in this regard has been traditionally different. Under such confusing circumstances we attempt here a rational assessment of the position under present day conditions and open the discussion by referring to the earnings of the workers and its relation to his daily budget.

Earnings of the general tea workers:— Exact figures for the first two decades of the existence of the industry are not available, but it appears that in the fifties of the last century a normal monthly wage was Rs. 2/8/0 per month. By 1860 the rate had risen to Rs. 4 or Rs. 5 and on piece rates it was said that a good worker could earn Rs. 8 per month. The earning of the clerical staff was about four times of the workers. To imagine this wage in its proper perspective it is necessary to note that the price of rice in Assam in 1860 was about Rs. 2 per maund.

Act VI of 1865, in theory, established a monthly wage of Rs. 5 per man, Rs. 4 for a woman and Rs. 3 for a child under 12 years of age, but the minimum only applied to the emigrants. The intention of the Act was that unless a magistrate had sanctioned short payment on account of absence, wilful negligence or indolence the employer was bound to pay the minimum wage, whatever might be the quantity of work done. In practice, payment to workers soon began to be made according to a task or 'hazri'. In 1868, the Commission found that this system worked fairly, that labourers liked the resulting freedom to take a holiday when they were so disposed.

Nevertheless, conditions must have deteriorated since 1860, for the Commission noted during their inspection that 'in most
gardens especially in Assam, the labourers earn very much below the minimum wage.\textsuperscript{137} It was pointed out that the workers received no pay for Sundays or weekly holidays unless they worked on that day and thus they could not normally earn the full month's wage.

\textbf{Committee of 1906} \textsuperscript{138}:- Henry Cotton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam was apparently unable to recognise the financial difficulties of the industry when he made a statement in Council that the wages actually earned in the tea districts were too low as compared with the general level of agricultural wages in Assam. The I.T.A. resented Cotton's allegations and in the case of the gardens to which Cotton had referred, the ABITA was able to show that the labour worked on an average only 17 days a month and in the ABITA annual meeting in 1901 the Chairman expressed concern at the general crisis falling on the industry in general.

The economic conditions of the Assam tea garden workers was studied by the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee in 1906. According to the figures quoted in their report, a family consisting of one working man, one working woman and one working child, apart from non-workers, would on an average have earned Rs. 14 in September 1905, and under Rs. 12 in March 1906, March and September being the lowest and highest earning months respectively. If the same average family had worked on every day when work was offered the earnings would be about Rs. 18 or Rs. 15-10As-0 P in the respective months. To these figures are to be added the annual bonuses paid in many gardens for

\textsuperscript{137} Griffith, Percival. \textit{History of Indian Tea Industry}. p. 305.

\textsuperscript{138} Proceedings of the Annual General meeting of the ABITA, 1901 Speech of Buckingham, J. Chairman of the A.B.I.T.A for the period 1889 to 1904.
renewal of agreements which was commonly Rs.12 per year in the Assam Valley. Many gardens at this time supplied labourers with rice at a price of Rs.3 per maund although the market price was higher.\textsuperscript{139} The Committee made favourable comments regarding the economic condition of the tea garden workers at that time.\textsuperscript{140} Generally the temporary emigrants worked harder and earned more money and the emigrants deciding to settle down in Assam worked more leisurely and tried to live a pleasant and easy going life.\textsuperscript{141} In spite of such reports from an important committee the general condition of the tea garden workers were not at all satisfactory and the Committee appears to be sympathetic to the alien employers. It, however, appears that what the report really means is that judging by the low standards of the poorer agricultural classes in India at that time the tea garden labourers in Assam was reasonably well off. Further due to complete lack of education the labourers' moods had not been expanded by even a rudimentary education to the point where their wants could extend beyond food and drinks. This state of affairs also casts reflections on the activities of the alien employers in putting the economic condition of the workers down to serve their own vested interests.

Committee of 1921: When the economic condition of the labourer in Assam was next examined by the official committee in 1921 it was found that considerable deterioration had taken place.

\textsuperscript{139}Assam Labour Enquiry Committee(1906)Report.p73.
\textsuperscript{140}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141}Ibid. p. 75
Prices had risen considerably during the war and wage increases had not been in commensurate with that rise. On many gardens the 'coolie' was partially shielded from the effect of rising prices by the supply of rice and sometimes cloth at concessional rates, but the quantities supplied did not cover the whole of his needs. Moreover, this shield was not able to resist the general impact of the scarcity conditions of the time. Moreover in 1920, important sections of the industry found themselves unable to bear the mounting losses on rice and in some areas the price of concession rice was raised. At the same time the cost of clothing and other necessaries rose still further. The depression in the tea industry had also seriously diminished the overtime earnings.  

There is no authentic statistical documents giving the accurate cost of living for the period, but managers who reported to the 1921 Committee estimated the rise in the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 at figures which generally varied between 33 percent and 50 percent. The Committee framed standard budgets for Assam tea garden labourers and found that the cost of living in 1922 had risen to approximately 140 percent of what it was in 1914. They nevertheless concluded that, generally the earnings of the tea garden workers were adequate in the sense that he had sufficient food to maintain him in health, but that his standard of living had been lowered and he had less money than before to spend on clothing and pretty

In Dibrugarh the D.C. reported that the average earnings of the labour were as under -
1918-19 Rs. 10-8-0
1911-12 Rs. 10-10-0
1918-19 Rs. 10-8-0
1919 September Rs. 9-11-0
1920 September Rs. 7-11-0
luxuries. They recognised that this was the inevitable result of the different economic situation in the industry. However, the important points is that the condition of the tea garden labourers in Assam was bad in 1921 compared with their position a decade earlier.

The Committee had asked the garden managers for estimates of the wages necessary to keep the labourer in reasonable comfort and they observed that whereas in Assam, actual wages approximated to this standard, they fell considerably below in the Surma Valley.

The following table shows the average comparative earnings of a male member from 1905 to the time of this enquiry Committee.

Table 55: Earnings of the Tea Labourers in Assam 1905-1922

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lakhimpur</th>
<th>Mangaldai</th>
<th>Jorhat</th>
<th>Nowoong</th>
<th>Cachar</th>
<th>North Sylhet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.-As-P</td>
<td>Rs.-As-P</td>
<td>Rs.-As-P</td>
<td>Rs.-As-P</td>
<td>Rs.-As-P</td>
<td>Rs.-As-P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>6-9-0</td>
<td>5-5-10</td>
<td>5-2-2</td>
<td>5-3-1</td>
<td>5-4-0</td>
<td>5-6-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>6-14-9</td>
<td>5-4-6</td>
<td>5-4-3</td>
<td>5-4-9</td>
<td>2-15-8</td>
<td>4-12-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>7-0-0</td>
<td>5-7-0</td>
<td>5-5-5</td>
<td>5-12-10</td>
<td>3-0-7</td>
<td>4-14-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>6-15-7</td>
<td>5-14-3</td>
<td>5-4-2</td>
<td>5-12-6</td>
<td>2-13-5</td>
<td>5-2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>6-12-2</td>
<td>5-2-7</td>
<td>4-12-6</td>
<td>5-3-7</td>
<td>4-7-1</td>
<td>5-1-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>6-11-6</td>
<td>5-11-10</td>
<td>5-4-2</td>
<td>5-11-7</td>
<td>5-3-1</td>
<td>4-14-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>6-14-6</td>
<td>5-3-5</td>
<td>5-4-11</td>
<td>5-12-8</td>
<td>4-15-0</td>
<td>5-4-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>7-14-7</td>
<td>6-1-9</td>
<td>5-6-0</td>
<td>6-0-5</td>
<td>5-4-5</td>
<td>5-2-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>7-4-4</td>
<td>6-1-8</td>
<td>5-7-7</td>
<td>5-11-8</td>
<td>5-6-0</td>
<td>5-2-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>7-7-6</td>
<td>6-9-6</td>
<td>5-8-8</td>
<td>5-15-1</td>
<td>5-7-11</td>
<td>5-6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>7-4-5</td>
<td>6-0-9</td>
<td>5-12-10</td>
<td>5-10-8</td>
<td>5-6-3</td>
<td>5-2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>7-4-2</td>
<td>6-4-11</td>
<td>6-1-0</td>
<td>5-8-11</td>
<td>5-9-10</td>
<td>5-11-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>5-11-1</td>
<td>6-3-5</td>
<td>6-7-3</td>
<td>5-12-4</td>
<td>5-11-5</td>
<td>5-8-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>7-9-4</td>
<td>6-1-9</td>
<td>6-7-6</td>
<td>6-1-9</td>
<td>5-11-5</td>
<td>5-8-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>7-12-0</td>
<td>6-8-10</td>
<td>6-3-11</td>
<td>6-3-1</td>
<td>5-8-10</td>
<td>5-13-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>7-12-7</td>
<td>7-5-4</td>
<td>6-10-1</td>
<td>6-4-3</td>
<td>3-6-4-7</td>
<td>6-5-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>8-7-9</td>
<td>6-5-9</td>
<td>6-12-10</td>
<td>6-7-3</td>
<td>5-14-10</td>
<td>5-12-11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

143. This was the first time that the Surmah Valley had received adverse comment in comparison with Assam Valley and it is interesting to note that the Commissioner of the Surma Valley stated in 1922 that to live in comfort a man would require to earn Rs.10, a woman Rs.7 or Rs.8 and child Rs.4. Actual earnings of a man at this time were Rs.6-3-4 in Sylhet Cachar.

144. Griffith, Percival. History of Indian Tea Industry. p.309
Although the increases in the Surtnah Valley were considerably less, the labour in that valley was much better off in respect of land for cultivation and places for fishing and hunting. In Surmah Valley the life of a tea garden 'coolie' approximated to that of an ordinary villager, with the advantage that he had paid employment available when he wanted it. The position has greatly changed now.\textsuperscript{145} We shall discuss the present problems in a later chapter.

But any inclination to criticise the industry for not adjusting wages to the cost of living must be qualified by the reflection that the loss on rice sold to labourers at concession rates was considerable and that in 1920, 47 out of 102 companies listed in the report of the I.T.A. paid no dividends.\textsuperscript{146} It must, nevertheless be noted that in the reasonably prosperous years of the First World War, the wages were not adequately increased and instead, on the plea of economic stringency, the facilities enjoyed by the workers have been greatly curtailed. Whenever there has been any imposition from the Government for the betterment of the economic and living conditions there has been great resistance from the employers on this or that pretext.\textsuperscript{147}

The 1921 Committee suggested that when the financial position of the industry improved, district Sub-committees should work out what they considered to be a decent monthly or daily rate of wage;

\textsuperscript{145} Das, B. 'Problems of Cachar Plantation Labour'—article published in the Souvenir published on the occasion of the Assam Branch INTUC, Biennial Session, held at Silchar on 4, 5, 6 April, 1975, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{146} Annual Report of the I.T.A. for the relevant year.

\textsuperscript{147} Sinha, J. 'Plantation Labour Act and its fate in Cachar'—an article published in the Assam Branch INTUC Souvenir dated 4, 5, 6 April 1975, p. 19.
not a mere subsistence allowance, but a wage that would suffice to keep the labourers in health and reasonable comfort, with the possibility of saving a little. Thus the Committee virtually admitted the fact that the plea of economy should not stand in the way of giving facilities to the workers. The Committee also rejected the view that any appreciable rise in wages would result in labour doing less work and justified their opinion by figures which showed that where wage rates had increased in 1921, actual earnings had also increased.¹⁴⁸

Royal Commission i 1929 :- In 1921 the tea industry in North East India moved into a period of prosperity which lasted for a decade and it is interesting to note how far the hopes of the 1921 Committee as to an increase in wages were realized. The Royal Commissioner on labour examined this matter in 1930 and found that in 1929-30, the average monthly earnings for Assam garden labourers were as under.¹⁴⁹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>Assam Valley</th>
<th>Surmah Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>13 - 8 - 7</td>
<td>10 -11- 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>11 - 1 - 7</td>
<td>8 - 6- 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>7 - 8 - 6</td>
<td>5 - 6- 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Committee observed that these averages showed a substantial increase over the figures for 1921, and as the cost of living had fallen in the intervening period they concluded that the economic condition of the Assam tea garden labourer had improved considerably. No substantial changes took place between 1930 and the outbreak of the Second World War except that the earnings began to decline as a result

¹⁴⁸ Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1921-22 p. 73
¹⁴⁹ Report of the Royal Commission on Labour p. 387
of the depression in 1930 and the trend was accelerated by the International Tea Control which came into operation in 1933-34. The control restricted production which resulted in the reduction of work and consequently of earnings of labour. The earnings had shown an upward tendency but as compared to the pre-war period the cost of living had gone up by at least 200 percent in North East India while the total earnings of plantation workers including the value of cloth and food concessions had gone up by about 80 percent only. Thus, it would appear that as compared to the pre-war period, the real wages of plantation workers had gone down considerably.  

National Commission on Labour: In 1969 the Commission noted that the plantation workers earned a low wage in the days prior to independence although the various fringe benefits helped the workers to make his both ends meet. The following table shows the monthly cash earnings of a tea garden worker during the period from 1938-39 to 1961-62.

Table 56: Earnings of Tea Workers in Assam: 1938-39 to 1961-62. *(Average monthly Cash earnings per worker in Rs.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Assam Valley Men</th>
<th>Assam Valley Women</th>
<th>Assam Valley Children</th>
<th>Cachar Valley Men</th>
<th>Cachar Valley Women</th>
<th>Cachar Valley Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948-49</td>
<td>19.26</td>
<td>15.21</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>15.82</td>
<td>10.59</td>
<td>8.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-50</td>
<td>21.78</td>
<td>15.94</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>17.53</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>5.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>20.53</td>
<td>17.33</td>
<td>11.68</td>
<td>16.51</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>10.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-52</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>19.85</td>
<td>12.37</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>10.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952-53</td>
<td>21.09</td>
<td>18.42</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>17.09</td>
<td>16.16</td>
<td>10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953-54</td>
<td>35.15</td>
<td>30.29</td>
<td>17.94</td>
<td>32.08</td>
<td>26.14</td>
<td>16.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-55</td>
<td>40.71</td>
<td>35.61</td>
<td>21.65</td>
<td>31.93</td>
<td>27.07</td>
<td>17.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-56</td>
<td>46.12</td>
<td>40.60</td>
<td>25.96</td>
<td>33.60</td>
<td>28.22</td>
<td>18.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-57</td>
<td>47.48</td>
<td>41.42</td>
<td>25.01</td>
<td>32.35</td>
<td>27.86</td>
<td>18.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957-58</td>
<td>49.23</td>
<td>41.92</td>
<td>24.78</td>
<td>38.43</td>
<td>26.86</td>
<td>14.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-59</td>
<td>45.45</td>
<td>38.76</td>
<td>23.28</td>
<td>30.34</td>
<td>27.38</td>
<td>18.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959-60</td>
<td>49.79</td>
<td>44.07</td>
<td>27.40</td>
<td>40.32</td>
<td>31.90</td>
<td>21.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>50.77</td>
<td>45.67</td>
<td>29.87</td>
<td>40.59</td>
<td>30.58</td>
<td>27.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-62</td>
<td>49.70</td>
<td>46.53</td>
<td>28.54</td>
<td>39.50</td>
<td>32.74</td>
<td>20.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

150. Labour Investigation Committee (Main Report) pp 258-259.
Thus we note a gradual increase in the wage rates of the tea
garden workers over the years and as we have already discussed
the total earnings per month per average worker also increased.
We observe that not withstanding the individual earnings the
family units in general obtain a very fair income.

According to the family budget enquiry conducted during 1947
there were 4.15 members in the average family in Assam Valley
consisting of 2.44 earners (1.17 men, 0.96 women and 0.31 children)
and 1.17 dependants. Assuming that the family composition has not
changed materially since 1947 the Central Labour Bureau conducted
an investigation in the Assam Valley and calculated the average
monthly cash earnings per family of 2.44 earners in European and
Indian estate. Findings are as under.

Table 57: Average monthly earnings of a family of 2.44

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>36 - 1 - 1</td>
<td>31 -11- 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>36 -12- 1</td>
<td>32 -14- 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>41 - 4 - 3</td>
<td>34 -1- 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>39 - 5 - 8</td>
<td>33 -7- 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>40 - 8 - 3</td>
<td>34 -10- 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>46 - 2 - 2</td>
<td>36 -15- 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>43 - 1 - 5</td>
<td>37 -1- 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>52 - 8 - 7</td>
<td>40 -7- 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>52 -14 - 7</td>
<td>42 -2- 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>50 -13 - 2</td>
<td>39 -5- 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>44 - 5 - 0</td>
<td>37 -4- 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>37 - 9 - 5</td>
<td>33 -13- 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

152. Plantation Labour in the Assam Valley p. 35.
As per report on an enquiry into the cost and standard of living of plantation workers in Assam and Bengal the weekly cash earnings of the same family during March-May, 1947 was about Rs.30.-\(^{153}\) The increase in the family earnings as compared to 1947 is only to be expected because there has been an increase both in the basic wages and in the rate of D.A. The most important point, however, is the gradual reduction in the difference of wages earned in two categories of gardens and the same rates are now paid in all the gardens of the state. On the basis of actual wage bill in three different gardens the following table has been prepared for a family of 2.44 earning units which represent the general position in 1973.

Table 58: Average Monthly Earnings of a family of 2.44 earners in Assam Valley: 1973

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Individual Earnings (Rs)</th>
<th>Family Earnings (Rs)</th>
<th>Total (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>65.62</td>
<td>66.15</td>
<td>53.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>74.33</td>
<td>62.09</td>
<td>61.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>67.58</td>
<td>68.22</td>
<td>79.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>60.78</td>
<td>66.77</td>
<td>54.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>68.59</td>
<td>65.78</td>
<td>73.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>62.35</td>
<td>100.10</td>
<td>64.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>69.77</td>
<td>100.68</td>
<td>78.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>80.27</td>
<td>112.43</td>
<td>101.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>77.75</td>
<td>124.04</td>
<td>118.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>79.54</td>
<td>138.14</td>
<td>98.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>67.81</td>
<td>90.76</td>
<td>90.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>61.08</td>
<td>72.81</td>
<td>86.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The higher income by the female workers for a few months is due to the fact that they are mainly engaged in plucking leaves.

\(^{153}\)Report on Cost of living of plantation Workers, Appendix XIV

\(^{154}\)The writer is grateful to the managers of Gingia, Tinkharia and Tulip T.E. and to Mr. D. R. Das of Julia T.E. for supplying the particulars used in this table. With the recent increases in the rates of wages \(\text{f}\)\(\text{x}\)\(\text{f}\)\(\text{t}\)\(\text{w}\)\(\text{w}\)\(\text{w}\)\(\text{w}\)\(\text{w}\)\(\text{w}\)\(\text{w}\) the monthly earnings will be about Rs. 20 more in 1975.
which is basically a 'pro-rata' paid job which returns more cash to the worker who plucks more leaf. This is in addition to the minimum wage which is paid as a legal right to all workers engaged in plucking, even if workers engaged in plucking are unable to earn increased additives. In this case there is practically no fixed ceiling on earnings for workers who are plucking leaves, which extends for about 6 months of the year. Thus since each family of workers is a composite earning unit within the estate, provided the individual family members work hard, there is no limitation on the extent of their earnings during the plucking season, if they are generally employed on plucking. Theoretically under such hypothetical conditions the average earnings of a work r's family in 1971 rates will be as under.¹⁵⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coverage</th>
<th>Earnings per week (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Worker engaged in M.W. Jobs</td>
<td>16.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife employed on plucking @ 37 kg. average per day</td>
<td>25.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter employed on plucking @ 35 Kgs. average per day</td>
<td>24.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son-in-law employed only occasionally on plucking</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or for a five week month</td>
<td>84.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>434.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This calculation given by a local planter is true under hypothetical conditions but the real earnings are much less. Further, the workers have non-earning dependants to feed from their income. However, it is true that the foregoing example is not

inconsistent with present day conditions and concessional rate rations, P.F., Bonus, Leave with wages, Fuel, free Medical facilities, Maternity benefit, Sick-allowance, free housing and usually a plot of company estate land for cultivation etc. are all additives to basic wage earnings.

Compared to some lower ranked management cadre personnel and medical and clerical staff, the wages earned by workers and facilities given are most competitive and a fair, and in most cases, it is the staff members who are faced with the financial problems. The fact still remains that comparatively, clerical and Medical staff, along with junior Management personnel, fare very badly in comparison to a tea garden worker family unit whose joint productive income along with fringe benefits enjoyed, amounts to a very reasonable non-taxable income.

There appears to be no short term solution to these problems, without protracted tripartite revision, which one doubts will be forthcoming in the near future. While one cannot and should not deny anyone a decent basic wage, we note that by simply increasing the wages the economic conditions of the general workers cannot be improved unless the workers are 'financially educated'. Most of the workers squander away their hard-earned money instinctively and do not try to improve their financial position by spending their money for proper and useful purposes.

156. Ibid p. 382.

Alcohol and Narcotics: One of the worst features of the labour conditions on plantations is the consumption of liquors and narcotics. This has been an evil in tea gardens and this bad habit has not decreased even in present times. In early days the habit of consuming country liquors, opium and ganja prevailed extensively among different classes of the population although varying in extent and kind according to the races and castes. The extent of the use of liquors and narcotics in the earlier days can best be judged by an analysis of the family budgets of the thirteen families collected by the census of 1921. It showed that the expenditure on liquors, opium and ganja varied from 3 percent to 23 percent, with an average of 8 percent as shown in the table below.

Table 59: Consumption of Liquors and Narcotics on Assam Tea Gardens 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of family budgets</th>
<th>Total Expenditure (Rs.)</th>
<th>Expenditure on liquor and Narcotics (Rs.)</th>
<th>Percent of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some of the families the expenditure was limited to liquors alone, while other consumed opium or ganja or all these products. The tea garden workers are generally conservative and do not easily change their habits. Yet once they acquire it, it is hard to make them give it up. In the first two decades of the current century the most alarming feature was the increasing ganja and opium habits among the tea garden workers. Out of 201 managers of tea gardens in Assam to whom an enquiry was addressed on this subject 83 managers reported an increasing consumption of ganja and 53 managers of opium. Our evidence is not sufficient to speak positively," says the Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Committee Report, "but there are signs in certain parts of the Assam Valley that the habit is actually growing among them. After independence due to strong legislative measures, the use of opium and ganja has been controlled to a very great extent. But the use of alcoholic drinks has not been controlled to an appreciable extent and it is a common sight to see workers forming queues before the country liquor shops licensed by the Government.

That the use of liquors and narcotics is injurious to health and interferes with the efficiency and welfare of the workers needs scarcely any discussion. The problem is how to discourage the growth of this habit. The Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Committee has, as early as in 1921, recommended the restriction of the

159. An intoxicating preparation of Indian hemp.
160. Assam Congress Opium Enquiry Report, Calcutta 1925 p. 33
161. Ibid. p. 32.
consumption of opium and other intoxicants to the medical and scientific needs and the creation of public opinion against its use by education and by agitation in the Press, Platform and Educational system.  

It is a welcome sign that there is a growing consciousness among the tea community to control the use of alcoholic drinks for the betterment of the tea garden workers and the union leaders have also been trying to educate workers in this respect. It appears that up to present times, the alcoholism among the workers is considered an individual problem of the garden workers, but it is to be considered as a general problem of the industry having far reaching influence on the administrative set up for the following reasons.

**First**, alcoholism creates health hazards and unhealthy workers result in liability of the employers as it obligatory for the gardens to sanction leave with pay and medical facilities to the ailing employees.

**Second**, as the workers squander away their money, there is always a sense of want and the periodic wage increases made from time to time cannot give them a feeling of happiness which lead to demands which may be too heavy for the paying capacity of an enterprise.

**Third**, alcoholism among the illiterate workers often lead to breach of industrial peace.

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162. Ibid pp 51-52

Fourth, consumption of rice and other foodstuffs for illegal distillation of liquor leads to more scarcity conditions in an already acute situation.

While the State Excise department has been taking steps to stop illegal distillation of liquor, the Industry, workers and the Government should discuss the problem in its true perspective and adopt necessary measures in this respect. The matter may be entrusted to an Enquiry Cum Implementation Committee to be constituted by the Government where the Government, Management and the workers are properly represented.

Loans and Savings: Indebtedness is another hardship from which the majority of the workers have been traditionally suffering in the plantation areas of the state. Even before coming to the Assam Tea gardens a large number of emigrants were in debt and one of the most difficult tasks of recruitment was the settlement of the debts before embarkation. Even after arriving at the gardens most of the labourers remained in debt.

The system of payments also often led the worker into debt. The rice advances which were common on plantations were sometimes kept outstanding for a number of years with a view to compelling the workers to stick to his job. From time to time, when his earnings permitted, deductions were made with a view to reducing the debt. As purchase on credit has a greater tendency to consumption beyond means than that on cash, most of the labourers remained and still remain in debt from the time they enter the gardens until the end, in spite of the fact that the labourers often worked overtime to pay off the debt. The Assam Labour Enquiry Committee of 1921-22 had
no hesitation in condemning the system of rice advances on credit as pernicious. Many cases are known where the labourers could not get discharge certificates from the planters on the ground that they owed money to the estates.\textsuperscript{164}

The Chief reasons for heavy indebtedness on the part of the workers, as we find it, may be: First, lower rates of wages at the initial days; Second, higher price index and cost of living when the wage rates have been increased which have not been able to keep pace with the higher rate of inflation in the country. Third, alcoholism and non-planned expenditure.\textsuperscript{165} Fourth, extravagant expenditure on festive occasions. The money on such occasions is generally advanced by the money lenders at an exhorbitant interest which is generally realised with interest from the workers at the time of settlement of P.F. accounts. Thus the only saving of the life-time is spent on repaying the loans taken by an worker when he was in active service.

The importance of savings as a part of a reasonably comfortable standard of living was admitted by the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee of 1921-22.\textsuperscript{166} An examination of the family budgets as quoted by the Census Report of 1921 shows that only three of them had savings of 3, 10 and 13 percent.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{164} Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report 1921-22 p. 74.

\textsuperscript{165} Farnham, D.W. of Syamaguri T.E. commented in 1971 as under: "At present, I do not hesitate to state that the worker in general has too much money which in turn leads him to absent himself from work and frequently turn to the Country Liquor for solace." The Assam Review and Tea News, October, 1971 p. 382.

\textsuperscript{166} Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report, 1921-22 p. 40

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid pp 132-33.
Moreover, the average tea garden labourer settled on the tea estates is not very thrifty by nature. Those who had dependants remitted small amounts from time to time for their maintenance. Short contract labourers, that is, emigrants coming to Assam for one reason or another who were anxious to return to their village homes after three years, were more thrifty. Usually they deposited their savings with the estate which maintained a deposit account and at the time of repatriation the estates arranged the balances to their credit to be remitted to their village homes so that immediately on arrival there they could get the money. This was done to preclude the possibility of the workers being cheated or robbed on their way or their dissipating their savings immediately on leaving the estates. According to the information contained in the Annual Reports of the working of the T.D.E.L. Act the following were remittances by money orders from the tea district of Assam Valley during 1947-48 and 1948-49.

Table 60: Remittances by Emigrant Tea Workers, 1947-49.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Remittances by money orders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1947/48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.-As.-Ps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>1,77,679-1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibsagar</td>
<td>1,99,710-2-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrang</td>
<td>59,162-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>3,520-14-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowgong</td>
<td>6,688-13-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>18,552-5-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,65,283-3-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons for the wide disparity for the figures for 1947-48 and 1948-49 are not known. This may, however, be due to the political uncertainties in the country as a whole just on the eve of Independence.
In May, 1951 the total amount held by 18 European owned estates was Rs. 77,724-14-6. This amount was held in trust for 1,224 workers at the average rate of Rs. 63-8-0 per worker. Some estates provide fixed deposit schemes at interest ranging from 5 to 6 percent per annum but the present rate of saving held with the employers is much less and the only saving made by the workers is the P.F. Contributions they have to make under the obligatory P.F. Scheme. Further, some workers neither make remittances by money orders nor do they deposit their surplus cash with the managers. If they have any surplus cash they hide it in a hole in the floor or in the bamboo rafters of their houses.

Thrift Societies: - Until very recent times there was no co-operative saving bank or saving societies on the estate. It is possible that if such societies were started and the workers were given the inducement of the payment of interest on their savings they may get into the habit, after certain amount of propaganda, of investing their savings in a proper manner. The thrift societies suggested by the S.L.C. Sub-Committee should be established in the tea garden areas. It is now felt by the enlightened section of the tea planters that the Unions and the Government although administratively equipped to deal with excess earnings accrued by workers are doing little or nothing to channel these amounts for the benefit of the working earners and the nation through National Savings.

169. Ibid pp 42-43
Savings Schemes and other programmes provided. It is not unreasonable to expect that Trade Unionists as well as Government should feel obliged to help the workers in this respect. The steps taken by the A.C.M.S. and the A.C.K.S., so far is commendable. The union proposes to open co-operative banks attached to all the branches of the A.C.M.S. in Assam on an experimental basis to encourage saving habits among the tea workers.
