CHAPTER- XII

CONCLUSION

It must be clear by now that a lot of ills plague the plywood industry in Assam, the most serious of them being the conflict between labour and management. At the heart of this conflict lies the nature and attitude of the industry towards society in general and its workers in particular. As mentioned earlier, labour welfare measures are practically non-existent and social benefits for workers absent. Managements are reluctant to pay full wages and allowances agreed which often leads to disputes in the industry. Inspite of being a rich industry in terms of profitability, the managements are always on the lookout to earn more profits at the expense of their workers. This indeed is a very sorry state of affairs.

Another major problem faced by the workers of industry is the lack of co-operation from Government agencies, especially the Labour Commissioners office and the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner. During interviews with the workers it was found that many plywood factories had not deposited the P.F. amount deducted from the wages of the workers, in the P.F. Account. The P.F. Commissioners office too, seems to take the matter lightly as no action is initiated by them with regard to this gross violation by the managements. In this connection Mr. Basudev Acharya, M.P. and leader of the C.P.I.(M) group in
the Lok Sabha had taken up the matter even with the then minister of State for Labour, Sri P.A. Sangma, but nothing seems to have been done in this regard. (Details of this can be seen in Annexure-12).

Another problem faced by the workers is the non-payment of family pension even after several years of death of the worker. A case which was brought to our notice related to the death of a worker sometime in the middle of 1982. Until the middle of 1988 his widow had not received the meagre pension which was due to her on the death of her husband. This only goes to show the total lack of sympathy the employees of the P.F. Commissioner have towards the poor workers of the plywood industry. (Annexure-13).

Similarly is the case with the offices of the Labour Commissioner, where it is seen that conciliation and adjudication proceedings take an inordinately long to be settled to the detriment of the workers. Wage negotiations may take years, thereby forcing untold hardships and miseries upon the workers. It should be in the interest of the Government to settle such burning issues, at the earliest.

A major complaint against the plywood industry in Assam has been the absence of its social commitments to society at large. Though the industry has been in the Upper Assam region for the last fifty or sixty years, it has not done anything
worth mentioning for the **people in and around the areas where they are set up.** Although they have used up massive forest resources of the state and practically finished off the forests in Assam through legal as well as dubious means, no effort has come from there side to replant or regenerate forest resources of the state. With the high profits generated from the units in Assam, these industrialists have been able to put up plywood units in other neighbouring states like Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland (mainly due to easy availability of cheap timber) and also in distant places like Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and even the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Thus, for them closing the factories and moving away from Assam at a short notice would not have much effect, but what would be the consequence of the work force they leave behind? It is simply unimaginable. The result of this inaction on the part of the industry has alienated the local populace and in fact created bitterness against the industry. It is therefore in the interest of the industry to come out more openly and contribute to the development of the surrounding areas in which they are situated thereby helping a large number of poor villagers, which would ultimately lead to better understanding towards the industry.

However, a new threat which could lead to the total closure of the industry in the state comes from the decision of the Government of Assam to ban the felling of trees in all the forests of the state. This action has lead to the closure of many units and
cutting down of production by some, as timber is the chief raw material in plywood manufacture. Big units by importing raw timber from South-East Asia mainly Malaysia are in a position to run their factories, but it is the smaller units which have to bear the brunt of this policy of the Government. These measures can be feasible only in the short run for no industry can depend on imported raw materials for its survival and it is high time the government reviewed its policy with regard to cutting and regeneration of timber in the state. Payments for subsidy provided to the industry for transportation of raw materials as well as finished products are made after a very long time, nearly two to three years after the claims are made. The Central government must take steps to disburse this amount within a reasonable period so that units do not face liquidity problems while running their business.

Taking all the above factors into consideration, it becomes imperative on the part of the Central and State Governments to see that the various problems facing the plywood industry in Assam are solved and that this age-old industry is allowed to grow and prosper in the state.