

warning against the consequences of substantial wage increases was carried by an overwhelming majority. Among its supporters were the big unions which are presently responsible for major claims. Most of these unions, however, voted for the second resolution which the Council accepted later, and which the Congress consequently adopted. The resolution criticised the Government's economic policy and said that until adequate price controls and food subsidies had been restored, the General Council should reject attempts to restrict *justifiable* wage increases to ease the burden of rising costs. It was on the third resolution moved by the Communist-led Electrical Trades Union that a major debate took place. The resolution called for an outright rejection of wage restraint. Mr Lincoln Evans, the TUC economic expert, used all the arguments he could muster against the ETU move. "We must see that the machinery of wage negotiation did not endanger the national economy," he said. "Britain was a nation that lived on international trade and any increases in wage rates will make us uncompetitive in the world markets." He thought the level of profits was not enough to absorb the increases in wages contemplated by the unions. He did, however, revise this attitude when he was reminded that according to the National Income White Paper, profits in 1951 had risen by £436m. and that this would amply meet the extent of new wage claims which the *Economist* had estimated at £432m. The ETU resolution, however, failed by a 2 to 1 vote against it.

The TUC has never, in its long and tortuous history, been more powerful and influential than it is today. The Government, in spite of the fact that it is Conservative-led, is extremely delicate and invariably on the defensive in its dealings with the TUC, which has acquired an unrivalled advisory position at the Treasury. And the TUC is not unaware of its power. This may be one of the reasons for the caution of its leaders and the moderation, they continually advocate. The feeling, however, is growing that this caution has become a tradition which works to the disadvantage of the workers, and on this occasion this feeling was amply manifested by the large support extended to the Bevanites and Communists.

Labour Problems — The "Giri Approach"

By *Almaz*

AFTER taking the oath of office, a Central Minister generally gets busy in cultivating mass contact—from a safe and convenient distance. After all, has he not to justify his inclusion in the Cabinet, to explain why Panditji had to select him in preference to many others to fill the role for which he alone is eminently fit? The new minister makes use of all the wavelengths of all the AIR stations for his "important" broadcasts in English and Hindi, issues statements after statement to the Press, utilises every platform that comes his way, appoints committees and convenes conferences, addresses meetings, opens exhibitions and in various ways tries to make his new policy known to the public. He reviews his predecessor's regime, refers to the implementation or non-implementation of past measures, elaborates the causes which have been responsible for the failure so far, blames the circumstances and the Communists and then explains his own programme, which, he assures, will bring happiness to everybody and prosperity to all.

Unfortunately, this has become such a routine procedure that it has ceased to arouse interest any longer and new programmes and policies go unnoticed. People have become *sthita-pragna*, immune to changing circumstances, which have gone from bad to worse. They do not find any inconsistency in a minister, who promised to be a tower of silence and turned out to be a Niagara of words. They do not put a minister in the dock when he makes tall promises, fails to carry them out and keeps mum about it or passes on the blame for it to others. For the first year or two, the minister is vociferous; then his enthusiasm wanes and finally evaporates while the administration goes on in routine fashion in the uninspiring hands of departmental officials.

The Labour Ministry of the Government of India, like every other Central Ministry, has experienced this cycle of activity and inactivity. The first two years (1947 and 1948) of Shri Jagjivan Ram's ministership produced Labour's Five Year Plan, the Industrial

Truce Resolution and enactment of important legislation like the Factories Act, the Minimum Wages Act and the Employees' State Insurance Act. Then for four years, all was quiet on the Labour Ministry front, till Shri Giri, an eminent trade unionist of 32 years' standing, took over the Ministry from Shri Ram. "The problems facing Shri Giri were the self same ones that had confronted his predecessor. The spectre of labour unrest still haunted the industrial scene. Labour laws adorned the statute book, but could not solve the elementary problems of lack of housing, inadequacy of earnings, unsatisfactory working conditions, etc.

Soon after assuming his office as Labour Minister, Shri Giri reviewed the whole held of labour and outlined his programme in clear-cut policy statements, giving his mature views on trade unionism, industrial relations, conciliation and arbitration, co-operation between workers, employers and the State, enactment and enforcement of labour laws, welfare work, housing—in fact on every aspect of labour, rural, industrial and commercial. An analysis of his policy statements and various pronouncements reveals what may be called the Giri approach, though Shri Giri himself has expressed his dislike for this term. The following paragraphs bring out the important points of this approach, with a few comments on them, wherever necessary.

Labour and Capital as Partners

That labour and capital are the two arms of production and both should have an equitable share in the fruits of improved production, is the first article of faith with the Labour Minister. As workers and employers are supposed to be partners in industry, though the former are at present weak, they can be the dominant partner if they unite in constitutional and sound trade unions. This theory propounded by Shri Giri is sound in principle. In actual practice, such factors as legal restriction, hostility of employers and active neutrality of the State come in the way. Workers' control over industry or their share in the management, is

practically unknown in this country. The only profit-sharing scheme is the system of prosperity bonus, which is purely a war-time creation and as "such, may be temporary.

Trade Unionism

As one of the founders of trade unionism in railways, Shri Giri is naturally interested in the trade union movement. He exhorts the workers to organise themselves in sound trade unions with sanctions behind their demands, so that they may get their reasonable grievances redressed by their own inherent strength. He also appeals for trade union unity. Fortunately, unlike so many other ministers, Shri Giri is a non-party labour leader and is, therefore, eminently fit to bring together trade unions of different shades of opinions. The majority of workers and their leaders will no doubt co-operate with him, if he attempts to achieve trade union unity. As a first step in this direction, he may have a Trade Union Adviser at the Centre, whose main work would be to advise trade union leaders how to conduct trade union work on sound lines.

Industrial Relations

Shri Giri's views on industrial relations form the most important plank of his platform. In fact, a major part of his statements is devoted to the ways and means of solving the problems created by the existing strained industrial relations. In recent years, inadequate compensation for rise in prices has been mainly responsible for industrial unrest. Employers and employees have fought on such issues as wages, dearness and other allowances, bonus, hours of work, retrenchment, etc. To solve these issues, a cumbersome legal machinery, mainly based on compulsory arbitration was set up. Adjudicators, industrial tribunals and industrial courts have given numerous (often conflicting) decisions on innumerable disputes referred to them. As a firm believer in negotiation and voluntary conciliation, Shri Giri hates compulsory arbitration and hence he declared himself as Enemy No. 1 of the courts, tribunals and adjudicators, which may be utilised only as a last resort. He dislikes the tendency on the part of workers and employers to run to the Government and seek their intervention in all matters. Instead,

the representatives of workers and employers should discuss their differences across the table and settle the issues. Unfortunately in this country, the gulf between the two parties is too wide and even enlightened employers like the Tatas find it difficult to negotiate with a representative union, as was seen in the recent Air-India strike. The biggest obstacle to industrial peace is lack of co-operation between individual employers and their employees, i.e., of co-operation at the factory level. Without this co-operation at the base, very little can be achieved even with an army of well-intentioned conciliators with full co-operation at regional, industrial or national levels. The necessity of industrial peace must be realised at the base—by the individual workers and individual employers; this realisation cannot be transmitted from above. The failure of works and joint committees in factories automatically means failure to achieve industrial peace. Unfortunately this aspect of the labour problem has not been adequately recognised by our administrators yet, who have been busy building up a grandiose superstructure on a very weak base.

Labour Legislation

That most of the progressive legislation which has been enacted still remains to be implemented is not denied by Shri Giri for whom legislation is a secondary matter. The primary need is of collective agreements, which are almost non-existent today. What is agreed upon between the parties is very easy to put into effect in the form

of legislation without much rancour and bitterness.

Shri Giri has expressed his views on many other matters, such as wage-freeze, welfare work, rural labour, etc. In all these matters, he advocates the necessity of mutual understanding between workers and employers, without any intervention from a third party. How far he will succeed in bringing about this understanding, it is difficult to prophesy at this stage. However, the measures at present being adopted by him make success a doubtful proposition. Following the usual Government of India way, he has issued a questionnaire on industrial relations, invited the views of persons and bodies concerned and convened a conference to discuss these views. The result can only be an addition to the statute book of an omnibus and complex piece of legislation, which may not be enforced. Again, following the craze of our administrators for foreign experts, Shri Giri is having experts from the International Labour Organisation to study our indigenous problems relating to payment by results, productivity and industrial relations. This may produce some excellent academic dissertations, but would they be worth practical consideration? Such high level expert advice will not bridge the gulf between the individual employer and his workers. Let us hope for the best and pray that in spite of this, Shri Giri will succeed. If he does not, we may have another Minister who will tell us why there is no co-operation between the two parties and why State intervention in the form of legislation and arbitration machinery is a necessity.

Royal & Genuine Perfume

Mysore Sandalwood Oil is recognised as the World's Standard of Quality.

Ensure that you get only Original containers with the Mysore Government Seal and Label.

Place orders for supplies with the authorised Agents only or with the Factory.

**GOVERNMENT SANDALWOOD OIL FACTORY
MYSORE**